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# A PEDAGOGY FOR LIBERATION

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DIALOGUES ON TRANSFORMING EDUCATION

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**WITH IRA SHOR & PAULO FREIRE**

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**Ira** I hope we find a dancing style. So, let's take turns being poetic and comic and profound.

What will help us stay in touch with reality is beginning with questions teachers have already been asking. Our own experiences and those of other teachers are enwrapped in what we say. This is not an archival study of education. Neither are we answering questions nobody asked. Maybe we can capture the real life dramas in what we learned in and out of the classroom. There is nothing more compelling than the facts of real life. For me, the primary goal is for theory to embrace everyday living.

This problem of merging critical thought with daily life is always a challenge. Perhaps nowhere is it more important than in teaching, which is a human experience full of unpredictable moments. When I write an education book at home by myself, I am closed off from an audience and I wonder if my words are meaningful. If I hear from others that my book reads as if I were speaking to them, I know I found the voice I wanted.

**Paulo** Another highly important aspect of doing a spoken book is that dialogue is itself creative and re-creative. That is, in the last analysis you are re-creating yourself in dialogue to a greater extent than when you are solitarily writing, seated in your office, or in a small library. And from the human perspective, the need for dialogue is so great, that when the writer is alone in the library, facing the blank sheets in front of him or her, the writer needs at least mentally to reach the possible readers of the book even if there is no chance that he or she will ever meet them. The writer needs to get to know, to interact with, the distant readers, who probably will read the book when he or she is no longer in existence. Here, in our case, we are facing uncountable, unknown readers, facing them symbolically, but we are one in front of another, you and I. In a sense, I am already your reader and in a sense you are already my reader.

While we are each other's reader as we talk, the readers of our own oral words and not yet of our written words, what happens here is that we each stimulate the other to think, and to re-think the former's thought. In this, I think, rests another fundamental dimension of the richness in an exchange like this one. This mutual possibility to read ourselves before writing can make our writings better, because in this interaction we can change ourselves in the very moment of the dialogue. In the last analysis, dialogue is not just "Good morning, how are you?" Dialogue belongs to the nature of human beings, as beings of communication. Dialogue seals the act of know-





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them what their real cognitive and affective levels are, what their authentic language sounds like, what degree of alienation they bring to critical study, what their living conditions are, as groundings for dialogue and inquiry. Students are motivated out of the learning process when the course fully pre-exists in the mind of the teacher, in the syllabus or reading list or state requirements. Do you see the corpse here? The learning already happened someplace else. The teacher merely implements a curriculum built elsewhere, merely reports conclusions reached someplace else. The student is supposed to memorize the report.

There is a lot of pressure to teach this traditional way, first because it is familiar and already 'worked out,' even if it doesn't 'work' in class. Second, by deviating from the standard syllabus you can get known as a rebel or radical or 'flake,' and be subjected to anything from petty harassment to firing.

How can I motivate students unless they act with me? Inventing a course in-progress with the students is both exciting and anxiety-producing. I feel anxious in the middle of such a creative process, wondering if all the threads will come together, but I know this openness is required to overcome the student alienation which is the biggest learning problem in school. How can a teacher learn to do this kind of teaching? By doing it. Unfortunately, academic departments and education schools discourage teachers from experimenting, and we see very few models in the teachers who taught us while we were in school.

## Modeling a Critical Theory of Knowing

**Paulo** Do you know, Ira, I think that all these things you are saying at this moment are linked to a very, very serious epistemological question. I am convinced that the deficient comprehension of what we can call *the gnosiological cycle* is related to the misunderstandings we are talking about. By 'gnosiological cycle' I mean the distinct moments in the way we learn. The cycle of knowing has separate phases related to each other, and by seeing these moments we can understand better what happens when we try to teach or to learn.

For example, if we observe the gnosiological cycle of knowledge, we can discern that there are only two moments in the cycle, not more than two, two moments that are dialectically related. The first moment of the cycle, or one of the cycle's moments, is the one of *production*, the production of new knowledge, something new. The other moment is the one during which the produced knowledge is



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context of the text, and also how to connect the text/context with my context, the context of the reader. And what happens is that many times we read authors who died one hundred years ago and we know nothing about his or her time. And often we know very little about our own time!

So, I am very much for demanding intellectual seriousness to know the text and context. But for me, what is important, what is indispensable, is to be critical. Criticism creates the necessary intellectual discipline, asking questions to the reading, to the writing, to the book, to the text. We should not submit to the text or be submissive in front of the text. The thing is to fight with the text, even though loving it, no? To engage in a conflict with the text. In the last analysis, it is a very, very, very demanding operation. The question then is not just to impose on the students quantities of chapters from books, but to demand that students confront seriously the texts.

Nevertheless, if you appeal to the students to assume a critical posture as readers, as ones who re-write the text being read, you risk the students not accepting your invitation, and their intellectual production declines. The invitation for students to re-write the text rather than to simply swallow it may invite the students to think that your own intellectual rigor is weak. The students might think that you are not rigorous because you asked them to critically read and re-write a single text instead of imposing on them the obligation of reading 300 books in a semester!

**Ira** There is that risk. Students are used to the transfer-of-knowledge. The official curriculum asks them to submit to texts, lectures, and tests, to habituate them to submitting to authority. Students are very good at resisting the demands of authority, but they can also reject the nontraditional classroom. Some do it with silent disregard; some actively resist; some are simply out to lunch. The problem is to ease a transition gradually away from the old habits. When I listen intently to students early in the term, I learn how dominated they are by the old ways of schooling. This lets me know what kind of transition pedagogy I have to introduce. Each group of students presents a new profile of resistances and openings which I discover by researching them while the course is underway, through the dialogue and exercises. I make some concessions to the old learning habits, to reduce the level of resistance and anxiety. I assign some readings, some papers, just enough bones from the old skeleton to make us all feel at home.

There are some other problems of transition from the transfer-of-knowledge. Teachers often come into class and ask students to write





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nored, but the California Commission on the Teaching Profession included Goodlad, and produced a more sensible state plan for reform, *Who Will Teach Our Children?* (1985) Two other reports pulling the debate in a liberal direction were *Involvement in Learning* (National Institute of Education, 1984) and *Integrity in the College Curriculum* (American Association of Colleges, 1985). The most egalitarian proposals for educational policy appeared in a New World Foundation report called *Choosing Equality* (1985), authored by Ann Bastian, Marilyn Gittell, Colin Greer, Ken Haskins and Norm Fruchter. A sourcebook on these years of reform-from-above was compiled by Ronald and Beatrice Gross, *The Great School Debate* (1985). Chapter 4 of Ira Shor's *Culture Wars: School and Society in the Conservative Restoration, 1969-1984* (1986), offers a comprehensive analysis of what this great debate was all about.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London, 1957); Noelle Bissleret, *Education, Class Language and Ideology* (London, 1977); Shirley Brice Heath, *Ways With Words* (Cambridge, 1983). See also Richard Ohmann, "Reflections on Class and Language," *College English*, Volume 44, Number 1, January, 1982, pp. 1-17. Ohmann's *English in America* (Cambridge, 1976) is another key text on language and politics.



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understand their language or their expectations. Yet, I knew exactly how to teach them!

It took me several years to discover the real interferences to critical learning, including my ignorance and arrogance, as well their own immersion in a disabling mass culture. But, at the start, in my inexperience, I thought because I swallowed the rules of grammar, so should they. Of course, Paulo, I had marvelous rationales for what I was doing! I thought I was a 'creative grammarian.' I would teach grammar in *such* an exciting way that everybody would *love* grammar! (Laughing) It was such a mistake!

**Paulo** Yes! It is almost impossible. In some moments, you have to fight *against* grammar, in order to be free to write. I also thought like you did, when I was 19 years old. But now, for example, I remember how ugly I wrote at that time. Nevertheless, I was following the so-called 'literate' patterns of the language.

**Ira** I did the same thing. I wrote poetry, too, that was exactly like the pre-Romantic poetry of the British 18th century. I wrote these sickly poems by copying the correct forms in school, completely uninformed about freedom in modern poetry. I would just copy whatever I saw printed on paper. My creative writing teacher in college was astonished at my precision in mimicking Gray or Collins. He was sure I had copied their pre-Romantic verse and handed it in as my own! He also looked down on me with contempt, as a sadly unsophisticated person from the wrong class. And I began teaching this way, from the printed forms of writing.

**Paulo** It's very interesting because there are some very good writers in Brazil who saved me. By reading them in my early 20s I was saved. Jose Lins do Rego and Graciliano Ramos are two of these writers; Jorge Amado; Gilberto Freyre, the great sociologist and anthropologist who writes so well was another important influence on me. But these writers were *not* preoccupied in following grammar! What they searched for in their writings was an aesthetic moment. I read them a lot. And in this way they also recreated me as a young teacher of grammar, because of the aesthetic creativity of their language. I remember today how I changed the teaching of syntax, when I was around 20.

The question then was not simply to deny the rules. When I was young, I learned that beauty and creativity could not live with a slavish devotion to correct usage. This understanding taught me that creativity needed freedom. So, I changed my pedagogy as a young teacher towards creative education. This was also a foundation for





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They were many things all at once. I created conditions in class where people could speak the themes of their lives. Those who responded to this invitation revealed the problem-areas of most interest to them. I questioned them about their statements, posed critical problems, and tried to educate myself into what such utterances meant, as windows into mass consciousness and as roads outward to transformation. The students' lives and language were social texts which neither they nor I understood, but which presented to me patterns, motifs, themes, characters, imagery, as clues to meaning. So, all in all, maybe I understood that the liberatory process could be a window and a road to the students, to see their own conditions and to envision a different destiny. The face and voice of the teacher can confirm their domination or can reflect enabling possibilities. If students see and hear a teacher's contempt or boredom or impatience, they learn again that they are people who inspire disgust and weariness. If they perceive the teacher's enthusiasm in their own moments of living, they can find subjective interest in critical learning.

These understandings came to me long after experiencing them in the classroom. I experimented first and reflected after. Later on, Paulo, I read your books and got a philosophical framework for what I was doing.

### **Student Responses: Resistance and Support**

**Paulo** And Ira, to the extent you challenged the traditional way of relating to the students, the way of approaching the object to be known by the students, what kind of reaction did the students demonstrate to these changes?

**Ira** There's been a range of reactions. Some students wanted to know why a liberatory class had been kept from them so long. They might have said in everyday language, Where have you been all my life? All your life you carry around unmet needs that you don't exactly understand. When you reach a moment that meets that need, you say, Where have you been all my life? Finally, you can be revealed for the person you are but none of life's situations have yet permitted this feeling. That was one reaction that I noticed.

Then, there was also anger and anxiety. Students might want to ask out loud, What the hell do you want? Why don't you just fill the hour with teacher-talk and let me copy down the answers silently, staring at you with glassy eyes, making believe I am listening to your words flying through the air while in fact I am dreaming about beer



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examples of grammar and syntax, analyzing what they were writing about. I taught them grammar based on what they were already writing, not from a textbook. And I also used readings from very good Brazilian authors.

**Ira** What kinds of questions did you ask them to write about?

**Paulo** I asked what they did on the weekend, for example. I did not ask them to write about abstract things or concepts. I always found that kind of exercise wrong. I kept the questions concrete, sometimes about a few pages of a text we were reading, sometimes about moments from their experience. And our class hours would be discussions on the themes and also the writing, but a critical discussion on what they said and wrote, not a textbook lesson.

From the beginning, I was convinced that I would have to have dialogue with the students. If you ask me if I had some systematic notion of what dialogue meant, I would have to answer no. I had no epistemology worked out to help me design my teaching. I had intuition. I guessed that talking with them should be the beginning. That is, not to just give classes to them, explaining things to them, but instead to challenge them critically about what I was saying. Finally, after leaving high school teaching, I started teaching adult workers in Recife, in the northeast of Brazil, my home area. There, I reinforced all these ideas. That was my second moment of formation, among workers and peasants in Recife. And I made mistakes. I was traditional but I was capable of going beyond.

My work then in Recife was for a private institution in local neighborhoods and in rural areas, and also at the university. I worked a lot trying to establish the relationship of schools to the lives of the workers and peasants. The more I discussed with them the problems of schools, and kids, the more I became convinced that I should study their expectations. All the things I am trying to theorize now did not come up suddenly or accidentally. They came from a series of experiences.

I could underline three or four moments of my development. The first was when I was just a student, my childhood partly in Recife and then in Jaboatao. My family left Recife in order to survive the economic crisis of the Depression of the 1930s. A great moment in my life was the experience of hunger. I needed to eat more. Because my family lost its economic status, I was not only hungry but I also had very good friends both from the middle class and the working-class. Being friends with kids from the working class, I learned the differences of classes by seeing how their language, their clothing, their whole lives expressed the totality of class separations in society.





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light on the power relations made opaque by the dominant class. We can also prepare and participate in programs to change society.

I would say that before the coup I gave to education some powers that were really beyond it, but the moment then was very optimistic. With some exceptions in left groups, there was almost a certainty that we would move forward to power. There was a great generalized hope that I was part of. In this atmosphere, it was not difficult to teach students. The moment was extraordinary. The young were absolutely motivated historically to participate in the transformation. I remember that one time we needed 600 students to work as teachers in adult literacy for an area in Rio de Janeiro. We announced it in the newspapers and we had 6,000 candidates show up! It was terrible! We had to make the interviews in a stadium to select the 600, at the end of 1963. It was a time of fantastic popular mobilization, and education was part of it, one of the elements, until the coup.

**Ira** In the late 60s in the States, and in parts of Europe, education was also a radicalizing part of society. I'm wondering if the 60s showed the power of education to radicalize society or the limits of education in transforming society, or both at the same time. In terms of the coup in '64, if you read education the same way the military read your work in adult literacy, you might say that education is an unacceptable threat to oligarchy, inequality, authoritarian rule. The military and its upper-class backers concluded that education could not be ignored. It was part of the mass mobilization and had to be restricted. This suggests that education's role in social transformation was very significant at that moment.

**Paulo** That's very interesting. Maybe now I should say that precisely because education should be the lever for social transformation, it cannot be!

**Ira** You mean that it will not be allowed to be what it should be? The elite forces in society will not permit education to transform the political structure?

**Paulo** Yes! (Laughing) If education could only have a conversation with biology, for example, and say, I have to understand how limited I am obliged to be because of the political limits I am not allowed to go beyond, then the living game of social limits would be easier to see! I began to understand the nature of limits on education when I experienced the shock of the coup d'état. After the coup, I was really born again with a new consciousness of politics, education and transformation. You can see this in my first book *Education for Critical*



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education to be the lever for the transformation of those who have power and are in power. It would be tremendously naive to ask the ruling class in power to put into practice a kind of education which can work against it. If education was left alone to develop without political supervision, it would create no end of problems for those in power. But, the dominant authorities do not leave it alone. They supervise it.

We have had in the 70s, a variety of theories trying to understand education as part of the reproduction of society, which Henry Giroux has studied very well.<sup>2</sup> The fact is that the relationships between the subsystem of education and the global system of society are not mechanical relationships. They are historical relationships. They are dialectical and contradictory. It means then, that, from the point of view of the ruling class, of the people in power, the main task for systematic education is to reproduce the dominant ideology.

Dialectically, there is nevertheless another task to be accomplished. That is, the task of denouncing and working *against* the reproduction of the dominant ideology. Who has this second task of denouncing dominant ideology and its reproduction? The educator whose political dream is for liberation. The second task cannot be proposed by the dominant class, whose dream is for the reproduction of their power in society. Transformation has to be accomplished by those who dream about the reinvention of society, the recreation or reconstruction of society. Then, those whose political dream is to reinvent society have to fill up the space of the schools, the institutional space, in order to unveil the reality which is being hidden by the dominant ideology, the dominant curriculum.

Of course, this unveiling is one of the main tasks of liberating education. The reproducing task of the dominant ideology implies making reality opaque, to prevent the people from gaining critical awareness, from 'reading' critically their reality, from grasping the *raison d'être* of the facts they discover. To make reality opaque means to lead people to say that A is B, and B is N, to say that reality is a fixed commodity only to be described instead of recognizing that each moment is made in history and can be changed in an historical process. An example of an obscuring myth is that unemployment in the U.S. is caused by 'illegal aliens' who take jobs away from native workers, instead of seeing high unemployment as a policy of the establishment to keep wages low. This is obscuring reality. This is the task of the dominant ideology. Our task, the liberating task, at the institutional level of the schools, is to illuminate reality. Of course, it is not a neutral task, just as the other one is not neutral either.

To make reality opaque is not neutral. To make reality lucid, illuminated, is also not neutral. In order for us to do that, we have





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a right to draw from it, lecture from it, assign long reading lists from it, and make deposits in the students' minds.

**Paulo** But, Ira, it is also important to say that by criticizing banking education we have to recognize that not all kinds of lecturing is banking education. You can still be very critical while lecturing. For me the question is how not to put the students to sleep because they listen to you as if you were singing to them!

The question is not banking lectures or no lectures, because traditional teachers will make reality opaque whether they lecture or lead discussions. A liberating teacher will illuminate reality even if he or she lectures. The question is the content and dynamism of the lecture, the approach to the object to be known. Does it critically reorient students to society? Does it animate their critical thinking or not?

How is it possible for you to provoke critical attention by speaking? How to develop a certain dynamism in the interior of your speech? How to have in your speech the instrument to unveil reality, to make it no longer opaque? If you can do that in one hour for students! Afterwards the class takes your very speech as an object to be thought about. Do you see? You take your speech as a kind of oral codification of a problem, now to be decodified by the students and you. This is tremendously critical.

**Ira** I hear many questions from teachers about the lecture format versus the dialogue format, so it's a good time to speak about the lecture as a verbal codification of reality, rather than as an oral transfer-of-knowledge from the teacher to the students, a problem-posing illumination which criticizes itself and challenges students' thinking rather than a delivery system of pre-packaged information passed out verbally in the classroom.

**Paulo** This is important! I tell you, why don't you go on commenting, because you said something very good now. I think you grasped it very well, better than I. Your expression was happier than mine on this question. Here the importance is that the speech be taken as a *challenge* to be unveiled, and *never* as a channel of transference of knowledge.

**Ira** All of us who come through traditional schooling have heard many lectures where there is nothing more than an oral transfer-of-knowledge, a verbal channel for knowledge-transferring. Very rarely were we provoked by a creative reinvention of knowledge in front of us, in an exciting way where the language compelled us to re-think the way we see reality. This takes some practice for teachers.



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training which gives them confidence in their own verbal creativity. On the other hand, students are conditioned to be passive when the teacher starts lecturing, so their inactivity is the trap waiting for us in the lecture mode. Even more, as you said before, Paulo, when you turn to a liberatory discussion format or when you decide to give lectures challenging the existing ideology, you are swimming against the current, revealing what the culture keeps hidden, and you have to expect some 'heat.' This risk of punishment restrains many teachers. You're on safer ground if you join the club and just lecture from the official knowledge.

Even if teachers have political space to deviate, to express some radicalism, we must believe that we too will be educated in the process, and not arrange the pedagogy so that transformation goes one way. Student subjectivity has to be mobilized. In the Literature and Environment course, I found myself studying issues not on my agenda. This threw me into uncertainty for a while, so the voice I offered in discussion and in my lecture was a searching one, creating itself in-process. The animated, inventing voice is crucial for the lecture mode. The trap of the lecture is more than the sleepy sonority of the teacher's voice. There is also the invitation to deliver knowledge, even radical knowledge, in neatly-bundled fully-formed packages, so that students exchange a diet of official words for a new diet of unofficial rhetoric.

This tendency of the talking teacher to silence students is greater in the lecture format. Even radical teachers can sound like talking textbooks. The students are simply less articulate, and less informed, so they'll shut up rather than intervene, ask the 'wrong' question, and risk humiliation. I also think that because the lecture-format is so dominant already from traditional schooling, it's easy enough to fall back on it and exclude other formats. Sometimes I like to talk about *parallel pedagogies*, where the teacher simultaneously employs a variety of classroom formats. If the dynamic, problem-posing lecture coexists with student presentations, group work in class, individual work, writing sessions, field work outside class, and so on, the form of the course itself will reduce the threat of teacher-talk in a transfer-of-knowledge lecture.

### **Teacher-Talk versus Dialogue, Domination versus Illumination**

**Paulo** I agree. That was a good example from your class. Let me go back to one point you made in your speech, about liberating





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you bring in World Bank reports into a biology class. If the Bank requires austerity for loans to Third World countries—higher prices, lower wages, and cuts in social programs—the biology class can calculate the effects on the family diet. How many fewer calories will people eat? What cheaper food will people turn to? Will this worse diet increase infant disease and death? All these things have to do with the ‘illumination’ of reality—to challenge the students to understand that knowing is not just *eating* knowledge and that eating is also a question of politics!

### **Knowing Is Not Eating Facts: Dialogue and Subject Matter**

**Ira** Nowhere is eating knowledge more prominent than in courses with giant reading lists. Teachers and students regularly ask how to apply the dialogical approach to subject-matter and technical-expertise courses. They suggest that writing courses, literacy programs, and communications departments are favored situations for doing liberatory education because there are smaller bodies-of-knowledge to teach. Communications courses, they suspect, lend themselves more naturally to a discussion method. The body-of-knowledge courses in science, engineering, nursing and social science leave those teachers wondering how to be dialogical when they have so much material to cover.

There is some justice to this question on how to use a dialogue-process in an imposing body-of-knowledge course. On the whole, though, I think the case is overstated. Because all of us have had so little chance to witness liberating models, it's easier to blame the subject-matter itself rather than to reinvent learning in dialogic discussion and lectures. Secondly, writing, communications, and literature courses can have bodies-of-knowledge as imposing as any other discipline. These courses have traditionally been taught in passive ways that alienate and silence students, through the sleepy voice of a teacher, and through materials remote from student interests. I can teach my English courses as drills in basic grammar, syntax, and rhetoric. I can teach literature courses that recite official canons. I can teach media courses as a textbook recital of delivery systems. My choice is to experiment with dialogic formats that absorb social issues and student themes. I know this choice is being made by teachers in other departments such as math and social studies.<sup>5</sup> Still, the most work done on liberating pedagogy here in the States has been in literacy, following your example in Brazil.



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## What Are The Fears And Risks Of Transformation?

### **Fear and Risk: The Results of Dreaming Inside History**

**Ira** We've discussed the transformation of students and teachers but I think we need to examine the special fears teachers have about transforming themselves. I've heard teachers talk directly and indirectly about their fears. They worry about being fired if they practice emancipating education instead of the transfer-of-knowledge pedagogy. They speak about the risks to their careers if they express opposition ideology, if they engage in opposition politics in their institutions. They also fear the awkwardness of relearning their profession in front of their students. Teachers want to feel expert, so the need to recreate ourselves on the job is intimidating to many. Dialogic classes are creative and unpredictable, invented in-progress, making some teachers worry that they will make mistakes in class and lose control or respect.

Teachers who fear transformation can also be attracted to liberating pedagogy. The regular curriculum often fails them, boring them and the students. They can feel stifled by the routine syllabus or by the familiar limits of their academic discipline. They want to breathe deeply as educators instead of taking gulps of air in a closet of official knowledge.





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## What Fear Can Teach Us: Limits and Lessons

**Paulo** The more you recognize your fear as a consequence of your attempt to practice your dream, the more you learn how to put into practice your dream! Do you see? Look, Ira, I never had interviews with the great revolutionaries of this century about their fears! I never asked Fidel Castro, for example, about his fears. I could not ask this question to Amilcar Cabral, another fantastic revolutionary. Or to Che Guevara, for example. But, *all* of them felt fear, to the extent that all of them were very faithful to their dreams.

But there is another point which I think is very important. This understanding of fear is not something which diminishes me but which makes me recognize that I am a human being. This recognition gains my attention in order to set limits when fear tells me *not* to do this or that. Is it clear? I have to establish the limits for my fear.

**Ira** First you make some concessions to it, and then you understand the concessions you make, saying I can't do *this* because I am afraid, but I won't allow my fear to prevent me from doing *that*.

**Paulo** This is what I am trying to say. What happens as a consequence is that in some moments instead of rationalizing fear, you understand it *critically*. Then, the recognition of the fear limiting your action allows you to arrive at a very critical position in which you begin to act according to the dialectical relationships between tactics and strategy. What do I mean?

If you consider that strategy means your dream, the tactics are just the mediations, the ways, the methods, the roads, the instruments to concretize the dream, to materialize the strategy. This relationship cannot be dichotomized. Tactics cannot be allowed to contradict strategy. Because of that, you cannot have authoritarian tactics to materialize democratic dreams. Another thing: the more you bring strategy and tactics into agreement, the more you recognize the space which limits your actions.

In some moments, for example, you discover that today historically it is not possible to do a certain kind of action because the repression should come easily on you. Then, it is as if your fear is more or less domesticated by your clarity. You just know that in that moment it is impossible to walk one kilometer. So, you walk 800 meters! And you wait for tomorrow to walk more, when another 200 meters can be walked. Of course, one of the serious questions is how to learn the *position* where the limit is. You don't find that in books! With



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command your fear, you no longer risk. And if you don't risk, you don't create anything. Without risking, for me, there is no possibility to exist.

Let us suppose we work in a faculty of education in some university. We are afraid because we are trying to do something different. What is terrible is that what we can do in some faculties is nothing that could seriously endanger the establishment. But, the establishment is so demanding concerning its preservation that it does not allow anything, even something naive, which can say NO! to it. Then, facing the sensitivity of the establishment, *we* are afraid. But, as I said before, we are clarifying our choice. We are knowing more or less what we would like to do. I think that one of the first things to do is to begin to know the space in which we are. This means to know the different departments of the faculty, the dean of the faculty and his or her approach, his or her comprehension of the world, his or her ideological position, his or her choice. We need to know the teachers in the different departments. It is a kind of research. I call it making an 'ideological map' of the institution.

By doing this, sooner or later, we begin to know who we can count on at certain moments. Acting alone is the *best* way to commit suicide. It's impossible to confront the lion romantically! You have to know who you can count on and who you have to fight. To the extent you more or less know that, you can begin to be *with* and not to be *alone*. The sensation of not being alone diminishes fear.

Let me say here, now, why I insist constantly on the politicity of education. There was a time in my life as an educator when I did not speak about politics and education. It was my most naive moment. There was another time when I began to speak about the political aspects of education. That was a *less* naive moment, when I wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). In the second moment, nevertheless, I was still thinking that education was *not* politics but only had an *aspect* of politics. In the *third* moment, today, for me there is *not* a political aspect. For me, now I say that education *is* politics. Today, I say education has the quality of being politics, which shapes the learning process. Education is politics and politics has *educability*. Because education is politics, it makes sense for the liberating teacher to feel some fear when he or she is teaching.

Then, when I am convinced of this, and being convinced that education is politics does *not* abolish fear, I treat my fear not as a ghost that commands me. *I* am the subject of my fear. This command over fear did not happen soon. It took time in my life. When rumors of a coup came up in early 1964, many people in Brazil preferred not to believe them. Instead of 'cultivating' their fears, they chose to say





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And then he said, that in jail, he began to think again of his seven kids, and about his wife. Finally, some people intervened and he was released. When he got out, he insisted again on teaching the classes.

This story is beautiful because we can see in it the question of fear associated with the dream, how he learned to control fear *without* rejecting it.

He said that the third time, when he began teaching the classes, he was called again to the police station. The chief said to him, "Look, it was just told me that you know fifty percent of the slum in which you live. And fifty percent of the people know you. Why don't you leave this area? Why don't you forget Paulo Freire? Why don't you go far away and live in another slum where you don't know anyone, start a new life?"

The answer he gave to the police chief was, "Oh, Mr. Prefect, yes I know fifty percent of the people of my slum. How can I leave the slum right now when I must get to know the *other* fifty percent?"

The worker stopped his story and stared at me in the great silence of this big meeting. I am sure he heard the silence gripping the attention of the people there. Finally, he said, "And about my seven kids, *what* happened to them?"

He answered his own question in such a *fantastic* way! Look, I am sweating from the memory of his speech! He said, "There was a moment in my fear in which I discovered that *precisely* because of the seven kids I could not be silent!" Do you see?

**Ira** His dream was their hope for the future. His fear meant that their hope was alive, their future was coming to life.

**Paulo** Yes! His dream, absolutely concrete, is his future and his hope. In no sense was there a future for his kids without his hope. Then, knowing this, he overcame his fear. No paralyzing fear. This, Ira, is what is not easy to explain, or to live with. After seeing the sweetness of this fantastic man, this Brazilian worker, this story of his fear, when I left the meeting that night in Sao Paulo, I also felt more or less changed. That is, finally, that man added to me some dimension of courage.

**Ira** The Brazilian worker was knitted into a community that helped him know what he was fighting for, but he also faced more severe repression than teachers face in the First World, who may lose their jobs but won't be locked up for doing liberatory education.

When I think of getting knitted into a location and acting for a dream of transformation, I'm taken back to the 'ideological profile' you spoke about earlier, as a way of preparing myself for opposition. I know I didn't understand this in the 60s, when the upheavals were



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**Ira** The traditional educator offers technical training in a way that strengthens the hold of dominant ideology on student consciousness. Training does not reveal the politics of doing such work. The liberatory teacher does not mystify jobs, careers or working, but poses critical questions while teaching them?

**Paulo** Yes! No mystification.

**Ira** Job skills must be criticized at the same time they are learned because the current conditions of society require students to enter a predatory job market.

**Paulo** Yes, it is required! How is it possible *before* transforming society to deny students the knowledge they need to survive? For me, (laughing) it is an absurdity.

**Ira** Then, our task as liberating educators with the necessity of training students for jobs is to raise critical questions about the very training we are giving. The students must earn a living, and no one can deny that need or have contempt for that expectation of theirs. At the same time, the pedagogical problem is how to intervene in the training so as to raise critical consciousness about the jobs and the training, too.

**Paulo** I don't deny or question the need for training. But I absorb this aspect into my criticism of the whole system, in the class. Still, what is impossible is to be an *incompetent* educator because I am a revolutionary! (Laughing) Do you see? It would be a contradiction. The more seriously you are engaged in a search for transformation the more you have to be rigorous, the more you have to seek for knowledge, the more you have to challenge the students to be scientifically and technically prepared for the real society they are still living in. If the students use the course *just* to get jobs and be happy with that, you *cannot* kill them! (Laughing) You have to challenge them at the very same moment you are helping them to be prepared.

**Ira** Won't students see this as a confusion? You are endorsing and criticizing the material at the same time.

**Paulo** Ah, no, it is not a confusion. It is a contradiction. They must understand what contradiction means, that human action can move in several directions at once, that something can contain itself and its opposite also. For example, at the same time that architecture or nursing students get competent training, the liberating teacher has to raise questions about how people live in slums, and what are their medical and housing needs. It is not enough to prepare students to





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Finally, teachers have to say to students, Look, in spite of being beautiful, this way you speak also includes the question of *power*. Because of the political problem of power, you need to learn how to command the dominant language, in order for you to survive in the struggle to transform society.

Someone may ask me, But, Paulo, if you teach correct usage, the poor or working-class student may just get ruling ideology through the elite usage. Yes! It is a danger. But dominant ideology is not being reproduced *exclusively* through language or through school. There are other ways of reproduction in society, and language is only one mechanism. For me, what we cannot deny to working-class students is the grasp of some principles of the grammar common to the dominant class. Not grasping the elite forms would only make it more difficult for them to survive in the struggle. The testimony that must be given to students as we teach the standard form is that they need to command it not exclusively in order to survive, but *above all* for fighting better against the dominant class.

Ira This is political wisdom for liberatory teachers. Still, I must criticize the word 'survival,' because 'survival' is a conservative theme that put teachers and students on the defensive after the egalitarian 60s. The word 'survival' has poisoned the educational atmosphere in the States with more fear than is necessary. The student fear of survival has helped conservatives tilt the curriculum towards careerism and back-to-basics. By alarming students, teachers and parents about survival, conservatives in the recent period were helped in narrowing the experimental and democratic curricula from the 60s. From another angle, I'd say that the overblown talk about survival is also an unnecessary paternalism by teachers. Students are very resourceful in dealing with the predatory job market. They know that connections, aggressiveness, luck, moxie, and chutzpah play as big a role as paper credentials. Students need critical education, skills, degrees, and adult mentoring, but they don't benefit from an alarming picture of reality, where careerism and back-to-basics are falsely posed as the keys to a fearful kingdom. Fears of survival only strengthen conservatism by encouraging students and teachers to think of career programs as the solution, while critical learning and politics are only distractions. Jobtraining and vocationalism have always been the curricula of choice by business forces for the mass of students. Work-based programs also have a poor historical record of connecting schoolish training with future employment.

I said these things because the theme of survival has become too angelic in my culture. I always remind myself that the great masters



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sion,' when some young teachers and young students ask a question like this, emphasizing improperly the rigor in the traditional curriculum, of choosing the contents of the programs, emphasizing the authoritarian dimensions of this traditional approach, giving to this mechanistic way of thinking and of doing curriculum the name of 'rigor,' for me it is *not* 'rigor.' The standard, transfer curriculum is a mechanistic, authoritarian way of thinking about organizing a program which implies above all a tremendous lack of confidence in the creativity of the students and in the ability of the teachers! Because in the last analysis, when certain centers of power establish what should be done in the classroom, their authoritarian manner denies the exercise of creativity among the teachers and the students. The center is above all commanding, manipulating, from some distance, the activities of the educators and the students.

Let's go back, Ira, to the beginning of my reflection. When students or young teachers ask the question you put on the table, my impression is that by thinking of something different, which the students or young teachers are naming 'dialogical education' or 'liberating education,' they are so used to following orders that they don't know how to be responsible for their own formation. They have not learned how to organize their own reading of reality and of books, understanding critically what they read. Because they are dependent on authority to structure their development, automatically they think that liberating or dialogical education is *not* rigorous, precisely because it asks them to participate in their own formation. I don't know whether I am being clear in my explanation.

**Ira** Students and teachers inventing liberatory education and reforming themselves may feel so unfamiliar with being responsible for their studies, that they think the dialogical approach lacks rigor. Participatory learning begins from a history of their non-participation. The elite transfer-pedagogy laid everything out in advance and just asked us to follow along step by step, preventing democratic learning and the intellectual habits needed for transformation. In this transitional moment, it is easy to mistake chaos from below as the antidote to control from above. Those of us who ask about liberating structure may also intuit the effort that participation requires and can feel tired by the energy it takes to 'illuminate' reality, to overcome the limits of traditional education. People can know *a priori* the rigor of transformation, which may make them long for a mechanical, undemanding route to liberating education. We have been allowed to know only *one* definition of rigor, the authoritarian, traditional one, which mechanically structures education, and discourages us from the responsibility of recreating ourselves in society.





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also authoritarian, *tremendously authoritarian!* Who cannot accept dialogical methods.

Many in a left position are convinced *religiously* that they received a mandate from God, in spite of not believing in God! To *save* the students, to *save* the people. They think they have *the truth* in their hands and their task is to walk all over the world as Peregrines of the Revolution, not discussing 'truth,' simply putting it inside as many heads as possible.

**Ira** Like injections of revolutionary wisdom.

**Paulo** Yes, injections! We *must* say that this is reactionary and *not* a revolutionary attitude.

**Ira** Let's talk more about the revolutionary attitude, how it works in favor of creative rigor. Suppose we want to reject the authoritarian way of transferring knowledge to students. We also want to avoid being left-wing crusaders who mimic the transfer-teacher by injecting "Revolutionary Truth" into students' minds. We have a creative pedagogy which seeks to reinvent knowledge situated in the themes, needs and language of the students, as an act of illuminating power in society. How can we describe the rigor of this process in even more intimate detail? You know what I'm getting at. There is in official schooling a range of tangible, seductive products, such as the final exam, the term paper, the multiple-choice test, entry skill-exams and exit competency-exams, it goes on and on, a closet full of cultural tools.

If you can't program a course in advance and can't test results mechanically at the end, how do we demonstrate the rigor of the liberatory course? How do we demonstrate to ourselves, to interested teachers, to our critics, and even to our enemies that rigor exists here?

**Paulo** Yes, but look, to demonstrate to our enemies is very difficult because they are absolutely inserted into their comprehension of rigor. For example, one of the connotations of rigor for them is never to try to interpret reality.

**Ira** Yes, like we discussed before, especially among some physical scientists and social scientists.

**Paulo** As a teacher, even though you humbly do not *proclaim* that you are a scientist, you have to give witness, testimony, to the students that they have nothing to do with interpreting or, even worse, changing reality. Reality is not there to be interpreted or changed but to be described, observed, according to the traditional way of teaching.



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behind this speech by the peasant." And then, I began to speak about what I was reading, and I read two or three more pieces of the speech, doing the same thing. When I stopped, I said, "Who would like to continue?" One of them began to read.

We did that for *four* sessions with *three hours* each session to read *six pages*. Twelve hours. When we finished, in the last day, one of the students, a sociology professor in the faculty of medicine, doing a graduate degree in education, came to me smiling and said, "Paulo, I have something to tell you. When you suggested one month ago to read this text, I bought it and Sunday evening, the day before the first session, I read it in twenty minutes, and I said to myself smiling, 'I want just to know what Paulo will do with this tomorrow. Because we have three hours in seminar and what will he do with this text which I finished in twenty minutes!' After spending twelve hours reading this text of six pages, my conclusion is that I did not know how to read before." Do you see?

What is my opinion on this? (Maybe I am not rigorous now because I begin with only my opinion!) My thesis is that for me it was better for that group of graduate students to have spent twelve hours reading with me six pages. The sociologist showed me how her notebook was full of notes she made during the discussions. My impression is that after that exercise it should be more easy for students *to read alone*. To understand what it means to read. To go on by themselves. I think that from time to time if you can read with students for one chapter like this, challenging them, and after that suggesting other chapters to read alone and discuss with you, it is better than to impose the reading of 300 books, which rests on a certain faith in a very, very problematic epistemology, which is, If you insist on something, you end up getting it. But 'knowing' is not that, not just getting what you insist will be the end result of an exercise. This is a problem and not a certainty.

But do you see, Ira, how difficult is our land, our territory?

Ira Yes. On the one hand, we want the 'illuminating' course to be serious and on the other hand it has *to develop* the habits of intellectual seriousness in a cultural field that discourages students from being critical. Even worse, the students are habituated to the wrong model of 'rigor,' one of mechanical study and memorization. We have to develop critical rigor in a pedagogy that asks students *to assume their own direction*. This amounts to directing self-direction. Then, also, the liberating class seeks to absorb themes and materials from *social contexts* which direct critical attention to reality. We also try *to give value to texts which traditionally are not taken seriously*, like the political





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where learning is supposed to go on, has little to say about the things that matter most to them. What the school does say isn't in the language they speak! You can imagine how easy it is for students to become anti-intellectual under these conditions.

Here in the U.S., mainstream students assume that just about any material brought to class by the teacher will be irrelevant to their interests. They ask themselves if they will be able to put up with it, and don't expect to be inspired enough to digest it word by word. Offering *less to read* will not be enough by itself to change this perception. Right now, just about anything students want to do from eating a hamburger to roller-skating is more appealing than education. The less that is chosen and how the less is presented are fateful decisions. Not least of all is the student perception that a teacher who assigns less, expects less from them.

**Paulo** Yes, I understand what you are saying. And it's very interesting. I remember when I was teaching at the University of Geneva, at the end of the seminar, at the evaluation we tried to do together, one of the students made a very interesting criticism to me which has to do exactly with what you said now.

By attempting the methodology in practice with them, as an object itself for reflection in our mutual evaluation of the seminar, the student said to me, "Paulo, today after our experience this semester I have something to tell you which is a criticism. But for me it is a necessary criticism and I hope I can help you." I said, "Okay," and he went on to say, "Look, Paulo, you committed just one mistake but it is a serious mistake in working with us. When you arrived here in the beginning of the semester, you thought we were ready to assume the responsibility of shaping ourselves with you, but you had no right to think like this. You assumed something that was not tested."

He told me, "And what did you do? *You committed suicide* as the teacher. Instead of that, you should have exposed yourself to our assassination! (Ira laughs) We would have to kill you as the only professor in the seminar for you to be re-born as a student who is also a professor. Instead of that, you committed suicide in our presence and it created in us a feeling of being orphans." (Paulo laughs)

I smiled and said, "Yes, I agree with you completely. I did not have the right to commit this mistake."

And I think that this is precisely what you are saying now. In some situations, in some circumstances, the democratic goal of liberating education can lead to irresponsibility if the students perceive it as expecting less from them. The responsible educator has to be at least



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'antagonistic.' The difference continues to exist! *I* am different from the students! But I cannot allow this to be antagonistic if I am democratic. If they become antagonistic, it is because I became authoritarian.

**Ira** You were not open to change.

**Paulo** Yes, I became rigid, closed to democracy. And it's very interesting. The students in a certain moment test you. They are so conditioned by authoritarian professors that when you come and say we in this class are different, we have the right to think and to ask questions and to criticize, not only the right but the duty, it's possible that one of the students (and it's beautiful!) makes the first test! Then he or she can provoke you by doing something which should be punished by an authoritarian professor. He or she does that in order to know whether what you said is real. If you punish that student, you really were not honest. Your speech did not have any value. But, if you do not say *anything* to the student, your speech *also* did not have value. Do you see how difficult it is?

**Ira** Yes, students are very clever in the power struggle of the classroom.

**Paulo** The student needs to know that in some moments freedom must be punished, when it goes beyond the limits of democratic authority. And the punishment has to be made by the authority. For example, Elza and I never failed to punish our kids every time it was necessary. We never beat them. It was not needed. They are absolutely virgin of this. But, we punished, we talked seriously with them. Yet, we never said 'no' unless we gave reasons why we were saying 'no.'

I've had other situations like this in my life. Two years ago in Brazil in a graduate course, a woman did something like this test I spoke of above, testing my testimony of freedom, on the first day. In the last analysis, I am sure she was expecting me to put her out of the room, in order to demonstrate that I was really not open. In my speech I could not do that, but I could not just smile either. When she stopped speaking, making an incredible *a priori* criticism of me, I spoke seriously to her with the authority of the teacher but I did not expel her from the seminar, and by the end of the term she got a good grade. She was a capable woman. We did not become friends because I think she also did not want it.

This is the kind of situation you have if your choice is a liberating one to use democracy, freedom and authority together. You cannot accept the invitation to authoritarianism which the dominant ideol-





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in big rooms either busily taking notes, or sleeping, or daydreaming, or doing homework from another course while sitting in this one, or talking to each other. A low-paid graduate student leads a recitation class afterwards, to review what the professor said or what the textbooks say. This is 'cost-effective' education, minimum personal contact between professors and students. Professor-contact is reserved for graduate students, or undergraduate majors, or honors classes, or for students at the most costly universities, where money is invested in small classes for the elite. In the lower grades, richer school districts and private schools also offer their students smaller classes, to give students more personal attention.

You can see the problem here for dialogue. The *right* to have a small discussion begins as a class privilege. The more elite the student, the more likely that he or she will have a personalized, discussion contact with the professor or the teacher. For the rest, there are large college classes mixed with recitation sections staffed by poorly-paid instructors, or large classes in underfunded public schools. If public resources were transferred from the military to education to fund smaller classes, that would make dialogue easier to have in school. Teachers and students would then have to confront our own inexperience in small-group, democratic communications. We are most familiar with 'monologue' or teacher-talk, in the transfer-of-knowledge approach. Even in discussion groups, student voices are often restricted by a dull or imposing teacherly voice that inhibits critical challenges to the syllabus.

The privilege of small classes and the predominance of transfer-teaching are the realities surrounding us. How does the dialogical method present a different model of learning and knowledge? How does dialogical teaching transform communication?

**Paulo** I think, Ira, that first of all we should understand liberating dialogue not as a technique, a *mere* technique, which we can use to help us get some results. We also cannot, must not, understand dialogue as a kind of tactic we use to make students our friends. This would make dialogue a technique for manipulation instead of illumination.

On the contrary, dialogue must be understood as something taking part in the very historical nature of human beings. It is part of our historical progress in becoming human beings. That is, dialogue is a kind of necessary posture to the extent that humans have become more and more critically communicative beings. Dialogue is a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it. Something else: To the extent that we are communicative



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which we can count on. What dialogue-educators know, nevertheless, is that science has historicity. This means that all new knowledge comes up when other knowledge becomes old, and no longer answers the needs of the new moment, no longer answers the new questions being asked. Because of that, all new knowledge when it appears waits for its own overcoming by the next new knowledge which is inevitable. Sometimes I say that if scientists were as humble as knowledge is, we would be in a different world.

But, there are other aspects of dialogical situations which I think are important to add. The circumstances of a seminar where dialogue is the relationship between cognitive subjects and a knowable object is not a situation in which we can do anything we want to do. That is, it has limits and contradictions which condition what we can do. Dialogue does not exist in a political vacuum. It is not a 'free space' where you may do what you want. Dialogue takes place inside some kind of program and context. These conditioning factors create tension in achieving goals that we set for dialogic education. To achieve the goals of transformation, dialogue implies responsibility, directiveness, determination, discipline, objectives.

Nevertheless, a dialogical situation implies the *absence* of authoritarianism. Dialogue means a permanent tension in the relation between authority and liberty. But, in this tension, authority continues to be because it has authority vis-a-vis permitting student freedoms which emerge, which grow and mature precisely because authority and freedom learn self-discipline.

Something more: A dialogical setting does not mean that everyone involved in it *has* to speak! Dialogue does not have a goal or a requirement that all people in the class *must* say something even if they have nothing to say!

**Ira** I see what you are pointing to. For them to feel pressured to speak even when they have nothing to add creates a false democracy, a fake moment of discussion. In a way, this is an imposition on the students, by a teacher who has made dialogue into a dogma, a technique instead of into a genuine open exchange.

**Paulo** Yes! In dialogue, one has the right to be silent! Nevertheless, one does not have the right to misuse his or her participation in the development of the common exercise.

**Ira** You mean your right to stay silent does not mean you have a right to sabotage the process?

**Paulo** That's a good way to put it. If for example, someone tries to sabotage the process precisely because the class is dialogical and





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I should say something here about a great friend of mine from Brazil, a physics professor at the University of Marcio Campos, who talks to me constantly, especially when we make our car trip of 90 minutes together from Sao Paulo to the University. I told him many times how frustrated I am that I am not able to audit his course and be one of his students. The course is 'From Astrology to Astronomy,' a kind of history of scientific rigor. By comparing astrology to astronomy he tries to grasp what rigor in science has meant, especially by analyzing the historicity of science.

One day, he said to me, "Look, Paulo, constantly I ask the physics students in the beginning of the course to do a simple neighborhood research over a weekend. I ask them to go to an area of common people and talk with fishermen, workers, peasants, people in the streets, to speak with them about how they understand the world, what is their cosmological vision, what is *the sky* for them? What do stars mean to them? What distance do they think there is between us and the stars? What is the world from their eyes? I also ask the students to put their own understanding down, to make some comparisons." This in a physics course!

This physics professor studies science with his students by beginning with their research into popular thinking about reality. When students come back the next week to his class, they report on how people think about night and day, the moon, the seasons, the tides coming and going, and compare all these things to their own positions. The assumption is that the students' own positions will be *less* magical, and they are.

Then, he begins to think scientifically with them on this material. For me, there is no problem here with situating the course in these concrete materials. Critics of such an approach might begin to worry about the program. What can we do with such contents, they may ask. The regular curriculum is more important, they say, the regular way of teaching physics. I say to them that I am not against a curriculum or a program, but only against the authoritarian and elitist ways of organizing the studies. I am defending the critical participation of the students in *their* education. Do you see? They have the right to participate and I don't have the right to say that because they might reject participation, then I assume the position of totally giving them their formation. No! I must recognize that students cannot understand their own rights because they are so *ideologized* into rejecting their own freedom, their own critical development, thanks to the traditional curriculum. Then, I have to learn with them how to go beyond these limits, beyond their own learned rejection of their rights.



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resolved soon or in a single classroom. But, there is a nobility to this impatience because it drives us forward towards answers, so it is not only a trap that can lead to fake solutions or to cynicism in the absence of easy answers.

**Paulo** But there is another point to this question of individualism, environment, and pedagogy. I don't know if you will agree with me, Ira, as an American, if I take environment above all as an instrumentality, an historical force, which weaves our cultural circumstance. For example, the quantity of books we find in the American bibliography on 'how to get happy,' 'how to be happy making love,' 'how to get a good job,' 'how to make friends.' Sometimes I think it should be a very interesting issue for a dissertation, to make a research into the books coming out in one year in the States about self-improvement. The project could be to make an ideological analysis of the books. On the one hand, they intensely stimulate individualism. On the other hand, they are consistently prescriptive.

**Ira** I agree. Also, various self-improvement programs become fads followed *en masse*. You are enveloped into a mass exercise for improvement via the appeal to individualism. Our discussion here has strongly characterized self-improvement as an interference to critical consciousness. Does this North American phenomenon of individual answers stand in the way of social empowerment?

**Paulo** Exactly! Such a literature and cultural endeavor are the opposites of a critical effort for social transformation.

**Ira** Just imagine the complications here in the U.S. for the notion of social class empowerment. This was a rich terrain inhabited by native peoples whose technology was no match for European gunpowder and diseased blankets. White settlers seized the land from the American Indians, exterminated them, and then millions of black slaves involuntarily developed our agriculture, while millions of poor white immigrants streamed into the new factories. Such a vast enterprise required great expectations, great capacity for cruelty and inflicting hardship, and the courage to endure hardship and cruelty. This historical experience rested on private dreams of prosperity and freedom, not ideas of class like in European and Latin cultures.

Individual dreams of freedom and prosperity in slaves and immigrants as well as in slaveholders and captains of industry molded this society. Getting free of slavery or the crushing poverty of early factory life meant dreaming big about your future or your children's future. Transformation was demanded by our historical experience. But, the privatization of this demand, the deflection of its social as-





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**Ira** Yet, we often say they don't know Standard English or correct usage, even when they can mimic a professor. They know something about this official language of the authorities. They don't use it or study it consistently because correct usage is not their organic language, not organic to their subordinate development in school and society. They will perform in standard usage for creative moments when they want. Here is an example of critical aesthetics that teachers as artists need to draw out.

**Paulo** I agree absolutely with you about this question of the teacher as an artist. I would just add two elements to it.

One is that no matter if education is exercised informally at home or formally at a school, through informal relationships between parents and kids or formally in primary school between teachers and students, education has to do with a permanent process of formation. Even though it is not strictly the task of the educator to form or to shape the students, no matter what the level of education, I am in my perspective a helper of the students in their process of formation, of their growing up. This process is necessarily an artistic one. It is impossible to participate in the process of getting shaped, which is a kind of rebirth, without some aesthetic moments. In this aspect, education is naturally an aesthetic exercise. Even if we are not conscious of this as educators, we are still involved in a naturally aesthetic project. What can happen is that, being unaware of the aesthetic aspect of education, we become very bad artists, but artists of a kind nevertheless, to the extent we help the students enter a process of permanent formation.

Another point that makes education once more an artistic event is precisely when education is also an act of knowing. For me, knowing is something beautiful! To the extent that knowing is unveiling an object, the unveiling gives the object 'life,' calls it into 'life,' even gives it a new 'life.' This is an artistic task because our knowing has a life-giving quality, creating and animating objects as we study them.

All the things you said participate also in this aesthetic nature of knowing and forming. Gestures, intonations of voices, walking in the classroom, poses: We can do all these things without being conscious all the time of their aesthetic aspects, their impact on student formation through teaching. What I think is that the aesthetic nature of education does not mean that we explicitly and consciously do it all the time. I think that from the moment we come into the classroom, at the moment you say, Hello! How are you?, to the students, you necessarily start an aesthetic relationship. This is so because you are an educator who has a strategic and directive role to play in liberating



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**T**wo world renowned educators, Paulo Freire and Ira Shor, speak passionately about the role of education in various cultural and political arenas.

They *demonstrate* the effectiveness of dialogue in action as a practical means by which teachers and students can become active participants in the learning process. In a lively exchange, the authors illuminate the problems of the educational system in relation to those of the larger society and argue for the pressing need to transform the classroom in both Third and First World contexts. Shor and Freire illustrate the possibilities of transformation by describing their own experiences in liberating the classroom from its traditional constraints. They demonstrate how vital the teacher's role is in empowering students to think critically about themselves and their relation, not only to the classroom, but to society. For those readers seeking a liberatory approach to education, these dialogues will be a revelation, and a unique summary. For all those convinced of the need for transformation, this book shows the way.

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