

PEDAGOGY OF FREEDOM

ETHICS, DEMOCRACY, AND
CIVIC COURAGE



PAULO FREIRE

"FREIRE'S MOST IMPORTANT BOOK SINCE *PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED*." —STANLEY ARONOWITZ

once this shadow is expelled, it needs to be substituted in the oppressed by a sense of autonomy and responsibility.

It is worth noting, however, that in spite of the political and ethical relevance of the effort of conscientization that I have just spoken of, it is insufficient in itself. It is important to go on from there to the teaching of writing and reading the word. We cannot, in a democratic context, transform a literacy circle into either a campaign for political revolution or a space totally given over to an analysis of what is going on in our world. The essential task of those like Danilson, with whom I identify myself, is to try out, with conviction and passion, the dialectical relation between a reading of the world and a reading of the word.

If we reflect on the fact that our human condition is one of essential unfinishedness, that, as a consequence, we are incomplete in our being and in our knowing, then it becomes obvious that we are "programmed" to learn, destined by our very incompleteness to seek completeness, to have a "tomorrow" that adds to our "today." In other words, wherever there are men and women, there is always and inevitably something to be done, to be completed, to be taught, and to be learned.

In my opinion, none of this makes any sense if attempted outside the socio-historical context in which men and women find themselves and within which they discover their vocation to find "completeness," to become "more."

Teaching Requires Curiosity

To me, the epitome of negation in the context of education is the stifling or inhibition of curiosity in the learner and, consequently, in the teacher too. In other words, the educator who is dominated by authoritarian or paternalistic attitudes that suffocate the curiosity of the learner finishes by suffocating his or her own curiosity. There is

not in any way diminish the need for explanation and exposition whereby the teacher sets forth his/her understanding and knowledge of the object. What is really essential in this process is that both the teacher and the students know that open, curious questioning, whether in speaking or listening, is what grounds them mutually—not a simple passive pretense at dialogue. The important thing is for both teacher and students to assume their epistemological curiosity.

In this sense, the good teacher is the one who manages to draw the student into the intimacy of his or her thought process while speaking. The class then becomes a challenge and not simply a nest where people gather. In the environment of challenge, the students become tired but they do not fall asleep. They get tired because they accompany the comings and goings of the teacher's thought and open their eyes in wonder at his or her pauses, doubts, uncertainties.

Even before attempting to discuss methods and tactics for the purpose of creating dynamic classes like these, the teacher must be clear and content with the notion that the cornerstone of the whole process is human curiosity. Curiosity is what makes me question, know, act, ask again, recognize.

It would be an excellent weekend task to propose to a group of students that each one single out the most striking curiosity he or she has experienced, connected with TV news propaganda, a videogame, a gesture of someone they know—any circumstance at all. It does not matter. What type of response did they make to their curiosity? Was it easily forgotten, or did it lead to other curiosities? Did this process involve a consultation of sources, the using of dictionaries, computers, books, or other people? Did this curiosity constitute a challenge, a provocation for some provisional knowledge, or did it not? What did one person feel when she/he discovered someone else working on the same curiosity? Finally, the students should consider the question of whether or not a person can be curious if prepared to think about his/her own curiosity.

The experience could be refined and deepened to the point, for example, where a seminar could be organized on a twice-weekly basis so as to debate the various types of curiosity and their implications and consequences.

The exercise of curiosity makes it more critically curious, more methodically rigorous in regard to its object. The more spontaneous curiosity intensifies and becomes rigorous, the more epistemological it becomes.

I've never been an ingenuous lover of technology; I do not deify it nor demonize it. For that reason I've always felt at ease in dealing with it. I've no doubt about the enormous potential for technology to motivate and challenge children and adolescents of the less-favored social classes. For that reason alone, as secretary of education for the city of Sao Paulo, I introduced the computer to the city's schools. In fact, my grandchildren are able to tell me about their curiosity and how it has been inspired by the computer, which for them is a normal part of living.

The exercise of curiosity convokes the imagination, the emotions, and the capacity to conjecture and to compare in tracing a profile of the object to be known as well as its *raison d'être*. A sound, for example, may provoke my curiosity. It focuses on the space where I think it is happening. I sharpen my ear. I compare it to other sounds that I already know. I investigate the space a little closer. I develop several hypotheses about the possible origin of the sound. Then, by process of elimination, I arrive at a satisfactory explanation.

Having satisfied one curiosity, a further search continues. There could be no such thing as human existence without the openness of our being to the world, without the transitiveness of our consciousness.

The more skill and methodological rigor I acquire in handling these various operations, the greater will be the exactitude with which I approach the objects of my curiosity.

One of the fundamental types of knowledge in my critical-educative practice is that which stresses the need for spontaneous curiosity to develop into epistemological curiosity.

Another indispensable type of knowledge in this field is that which enables us to handle the relationship between authority and freedom, which is an area of permanent tension between discipline and undiscipline.⁶

Resulting from the harmony between authority and freedom, discipline necessarily implies respect of the one for the other. And this respect is expressed in the admission that both make regarding the limits that cannot be transgressed on either side.

Authoritarianism and freedom with no boundaries are ruptures in the tense harmony between authority and freedom. Authoritarianism is the rupture in favor of authority against freedom. And unbridled freedom is the rupture in favor of freedom against authority. Both authoritarianism and freedom with no bounds are undisciplined forms of behavior that deny what I am calling the ontological vocation of the human being.⁷

So, as there is no room for discipline either in authoritarianism or in unbridled freedom, both lack rigor, authority, and freedom. Only in those practices where authority and freedom are found and preserved in their autonomy (that is, in a relationship of mutual respect) can we speak of a disciplined practice as well as a practice favorable to the vocation "to be more."

Here in Brazil, our authoritarian past is now being challenged by an ambiguous modernity, with the result that we oscillate between authoritarianism and boundless freedom. Between two types of tyranny: the tyranny of freedom and the tyranny of exacerbated authority. And sometimes, we experience the two simultaneously.

A really good exercise would be to explore the tension involved in the confrontation between authority and freedom. With such an exercise, one could evaluate the degree to which these opposites, in

becoming themselves, remain autonomous in situations of dialogue. For this exercise to be possible, it is indispensable that both contrary concepts, authority and freedom, become increasingly convinced of the ideal of mutual respect as the only road to authenticity.

Let us begin by reflecting on a few of the qualities that democratic authority in teaching needs to incorporate in its relationship with the freedom of the students. It is interesting to note that my learning experience will be fundamental to the teaching I will be doing in the future or that I may happen to be doing now. It is in living critically my freedom as a learner that, in large part, I will prepare my authority as a teacher in the future or recover it in the present. To this end, as a student who dreams of becoming a teacher tomorrow or who is already teaching, I ought to have as the object of my curiosity the experiences I have lived with various teachers, as well as my own experiences with my own students. What I want to say is the following: I must not think only of the programmatic contents that are the themes of our discussions in the various teaching departments. I must reflect at the same time on the question of whether this or that teacher teaches in an open, dialogical way or in a closed, authoritarian way.