

## ***Education Matters: Beyond the Fetishization of the Banking Model***

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One of the most formidable challenges of the twenty-first century is the recommitment to the principle that education matters—an education that, according to Zygmunt Bauman, ceases to promote, “as binding rules of [its] own discourse, the inadmissibility of ethical problematic in any other form but that of a communally-sustained ideology and thus heterogeneous to sociological scientific, rational discourse”<sup>1</sup> — a discourse that is overly concerned with the positivistic overemphasis on the so-called scientific methods and absolute objectivity that informs the current reform in education. The current move to blindly promote “research-based” instructional methods and the general tendency to accept only “scientifically proven” methods epitomizes the rigidity of the educational reform discourse during the past two decades or so. The attempts of educators to adopt “hard science” modes of analysis as part of their research in social sciences and education have given rise to a form of “scientism” rather than science. By “scientism” I refer to a process whereby educators engage in the mechanization of the intellectual work which often leads to the fragmentation of knowledge—a process through which “[p]hrases like the ‘sanctity of human life’ or ‘moral duty’ sound as alien in a sociology seminar as they do in the smoke-free, sanitized rooms of a bureaucratic office.”<sup>2</sup> Hence, education that fragments bodies of knowledge is not only education that domesticates but it also preponderantly markets literacy for stupidification under the rubric of democracy and the refusal to admit that a claim of objectivity is, in fact, an ideological act—an act that attempts to relegate citizens as bystanders and spectators in the farcical elections increasingly controlled by corporations-turned-people whose freedom of expression is protected by the Supreme Court as they funnel obscene amounts of money to hijack the electoral process and buy politicians who will ultimately serve the interests of the moneyed minority and work against the interests of the ever-increasing dispossessed majority. The stupidification process is, in turn, legitimized through the vulgarization of democracy by the dominant ideology as witnessed by the remarks of the Secretary of State, John Kerry, who exalted

the values of the U.S. democracy in Germany by declaring that “[i]n America you have the right to be stupid.”

By blindly embracing a positivistic mode of inquiry that would outright deny the role of ideology in their work, educators, nonetheless, ideologically attempt to, according to Bauman, “avoid the temptation to shrug off these questions as of merely historical significance, one needs to search no further than Colin Gray’s analysis of the momentum behind the contemporary nuclear arms race:”<sup>3</sup>

Necessarily, the scientists and technologists on each side are “racing” to diminish their own ignorance (the enemy is not Soviet technology [now Iranian]; it is the physical unknowns that attract scientific attention ... Highly motivated, technologically competent and adequately funded teams of research scientists will inevitably produce an endless series of brand new (or refined) weapon ideas.<sup>4</sup>

The fetishization of scientific objectivity under the rubric of scientific rigor not only gives cover to educators who willfully choose to see that civilizing democracy education and human misery should be mutually exclusive, but it also points that “*the civilizing process is, among other things, a process of divesting the use of deployment of violence from moral calculus, and of emancipating the desiderata of rationality from the interference of ethical norms or moral inhibitions.*”<sup>5</sup> Thus, the inability to resolve the contradictions between the oppressor and the oppressed, to make linkages, and to become a “tramp of the obvious,” as Freire would say, is directly linked to another important feature of Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed: the “banking” model of education—a process through which:

education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the ‘banking’ concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filling, and storing the deposits.<sup>(6)</sup>

The “banking” model of education is largely supported by instrumental literacy for the poor, in the form of a competency-based skills-banking approach, and the highest form of instrumental literacy for the rich, acquired through higher education in the form of professional specialization. However, despite their apparent differences, the two approaches share one common feature: they both prevent the development of critical thinking that enables one to “read the world” critically and to understand the reasons and linkages behind the facts and behind what may appear seemingly obvious but remain ill understood. Literacy for the poor through the “banking” concept of education is, by and large, characterized by mindless, meaningless drills and exercises given “in preparation for multiple choice exams and writing gobbledygook in imitation of the psycho-babble that surrounds them.”<sup>7</sup> This “banking” and instrumental approach to education sets the stage for the anesthetization of the mind, as poet John Ashbery eloquently captures in “What is Poetry”:

In school  
All the thoughts got combed out:  
What was left was like a field.”<sup>8</sup>

The educational “comb,” for those teachers who have blindly accepted the “banking” model of education is embodied in practice sheets and workbooks, mindless computer drills and practices that mark and control the pace of routinization in the drill-and-practice assembly line where the “narration (with the teacher as narrator) leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them into ‘containers,’ into ‘receptacles’ to be filled by the teacher. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are”<sup>9</sup> as they are later measured by high-stakes tests that reflect an often militaristic controlled transaction of the teacher’s narration and students’ memorization of the mechanically “narrated content.” Hence, the dominant forces of this mechanistic “banking” education necessarily reduce the priorities of education to the pragmatic requirements of capital and necessarily also create educational structures that anesthetize students’ critical abilities, in order to “domesticate social order for its self-preservation.”<sup>10</sup>

On the other end of the spectrum, the domestication of the social order is achieved by an equally mechanistic approach to education for the rich via the hyperspecialization that, on the one hand, deposits high level skills and, on the other hand, discourages the linkages of different bodies of knowledge in the name of “pure” and specialized science that produces a specialist subject who, according to the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, “knows very well his own tiny corner of the universe [but] is radically ignorant of all the rest.”<sup>11</sup> In fact, this inability to make linkages between different bodies of knowledge often produces a level of arrogance as exemplified by a math professor in a major university when she stated that she has the right of not knowing. This statement was made in reference to the news coverage of the Iraq war and, perhaps because she was feeling uncomfortable with her colleagues’ open opposition to the war, she abruptly proclaimed: “I have a right not to know the news.” While she has the *right* to choose not to know, as an academic and citizen in a democratic society, she has the *responsibility* of knowing what her leaders are doing in regards to policies full of barbarism, policies that enable horrors like the drone-guided bombing of targets that invariably include the carnage of innocent civilians, women, and children which policy makers consider an “unfortunate part of war” or simply “collateral damage.”

The social organization of knowledge via rigidly defined disciplinary boundaries further contributes to the formation of the specialist class, that is, engineers, doctors, professors, and so on. This sort of specialist is “only acquainted with one science, and even of that one only knows the small corner in which he is an active investigator. He even proclaims it as a virtue that he takes no cognizance of what lies outside the narrow territory specially cultivated by himself, and gives the name ‘dilettantism’ to any curiosity for the general scheme of knowledge.”<sup>12</sup>

This “dilettantism” is discouraged through the mythical need to discover absolute objective truth and, in the process, it domesticates a form of specialized knowledge that not only produces a rupture with philosophies of social and cultural relations, but also hides behind an ideology that creates and sustains false dichotomies rigidly delineated by disciplinary boundaries. This ideology also informs the view that “hard science,” “objectivity,” and “scientific rigor” must be disarticulated from the messy data of “soft

science” and from the social and political practices that generate these categories in the first place. In addition, this “banking” model of education produces a form of fragmentation of knowledge that invariably diminishes the students’ critical awareness and “critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them”<sup>13</sup> thus renouncing their ontological vocation as agents of history who not only transform their world but also reflect on that transformation. According to Freire, “[t]he capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students’ creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interest of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor see it transformed.”<sup>14</sup>

The “banking” model of education is often used also as a safe haven for most conservative and many liberal educators who hide their materialist and consumerist conception of education in what Freire calls a “‘digestive’ concept of knowledge, so common in current educational practice”<sup>15</sup> — a practice that considers students to be “undernourished” and, as a result, the teacher must feel compelled to give students an unrealistic list of readings that are never really covered or discussed in class under the pretext that the students’ “consciousness is ‘spatialized,’ and must be ‘filled’ in order to know.”<sup>16</sup> This ‘nutritionist’ approach to education follows the “same conception [that] led Sartre, [when] criticizing the notion that ‘to know is to eat,’ to exclaim: ‘O philosophie alimentaire!’”<sup>17</sup> — a process where “words are transformed into mere ‘deposit of vocabulary’ — [the teacher’s vocabulary] — the bread of the spirit which the [students] are to ‘eat’ and ‘digest’”<sup>18</sup> the teacher’s knowledge (i.e. definition lists without the apprehension of the object of knowledge, fetishization of methods, particularly now as it applies to new technologies, formulaic texts masquerading as theory that belittles practice, and glossaries lists), which students are later asked to “vomit” back in the mandated exams and tests designed, on the one hand, to confirm the teacher’s superior knowledge-bank-account and, on the other, to feed his or her narcissistic needs inherent in most humanitarian and not humanist education. In the end, the “nutritionist banking” approach to education, even when offered under the guise of progressive education, has

as its major goal the fattening of the students' brains through the "deposits" of the teacher's knowledge and thus, under this pedagogical model, students absorb understandings "not born of [their own]...creative efforts...[as] learners."<sup>48</sup> This kind of education invariably results in the paralysis of the learner's epistemological curiosity and creativity due to the overload of the imposed teacher's knowledge "which in fact [is]...almost completely alienating and alienated, having so little, if anything, to do with the student's socio-cultural reality."<sup>19</sup>

Rather than feeding students fragmented and disconnected facts that invariably lead to their alienation and the creation of verbal robots, educators should always embrace Freire's liberating and emancipatory model of education as proposed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*—a book that is not only a classic but continues to be relevant in the twenty-first century as it always dares us to imagine, as Freire would usually insist, a less discriminatory, more just, less dehumanizing and more humane world. I had the great good fortune of working with Freire for fifteen uninterrupted years, first translating many of his books into English and, later, collaborating with him on other book projects. I have read and re-read the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* so many times and, with each re-reading, I gain new insights in my understanding of our ever-changing world—a world that is marked by manufactured wars, expanding human misery, and obscene greed.

Without falling into false modesty, I have always felt I understood Freire's leading ideas, the subtleties and the nuances, that characterized the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. But I did not really fully capture the layered complexity of Freire's leading ideas until a few years ago when his widow, Nita Freire, and I visited Morro de Saúde, an impoverished community in the outskirts of Recife.

Freire's family had moved there after the great economic crash of the thirties that unceremoniously yanked the middle-class rug from under Freire's family. No longer able to afford housing in Recife as the economic situation worsened, Freire's family moved to a modest house in Morro da Saúde where Freire, his siblings, his parents, and other close family members took refuge. Witnessing the dire economic difficulty faced by Freire, I immediately began to see new dimensions and the *raison d'être* of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and his proposals for a more democratic and inclusive education that

matters. As I entered the small, dark, four rooms, without an indoor bathroom and with non-existent ceilings, I began to put into perspective the traumas that must have overwhelmed Freire as he came face to face with a new form of schooling called life—life created and sustained by a cruel political and economic system that uncaringly relegated millions and millions of his fellow Brazilians to half citizenry and subhumanity. I also took a short walk along a shrinking river where Freire and his friends use to take baths alongside neighborhood women who religiously washed clothes on a daily basis. The sun was the only towel available to Freire to dry his skin.

Freire learned quickly that a psychological class wall enveloped his new reality as he began to get acquainted with his new friends and neighbors—their humanity enabled him to empathized with his Aunt Natércia’s preoccupation with keeping their poverty “hidden” and to understand “why the family would not let go of Lourdes’s German piano or [his] father neckties”<sup>20</sup> even when his father was doing manual chores in the workshop. Paulo soon learned that his family’s clinging to middle-class markers and mores did little to alleviate their pain—“a pain almost always treated with disrespectful language . . . [as his mother] would leave the shop to look for another one, where new offenses were almost always added to these already suffered”<sup>21</sup> in that she was always denied groceries on credit since the family was never able to pay. In an effort to protect his mother from such daily blows to her dignity, Freire would often wander into the backyards of neighbors to steal chickens that would frequently be that day’s only family meal since all of the town’s merchants had by then refused to grant his family credit. To protect his family’s middle-class sensitivities, Paulo would euphemize his backyard thefts as “incursions into a neighbor’s yard.” Freire’s mother was a Christian Catholic who no doubt viewed such “incursions” as violations of her moral principles, but she must have realized that “her alternatives were either to reproach [Paulo] severely and make [him] return the still warm chicken to [their] neighbors or to prepare the fowl as a special dinner. Her common sense won. Still silent, she took the chicken, walked across the patio, entered the kitchen, and lost herself in doing a job she had not done in a long time.”<sup>23</sup> Freire’s mother knew that stealing a neighbor’s chicken was morally wrong and constituted a crime, but she also knew that there was an a priori crime committed by

society. As Freire recounted, “the problem of hunger [created by social inequality] . . . was a real and concrete hunger that had no specific date of departure . . . On the contrary, our hunger was the type that arrives unannounced and unauthorized, making itself at home without end in sight. A hunger that, if it was not softened as ours was, would take over our bodies, molding them into angular shapes. Legs, arms, and fingers become skinny. Eye sockets become deeper, making the eyes almost disappear. Many of our classmates experienced this hunger and today it continues to afflict millions of Brazilians who die of its violence every year.”<sup>24</sup>

It is against this form of violence that Freire angrily and compassionately wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The reading and rereading of Freire’s insights in both his denunciation of dehumanizing conditions and his announcement that change is difficult but it is possible, unleashed in me a complexity of emotions that ranged from the reconfirmation of a tremendous loss—a loss infused with “anguish, doubt, expectation, and sadness,”<sup>25</sup> as his widow Nita Freire so poignantly wrote in the introduction of Paulo’s *Pedagogy of Indignation*. At the same time, she also announced that through Paulo’s writings “we can celebrate in joy [Freire’s] return”<sup>26</sup> as he, over and over again, energizes and challenges us to imagine a world that is less cruel, more just, and more democratic. However, as Freire so energetically insisted in his writings, the announcement of a more just and humane world must always be preceded by the denunciation of the dominant forces that generate, inform, and shape discrimination, human misery, and dehumanization.

Against a world backdrop of increasing human suffering, where a preemptive war is waged based on a web of lies that has thus far killed approximately 600,000 innocent Iraqis, the work of Freire, forty or so years later, challenges us to courageously denounce any and all forms of authoritarianism—such as that clear abuse of raw power witnessed in the atrocity of the Iraq war. In defiance of “a spectacular display of public morality [when] ten million people on five continents marched against the war on Iraq,”<sup>27</sup> Former President Bush dismissed the worldwide protests by cynically declaring he does not make policies based “on focus groups.” The expressed outrage of 10 million people against a cruel and illegal war did not prevent Bush and his junta from launching their crusade on



Iraq in the name of freedom, democracy, and civilization—a civilization that sanctions human exploitation, murder, rape, humiliation, dehumanization, and animalization of Iraqis—this last as captured on camera when a young American soldier paraded a naked Iraq man on a leash at Abu Ghraib prison. The wanton killing of civilians in Iraq did not begin with the military invasion and Bush’s attempt to occupy and recolonize this oil-rich country. The killings began summarily with the wielding of another weapon, that of corporate greed and globalization, which is part and parcel of “the project of New Racism ... [that leads invariably to] New Genocide.”<sup>8</sup> According to Arundhati Roy, “New Genocide means creating conditions that lead to mass death without actually going out and killing people. Dennis Halliday, who was the UN humanitarian coordinator in Iraq between 1997 and 1998 (after which he resigned in disgust), used the term genocide to describe the sanctions in Iraq. In Iraq the sanctions outdid Saddam Hussein’s best efforts by claiming more than half a million children’s lives.”<sup>29</sup>

Unlike reactionary and many liberal intellectuals, who often view anger as a form of pathology to be contained through psychologized behavior modification, Paulo Freire sees anger as the appropriate response to obscene violation of human rights and social injustices. He sees it as a tool that enables all those who yearn for social justice to recapture human dignity while avoiding falling into cynicism, even when confronted with inescapable injustice and cruelty as is now unleashed under the banner of the “new world order” and guided by neoliberal policies and determined globalization. We see, for example, in India, that globalization guaranteed “Enron profits that amounted to 60 percent of India’s entire rural development budget. A single American company was guaranteed a profit equivalent to funds for infrastructural development for about 500 million people!”<sup>30</sup> Paulo Freire passionately insists on his right to be angry: a “just ire [that] is founded in my revulsion before the negation of the right to ‘be more,’ which is etched in the nature of human beings.”<sup>31</sup> Freire further emphasizes: “I have the right to be angry and to express that anger, to hold it as my motivation to fight, just as I have the right to love and to express my love for the world, to hold it as my motivation to fight, because, while a historical being, I live history as a time of possibility, not of predermination.”<sup>32</sup> While Freire views anger as the appropriate response to the violence

and violation of our humanity—a violence that needs to be denounced before our rehumanization can be announced—many liberal pseudo-Freireans prefer to denounce through euphemisms that, on the one hand, fail to address reality and, on the other, allow them to save face even as they are complicit with the very structures of oppression they claim to denounce. They use a language of politeness with no purpose other than to white wash the dehumanization of the oppressed. This was evident in Peter Lucas’s review of Paulo’s last book, *Pedagogy of Indignation*, where he criticized me for naming people who vulgarize and pimp Freire’s work: “Macedo, a professor of Education at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, vents his own frustration with the exclusion of Freire at elite schools such as Harvard. On one hand, I find Macedo’s shaming of certain professors by name a bit distasteful, but this is not the first time Macedo has named people for their inconsistent and partial understanding of Freire’s project. On the other hand, I share Macedo’s fury as I look around at my closest colleagues in the academy, and I am shocked at the absence of ethics behind the façade of progressive education.”<sup>33</sup>

Instead of falling prey to a language that does not name reality for what it is and is a form of cynicism that paralyzes, Freire reiterates the importance of anger as part of a constitutive matrix, along with hope, that animates “rebelliousness [which] the indispensable starting point; it is the eruption of just ire, but it is not enough. Rebellion, while denunciation must be expanded into a more radical and critical position, a revolutionary one, one that fundamentally announces [a more humanized world]. Changing the world implies a dialectic dynamic between denunciation of the dehumanizing situation and the announcing of its being overcome, indeed, of our dream.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, before announcing that “another world is possible,” we must first, for example, denounce the pillars of neoliberalism and globalization whose whole purpose is, according to Arundhati Roy:

to institutionalize inequity. Why else would it be that the US taxes a garment made by a Bangladeshi manufacturer twenty times more than a garment made in Britain? Why else would it be that countries that grow cocoa beans, like Ivory Coast and Ghana, are taxed out of the market if they try to turn them into

chocolate? Why else would it be that countries that grow 90 percent of world's cocoa beans produce only 5 percent of the world's chocolate? Why else would it be that rich countries that spend over a billion dollars a day on subsidies to farmers demand that poor countries like India withdraw all agricultural subsidies, including subsidized electricity? Why else would it be that after having been plundered by colonizing regimes for more than half a century, former colonies are steeped in debt to those same regimes and repay them some \$382 billion a year?<sup>35</sup>

Freire's keen understanding that hope "is the very matrix for any dialectic between hope itself, anger or indignation, and love,"<sup>36</sup> not only makes his political project timelier in view of the dehumanizing policies the world is now facing through neoliberalism and hot-button cowboy militarism, but hope also makes it indispensable for all those who claim to embrace Freire's leading ideas and view themselves as having an "ontological vocation for humanity" as they position themselves as agents of change. Freire's work is 'drenched,' as he might say, in his humanistic love and his political anger or indignation."<sup>37</sup> Given his yearning for social justice and democratic ideals, Paulo himself was well aware that his pedagogical proposals would be outright rejected by reactionary educators, for, according to him, "only the 'innocent' could possibly think that the power elite would encourage a type of education that denounces them even more clearly than do all the contradictions of their power structures."<sup>38</sup> In a dialogue we had concerning the challenges faced by progressive educators in the present world conjuncture, he lovingly cautioned me: "Donaldo, don't be naïve, the ruling class will never send us to Copa Cabana for a vacation."

Freire would also caution us to not be at all surprised that schools of education, as well as other disciplinary departments at universities, with a few exceptions, would demonstrate an aversion toward critical theory and the development of independent critical thought. He would not be surprised that in a lecture at Harvard, given by Ramon Flecha from the University of Barcelona, Spain, that analyzed his theories, a Harvard Graduate School of Education doctoral student approached me and asked the following:

“I don’t want to sound naïve, but who is this Paulo Freire that professor Flecha is citing a lot?” Then again, how can one expect this doctoral student in education to know the work of the most significant educator in the world during the last half of the century when the Harvard Graduate School of Education offers a graduate course entitled Literacy Politics and Policy without requiring students to read, critique, and analyze the work of Freire?

It is this form of academic selection of bodies of knowledge that borders on censorship of critical educators that is partly to blame for the lack of awareness of Paulo Freire’s significant contributions to the field of education worldwide. Even many liberals who have seemingly embraced his ideas and educational practices, often reduce his theoretical work to a mechanical methodology. According to Stanley Aronowitz:

In fact, in concert with many liberal and radical educators, some teachers have interpreted liberatory humanistic values in a nonrepressive way. The school seems to be a massive values clarification exercise . . . Many read Freire’s dialogic pedagogy as a tool for student motivation and cannot recognize that for him dialogue is a content whose goal is social as much as it is individual change. In Freire’s educational philosophy, the first principle is that the conventional distinction between teachers as experts and learners as an empty biophysiological shell is questioned. Education takes place when there are two learners who occupy somewhat different spaces in an ongoing dialogue. But both participants bring knowledge to the relationship and one of the objects of the pedagogic process is to explore what each knows and what they can teach other. A second is to foster reflection on the self as an actor in the world as a consequence of knowing.”<sup>39</sup>

The vulgarization of Freire’s leading ideas was denounced by Ann Berthoff who pointed out that her colleagues at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, “went on and on about the pedagogy of the oppressed without a clue about the role of dialogue, with no idea of the heuristic uses of syntax, to say nothing of the heuristic value of composing in paragraphs. Theory and practice remained alien to one another because the theory had not

been understood.”<sup>40</sup> Although Ann Berthoff was correct in pointing out that many of those who claim to be Freirean often do not understand his theory, she is soon betrayed by her own ideological blinders when she declares that Freire’s “writing is often graceless, suffering the effects of seeing things in both Christian and Marxist perspectives.”<sup>41</sup> What she failed to realize is that one cannot understand Freire’s theories without taking a rigorous detour through a Marxist analysis, and her offhand dismissal of Marx is nothing more than a vain attempt to remove the sociohistorical context that grounds the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Perhaps, for Ann Berthoff, a more “heuristic use of syntax” is to transform the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* into the *Pedagogy of the Disenfranchised*—a euphemism that dislodges the agent of the action while leaving in doubt who bears the responsibility for the oppressive actions. This leaves the ground wide open for blaming the victims of disenfranchisement for their disenfranchisement. While the *Pedagogy of the Disenfranchised* may be more palatable to many liberal educators, it fails to unveil the dialect relationship between the oppressors and the oppressed in that if you have oppressed you must also have oppressors. The first title utilizes a discourse that names the oppressor whereas the second fails to do so. What would the counterpart be of *disenfranchised*? In addition to the “heuristic use of syntax,” we must also, according to Freire, embrace “methodological rigor, a reading of the world founded in the possibility men and women have created along their long history to comprehend the concrete and to communicate what is apprehended undeniably constitutes a factor in the improvement of language. The exercises of apprehending, of finding the reason or reasons for what is apprehended, of denouncing apprehended reality and announcing its overcoming, all are part of the process of reading the world.”<sup>42</sup>

The misunderstanding of Paulo Freire’s leading theoretical ideas goes beyond “seeing things in both Christian and Marxist perspectives.” The misunderstanding of Paulo Freire’s theories, even by those who “claim to be Freirean” is not, however, innocent. It allows many liberal educators to appropriate selective aspects of Freire’s theory and practice as a badge of progressiveness while conveniently dismissing or ignoring the “Marxist perspectives” that would question their complicity with the very structures that created the human misery in the first place. It also allows them to hide

their class privilege while slumming as defenders of the disenfranchised. In Freire's own words, "theoretical praxis is only authentic when it maintains the dialectic movement between itself and that praxis which is carried out in a particular context. These two forms of praxis are two inseparable moments of the process by which we reach critical understanding. In other words, reflection is only real when it sends us back, as Sartre insists, to the given situation in which we act."<sup>43</sup>

The misunderstanding of Freire's leading theoretical ideas is also implicated in a facile dismissal of his legacy and his influence in shaping a vibrant field of critical pedagogy that has taken root throughout the United States and the world in the last two decades or so. It is precisely this vibrancy and energy that was conveniently ignored by Ann Berthoff when she states that "[t]o my knowledge, one place where Freire has not been misunderstood is in the field of ESL. I am thinking of the work of Elsa Auerbach and Nina Wallerstein. Patricia Laurence, Ann Raimés, and Vivian Zamel know very well what it means to say 'Begin with where they are'—as meaning makers. Also in the field of composition pedagogy: Beth Daniel understands the importance of the spiritual dimension of Freire's philosophy of education . . . The fact that all these teachers are women should give pause to anyone who has taken seriously the recent condemnation of Paulo Freire by obtuse feminists."<sup>44</sup> By dismissing "obtuse feminists'" critique of Freire, which he addressed with humility in "A Dialogue: Culture, Language, and Race," published by *Harvard Educational Review*,<sup>45</sup> Ann Berthoff forecloses the opportunity to engage critical feminists like bell hooks who, while critiquing Freire, acknowledges the depth of Freire's contributions in shaping her theories regarding gender and race and how these factors always cut across class. By ignoring the enormous contributions of scholars such as Henry Giroux, Stanley Aronowitz, Michele Fine, Antonia Darder, Linda Brodkey, Joe Kincheloe, Shiley Steinberg, and Peter McLaren, among others, all of whom have, in various ways, been influenced by Freire and write about his theories, such ignoring creates spaces where the misunderstanding of Freire is guaranteed and vulgarly reproduced. In other words, after reading Ann Berthoff, one is left with the false idea that Freire's leading ideas are taken up seriously only in English as Second Language (ESL) and composition fields—fields that, by and large, suffer from a lack of criticism and the

democratic radicalism espoused by Freire. Although Freire inspires some individuals in the field of ESL, they are often reduced to SIGS (Special Interest Groups) that operate largely in the margins. To a large extent, the presence of Freire's theories has done little to alter the highly racist composition of the field of English as a Second Language that continues to exhibit racism in the markedly white ESL teacher population that serves a markedly nonwhite student population. If one attends the annual conference of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), one will find oneself in a sea of whiteness sprinkled with islets of nonwhite teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL), given the international nature of the conference. However, if one moves to conferences in the United States sponsored by state ESL organizations, the islets are almost totally submerged by the all-white composition of the ESL field. Contrary to Ann Berthoff's assertion, the field of ESL is largely atheoretical and acritical and most ESL teacher-training programs emphasize the technical acquisition of English, and most ESL teachers, even those with good intentions, fall prey to a missionary zeal to save their students from their "non-English-speaker" status. They seldom realize their role in the promotion and expansion of English imperialism and racist policies that is brilliantly documented by Bessie Dendrinos in her work titled "Linguoracism."<sup>46</sup> I am not aware of any substantive anti-racist project designed to bring to the fore the present English hegemony reproduced by ESL, as well as by most English teachers, that would attempt to alter the field by infusing ethnic and racial diversity and celebration of languages other than English. Neither am I aware of a swell of Freirean proposals to transform an otherwise mostly formalistic and technicist field of English composition where the "study of textual representation and signification has increasingly become a means to erase 'the political economy of knowledge' and to 'reinstall the subjects in the discourse of dominant knowledges.'"<sup>47</sup> Even progressive composition experts such as David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky, who want to elevate students to a position of textual critic, end up promoting a higher level of literacy as a form of textual specialization that functions to domesticate the consciousness via a constant disarticulation between a narrow reductionistic reading of the text and the "material realm" that generated the text to begin with. By adopting a truly Freirean approach to writing, writing teachers would

have to cease viewing subjectivity and knowledge as mere “idealized textual practices (signification, representation, interpretation)”<sup>48</sup> divorced from the material contexts that forms, informs, and sustains these textual practices in the first place. However, it is precisely this form of anchoring “those rhetorical practices that privilege the critical experience of textuality”<sup>49</sup> (the mechanics of signification) in the “material and historical situation of experience”<sup>50</sup> that even liberal composition experts like Ann Berthoff, David Bartholomae, and Anthony Petrosky often avoid—since it calls for a Marxist analysis. One should not be overly surprised that liberal composition theorists in the United States such as Bethoff, Bartholomae, and Petrosky would “waver somewhat in their commitment to a Marxist critique [by appearing] to avoid all but the most superficial definition of key terms of Marxist analysis.”<sup>51</sup> The unmentionable “M” word has such ideological power that it structures an academic reality that brooks no debate. That is to say, to be labeled a Marxist analyst provokes generally a negative effect that attempts to disqualify all those who use a Marxist critique framework as a form of counterdiscourse to the present cultural and English hegemony.

Part of the problem with some of these pseudo-critical educators who selectively appropriate Freire as a badge of their progressiveness is that, in the name of liberation pedagogy, they reduce Freire’s leading ideas to a method. This takes place even with a facile adoption of the dialogic approach that is often turned into a mechanistic turn taking of experience sharing. According to Stanley Aronowitz, the North American fetish for method has allowed Freire’s philosophical ideas to be “assimilated into the prevailing obsession of North American education, following a tendency in all human and social sciences, with methods—of verifying knowledge and, in schools, of teaching, that is, transmitting knowledge to otherwise unprepared students.”<sup>52</sup> I have even witnessed contexts where teachers claiming to be Freirean would use a flow chart specifying numbers to groups of students and arrows connecting neatly arranged boxes identifying issues to be discussed in the dialogue.

This fetish for method works insidiously against educators’ adherence to Freire’s own pronouncements against any form of pedagogical rigidity. Freire’s leading ideas concerning the act of knowing transcend the methods for which he is known. In fact,



according to Linda Bimbi, “The originality of Freire’s work does not reside in the efficacy of his literacy methods, but, above all, in the originality of its content designed to develop our consciousness”<sup>53</sup> as part of a humanizing pedagogy. Freire wrote: “A humanizing education is the path through which men and women can become conscious about their presence in the world. The way they act and think when they develop all of their capacities, taking into consideration their needs, but also the needs and aspirations of others.”<sup>54</sup>

A humanizing pedagogy is not a process through which privileged teachers, in their simplistic attempt to cut the chains of oppressive educational practices, blindly advocate the dialogical model that would allow oppressed students to share their experiences and state their grievances without creating educational structures that would enable these same students to equip themselves with the necessary critical tools to unveil the root cause of oppression, including the teachers’ complicity with the very structures from which they reap benefits and privileges. Without the development of their critical capacities, the dialogical model is often turned into a new form of methodological rigidity laced with benevolent oppression—all done under the guise of democracy, with the sole excuse that it is for the students’ own good. This is evident when white, privileged teachers adopt minority students to mentor and then parade them around at conferences to share their experiences as a process for giving the students a voice. In fact, these white teachers often speak with great pride of their benevolence—a form of paternalism that turns the minority students into trophy minorities—a badge of the teachers’ anti-racist posture so long as the relationship remains asymmetrical and issues concerning the teachers’ class and privilege are always kept out of the dialogue. It is not unusual for these same white teachers to have difficulty in working with minority students who have in fact empowered themselves, or with minority teachers who consider themselves equals. In such cases, it is common to hear the white teachers complain of the minority students’ ungratefulness or the uppity nature of the minority teachers. Not only do these white teachers feel hurt and betrayed by what they perceive as “ungratefulness,” they often work aggressively to undermine the now-empowered minority since they cannot envision themselves outside the role that their privilege has allowed them as

representatives or spokespersons for the community and minority students. This overly paternalistic posture is well understood by bell hooks, as evidenced by her criticism of white feminists when she wrote: “You don’t need to speak since I can do it so much better than you can.”<sup>35</sup>

The position of many white liberals in the United States, including those who claim to be Freirean, is similar to that of the leftist colonialists who, in not wanting to destroy their cultural privileges, found themselves in an ever-present contradiction. This contradiction surfaces often when white liberals feel threatened by the legitimacy of a subordinate group’s struggle—a struggle that not only may not include them but also may demand that their liberal treatment of oppression as an abstract idea must be translated into concrete political action. In other words, a struggle that points out to those white liberals who claim to be anti-racist that an anti-racist political project is not a process through which they can “become enamored and perhaps interested in the [groups] for a time,”<sup>56</sup> and yet always shield themselves from the reality that created the oppressive conditions they want ameliorated in the first place. That is, many white liberals need to understand that they cannot simply go to the oppressed community to slum as do-gooders while preventing community members from having access to the cultural capital from which these white liberals have benefited greatly. A do-gooder posture always smacks of the false generosity of paternalism, which Freire aggressively opposed: “The pedagogy of the oppressed animated by authentic humanism (and not humanitarianism) generously presents itself as a pedagogy of man [and woman]. Pedagogy that begins with the egotistical interests of the oppressors (an egoism cloaked in the false generosity of paternalism) and makes of the oppressed the objects of its humanitarianism, itself maintains and embodies oppression. It is an instrument of dehumanization.”<sup>57</sup> To the degree that a false generosity constitutes oppression and dehumanization, an authentic pedagogy of the oppressed, not a pedagogy of the disenfranchised, needs to denounce the paternalistic pedagogical attitude embraced by many white liberals—an attitude that not only represents a liberal, middle-class narcissism that gives rise to pseudo-critical educators who are part of and responsible for the same social order they claim to renounce. It also positions these liberal educators as colonizers whose major *raison d’être*

is to appropriate all that the colonized have to offer, including their language, culture, and dignity.

Against a backdrop of increasing human misery around the world coupled with the accommodation stance of even liberal educators, it is important that educators, particularly those who consider themselves agents of change, begin to feel a sense of indignation and just ire given the exponential human sufferings unleashed by so-called civilization, including our own—a civilization marked more by greed and cruelty designed to exploit, dehumanize, and condemn more than 50 percent of the world population to subhumanity—a subhumanity that should be denounced by courageously naming the perpetrators while embracing a humanizing pedagogy.

However, a humanizing pedagogy requires courage, humanity and humility—a humility that guides and shapes the act of reading the word while giving the necessary coherence to the reading of the world as Freire would insist. And this humility was exemplified by a Mexican Indian teacher, Sara Zuguide, who risked her life in Oaxaca attempting to protect the rights of Mexican Indian children. In a speech in Las Jornadas Conference at Loyola University in Los Angeles, Sara shared that she did not want to be a teacher. She agreed to teach for one year because of her mother's insistence that teaching was the best way to save their endangered culture and language and safeguard their battered human dignity.

Sara recounted that from the first time she walked into a classroom filled with thirty Mexican Indian children, all she could feel was the sadness and intensity of sixty young eyes upon her, of children whose hopes hinged on her ability to teach. At that moment, she knew she couldn't let these children join the ranks of the wretched of the earth. At that moment, she also knew she had to be a teacher who would embrace a humanizing pedagogy through which the helplessness and the obscene human misery experienced by these children could be turned into hope—a path through which their human dignity would be recaptured and celebrated. She ended stoically by stating: "I would gladly give my life to create the necessary structures so that Indian children who have been sentenced to a life of subhumanity would again have the opportunity to know what it means to be human."

The movement from subhumanity to humanity must invariably adhere to Freire's political project, which also requires that we recognize our own humanity in others. The recognition of our humanity in others would also require us, according to my late friend and collaborator, Paulo Freire, to imagine that while change in the current dehumanization is difficult, it is possible. We should always remain transformative agents of history, understanding that "in truth, the dominated popular classes generate knowledge and culture, and they experience different levels of exploitation and the consciousness of the exploitative order. This knowledge becomes, in the final analysis, an expression of resistance"<sup>58</sup>—a resistance that should remind all educators that the oppressed are always actively exercising their human agency. Education that matters must always move beyond the technician's "moral sleeping pills"<sup>59</sup> and harness the human potential in its entirety regardless of a person's class, ethnicity, culture, gender, and sex orientation. And harnessing a person's full human potential must be inextricably linked to a humane pedagogy that always acknowledges that behind the scientific task of alpha movements in educational endeavors, there is always a human face who dreams, desires, and aspires to be fully human.

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## ENDNOTES

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Dr. Donaldo Macedo has been a central figure and an early animator along with Henry Giroux and Stanley Aronowitz, among others in the development what is now known as critical pedagogy. His work with Paulo Freire broke new theoretical ground in its attempt to develop a critical understanding of the ways in which language, power, and culture contribute to the positioning and formation of human experience and learning. He is known as Freire's chief translator and interpreter in English. Macedo's published dialogues with Paulo Freire are considered classic work for their elucidation not only of Freire's own theories of literacy but also for the way in which they have added a more critical and

theoretically advanced dimension to the study of literacy and critical pedagogy. His coauthored book with Paulo Freire, *Literacy: Reading the World and the Word*, is central to critical literacy in that it redefines the very nature and terrain of literacy and critical pedagogy. In addition to his seminal work with Freire, Macedo has played a central role in constructing a literacy of power for use in critical pedagogy. He has published extensively in the areas of linguistics, critical literacy, and bilingual and multicultural education. His publications include: *Literacies of Power: What Americans Are Not Allowed to Know* (1994), *Dancing With Bigotry* (with Lilia Bartolomé, 1999), *Critical Education in the New Information Age* (with Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux and Paul Willis, 1999), and *Chomsky on Miseducation* (with Noam Chomsky, 2000), *Howard Zinn on democratic Education* (with Howard Zinn, 2005), and *Imposed Democracy: Dialogues with Noam Chomsky and Paulo Freire* (2012).