

⁷ A description of the project, as well as online version of the TLG, can be found at the project's website (<http://www.tlg.uci.edu>).

⁸ Homer, *Odyssey* 10.495.

To Be a Teacher: The Power of Transformative Pedagogy

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During the years that we were colleagues at Hellenic College, George Pilitsis and I would often meet at his office to take a break from work and discuss the hot topics of the day over a cup of coffee. Our collegial conversations were frequently interrupted by a knock on the door that announced the visit of one of George's students. I had never seen George more animated than he was in the presence of his students, offering a word of advice, assuring someone that she, too, would be able to learn Greek, or assisting with an assignment. One of George's defining characteristics was his ability to share himself, his ideas, and his passion for Greek language and culture with his beloved students. This essay on the power of teachers and students to remake the world by imagining what is possible, is dedicated to George's memory.

Of "Pedagogues" and "Pedagogy:" Origins and Evolution of the Concepts

The concepts of "pedagogy" and the "pedagogue" have undergone interesting twists and turns in the evolution of their meaning in the context of modern educational theory and practice. In this paper I would like to explore conflicting ideals of the role of the teacher and the nature of his/her relationship with the student in the educative process.

Before organized schooling prescribed roles and assigned duties to the professional educator, the act of teaching amounted to simple interactions among humans in which a more knowledgeable adult acted as a mentor and was observed closely by an apprentice. Knowledge was passed on from generation to generation through the emulation of those whom the community acknowledged as the carriers of its traditions and values. The education of the young had not yet been institutionalized into formal structures and curricula. The concept of the teacher as the moral authority was a powerful model that remained dominant at least until the Reformation. Its roots are to be found in Ancient Greece in the person of Socrates, who offered himself as the exemplar of the virtuous teacher, and who taught that the first obligation of man is to know himself. In the second century A.D. Clement of Alexandria wrote a book entitled *Paidagogos*, emphasizing the moral authority of the teacher whose exemplary life would serve as a model on which students might pattern their own. Of course, the master model of a teacher Clement had in mind was Christ.¹

There was no exact prescription on how to transform one's life for the glory of God. One meditated, studied and transformed oneself. The primary role of the teacher was to encourage this undertaking. It was not assumed that a student could be instructed into an educated person, for that involved personal self-formation. Thinkers from Augustine to Erasmus to Montaigne cautioned against reliance on teachers, clearly demonstrating a preference for a theory of study over a theory of teaching.² Study, "inward driven study," was the chief mode of education for well over a millennium. Instruction, or the direct transmission of the knowledge from a teacher to a student, was present throughout this period as well, but instruction played a minor role in a person's education compared with study. A more contemporary example of the teacher as moral authority was Gandhi, who, when asked

what his message was, replied, "My life is my message."

Things started to change in the mid-seventeenth century with the work of John Amos Comenius, who conceived of teaching as essential for learning to occur. One's education was achieved via the mechanism of receiving instruction. With modern pedagogy the assumption is that the teacher possesses all the essential knowledge that a student needs. Through the directing power of instruction as a technical system the student will converge upon the teacher's truth. For Comenius, teaching is no longer trivial. In fact, according to him, a person could not become human without a teacher's instructional hand. Instruction, the essential method of making the animal human, was much too critical a function of teaching to leave to chance. Comenius proposed the "didactic college" to train teachers in how to impart knowledge to empty minds. In sum, we credit Comenius with connecting teaching to learning, with proposing universal compulsory education, establishing the rationale for the cult of the degree, and laying the foundation for the concept of the teacher as an accountable professional. Some scholars believe that Comenius, on the basis of his *Great Didactic*, can be seen as an early efficiency expert.³

Comenius' ideas were resurrected in the nineteenth century when, under the influence of empiricism and positivism, a science of education was elaborated in the theory of instruction proposed by Johann Friedrich Herbart and his disciples.⁴ According to Herbart, there are specific steps a teacher needs to take in order to organize subject matter in a way that will be absorbed and retained by the student's mind. With Herbart we have a clear articulation of pedagogy as the efficient organization of classroom conditions that allows the teacher to disseminate knowledge effectively. Herbart used the term pedagogy to refer to "the process whereby the teacher deliberately intervenes, and to know how to do this effectively each child must be carefully studied."⁵ Such a conception

meant the objectification of the child whose mind is structured to receive an objective, scientific view of the world codified in Herbart's famous lesson plans. We contend that this notion of pedagogy as technology and the teacher as an effective manager has been the dominant conception in modern educational thought and has informed curriculum proposals and teacher education up to this day.

The conception of pedagogy as a method of transmitting knowledge has dominated modern educational systems regardless of their ideological underpinnings. The role of educational institutions in the transmission and reproduction of the "truths" of particular cultures has been amply documented in recent decades in the works of philosophers, historians and sociologists of education.⁶ In systems where the dominant tradition has been a humanistic ideal, the aim of education has been primarily to transmit to students the perennial truths of a revered tradition or way of life and to ensure the continuity of the culture against internal and external threats. In systems dominated by the technocratic model, the transmitted knowledge is of a more utilitarian nature that aims at the pursuit of self-interest, preparation for a vocation, and technological control over the environment. The cases of the educational systems of Greece and the United States exemplify this clash of humanistic and technocratic paradigms. Greece is a model case for studying the dominance of the humanistic tradition in education. Because of its precarious position between East and West, Greece, as a newly independent nation in the nineteenth century, used education primarily as a tool for forging a national identity and relied heavily on German idealist and nationalist ideals for shaping its educational system. Similarly, the United States is a model case for studying the triumph of a technocratic educational model. Whereas Greek education stressed continuity with Europe and its traditions, American education emphasized discontinuity by rejecting European ways as aristocratic and

corrupt. The American public school was for the most part concerned not with the transmission of venerable traditions but with the dissemination of skills that would facilitate social adjustment while forging a national identity that was rooted in empiricist/utilitarian ideals.⁷

However, whether systems favor the teaching of a classical/Great Books tradition or more "relevant" studies such as social studies and drivers' education, the fact of the matter is that both are curriculum-centered and teacher-centered. In both cases knowledge is something found, not created. Both systems practice what Freire has called the "banking concept of education," 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.⁸

Deposits of codified knowledge (the curriculum) are made by either type of teacher, both the authority figure who has the monopoly on cultural truths, and the "facilitator" who simply transmits ideas or skills that someone else has packaged for him.

Dissenting Views:

The Re-Conceptualization of Pedagogy

To counter the conception of pedagogy as simply the transmission of uncritically accepted knowledge, a number of educational theorists have proposed a broadened conception of pedagogy. A dynamic field has been forming in the past two decades or so under a variety of names such as "critical," "radical," and "engaged" pedagogy, or "pedagogy of difference," "pedagogy of possibility," and so forth. Influenced by the work of Brazilian educator and cultural revolutionary Paulo Freire and of earlier progressive traditions in American education, many theorists have expanded the definition of pedagogy to signify a process of "the transformation of con-

sciousness that takes place in the interaction of three agencies – the teacher, the learner and the knowledge that they together produce.”⁹ This enlarged notion of pedagogy requires that teachers become, in Henry Giroux’s words, “transformative intellectuals”¹⁰ engaged in a “deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge and subjectivities are produced within particular sets of social relations.”¹¹ Such transformation on the part of the teacher occurs within the context of a dialogical communication where the other participants (students or coworkers) are given the space and the tools to become intellectuals themselves. To ask teachers to be transformative intellectuals

is not a call for educators to become wedded to some abstract ideal that turns them into prophets of perfection and certainty; on the contrary, it represents a call for educators to perform a noble public service, to undertake teaching as a form of social criticism, to define themselves as engaged, critical, public intellectuals who can play a major role in animating a democratic public culture.¹²

This essentially political conception of the role of pedagogy offers educators a vision, which holds the possibility of remaking schools into just and caring democratic communities. Within such communities the roles of the teacher and student are redefined and classroom environments are created that enable equal and non-coercive participation in dialogue. The idea of the school as a democratic community can be traced to the work of John Dewey, the preeminent American philosopher and educational theorist of the twentieth century. Similarly, Freire’s “culture circles,” where illiterate peasants learn how to read and write, become laboratories of democracy that allow the participants to imagine the possibility of transforming their world.¹³ Dewey’s concept of “experience” and Freire’s notions of “dialogical communication” and “praxis” capture beautifully the relationship between the individual and the world. Dewey and

Freire conceive of the individual as situated within the world in constant exchange with it. Dewey’s definition of “experience” in the following passage points to the individual/world interconnectedness:

When we experience something we act upon it; then we suffer the consequences... When an activity is continued *into* the undergoing of consequences, when the change made by action is reflected back into a change made in us, the mere flux is loaded with significance. We learn something.¹⁴

Freire also defines “praxis” as “the action and reflection of men upon the world in order to transform it,”¹⁵ and extols the importance of open-ended dialogue between individuals and their world:

“Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.”¹⁶

Dewey’s and Freire’s focus on the *relationship* between individuals and their world treats the two as inextricably connected and shaped by each other. The individual/subject thus is seen as concrete in his/her historicity, an agent defined by his/her circumstances but nevertheless not totally determined by them, since these same circumstances are also in the process of being formed as a result of human intervention.

Consequently, the act of learning – and here lies the educational significance of the Deweyan and Freirean epistemologies – is not a passive reception or discovery of an objective reality that “lies out there,” either in the form of concrete facts or of superior ideas. It is rather the active process of negotiation with a world which is fluid and incoherent, but acquires meaning as a result of human action.

Dewey and Freire imagine the classroom and society at large as settings where conflict is considered a positive element rather than a threat to the learning process. The admo-

inition that we remain forever experimental suggests an educational position that sees ambiguity and confusion not as obstacles to the learning process but rather as incentives to it. To the "banking concept of education," which places the teacher and the subject matter to be transmitted at the center of the learning process, Freire juxtaposes the concept of a problem-posing education which regards dialogue as indispensable in the act of cognition. This type of education sees students and teachers as critical thinkers who are empowered through dialogue and reflection to change their circumstances both inside and outside of class: "The students – no longer docile listeners – are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher."¹⁷

There are many educators – too numerous to mention them all here – who have envisioned pedagogy as the space where teachers and students meet to learn together and from each other. However, I opt to mention only a few who have influenced my thinking and practice over the years. I have learned much from Bill Ayers, who has likened teaching to midwifery: "Good teachers, like good midwives, empower. Good teachers find ways to activate students, for they know that learning requires active engagement between the subject and 'object matter.'¹⁸ Ayers has also reminded us of the "values implicit in a hopeful approach to teaching: the importance of love, commitment and ethical action; the centrality of making the student visible as a whole person; the value of creating a safe and stimulating environment for reflection."¹⁹ I am also reminded of bell hooks, who speaks so passionately of her encounters with students: "To hear each other (the sound of different voices), to listen to one another, is an exercise in recognition. It also ensures that no student remains invisible in the classroom."²⁰

Additionally, I hear Judith Lindfors' powerful voice when she defines the act of inquiry taking place in the classroom as "a language act in which one attempts to elicit another's help

in going beyond his or her own present understanding."²¹ And last, but not least, teacher of teachers Maxine Greene reminds us that "Teachers, like their students, have to learn to love the questions, as they come to realize that there can be no final agreements or answers, no final commensurability. And we have been talking about stories that open perspectives on communication grounded in trust, flowering by means of dialogue, kept alive in open spaces where freedom can find a place."²²

It seems that we have almost come full circle to the ideal of teacher as moral exemplar. From the classical (and Christian) ideal of teaching, which presents the teacher as a moral force in the eyes of students, critical educators have retained the conception of the teacher as a source of morality, virtue and wisdom. However, while they want to preserve the authority of the teacher, they wish at the same time to get rid of the authoritarianism which negates student participation in the negotiation of the conditions of learning. This position implies that in our classroom we construct situations that permit two-way critical traffic, in the sense that we accept the possibility that what our students articulate might contest our own views and actions. Thus, the teacher's compassionate intervention should be tempered by a sense of humility and self-reflection, which keep him/her open to a critique of his/her own limitations. In the end, teaching is an act of love and an act of transcendence. Transcending oneself to come into communion with another human being constitutes the essence and the power of teaching (and learning).

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was first discussed in a paper co-authored with Dr. Bill Taylor of OSU and presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in Boston, in April 1990. Further refinement of the ideas on critical pedagogy resulted from my work with students in the elementary education program at Hellenic College (1991-1998) and my work in Reading Recovery through Lesley University and with colleagues around the world who bring the gift of literacy to students who have been traditionally marginalized in educational systems.

NOTES

¹ James Bowen, *A History of Western Education*, vol. 1 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972), 241-243.

² Robert McClintock, "Toward a Place for Study in a World of Instruction," *Teachers College Record*, 73:2 (1971), 161-205.

³ Bernard Mehl, *Classic Educational Ideas: From Sumeria to America* (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing, 1972).

⁴ Francesco Cordasco, *A Brief History of Education* (New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams, & Co., 1976).

⁵ James Bowen, *A History of Western Education*, vol. 3 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 237.

⁶ See Michael Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum* (London: Routledge, 1979); Pierre Bourdieu and Jean C. Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1977); Donald Oliver, *Education, Modernity, and Fractured Meaning* (Albany: State University of New York, 1989).

⁷ The juxtaposition of humanistic and technocratic educational models is not meant to suggest that educational systems are sharply divided into espousing one or the other model. Both may compete in the context of the same educational system, as witnessed in reform proposals in both the United States and Greece, which have attempted to steer their educational systems toward adopting more humanistic or more utilitarian perspectives, respectively. Most industrialized nations, however, have been steadily moving toward adoption of a technocratic paradigm in education under the exigencies of consumerism and economic development.

⁸ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuing Pub-

lishing Company, 1990), 58.

⁹ David Lusted, "Why Pedagogy?" *Screen* 27:5 (1986), 3.

¹⁰ Henry A. Giroux, *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning* (Bergin and Garvey Press, 1988).

¹¹ Henry A. Giroux, "Liberal Arts Education and the Struggle for Public Life: Dreaming About Democracy," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 89:1 (1990), 123.

¹² *Ibid.*, 132.

¹³ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970).

¹⁴ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1916), 139.

¹⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 66.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁸ William Ayers, "Thinking about Teachers and the Curriculum," *Harvard Educational Review* 56:1 (1986), 50.

¹⁹ William Ayers, *To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993), 75.

²⁰ bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York & London: Routledge, 1994), 41.

²¹ Judith Wells Lindfors, *Children's Inquiry: Using Language to Make Sense of the World* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999), ix.

²² Maxine Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988), 134.