

Paulo Freire at the Institute results from a Seminar with Paulo Freire at the Institute of Education in October 1993. The Seminar was built around a central topic: the educational theory of Paulo Freire.

Paulo Freire at the Institute contains the reflections of Freire on progressive education, as well as discussions on the topics raised by academics and the audience. This volume was thought of as an opportunity to make widely available Freire's talks, which are based around issues he has discussed in recent publications in Portuguese.

"He was a returning hero to many in the packed lecture theatre. Described by Peter Mortimore, the Institute's deputy director, as a worldwide legend in his own life time, the Brazilian author – best known for *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* – was talking about the qualities a progressive teacher needs. His reputation is built upon his work on adult literacy, which he saw as the greatest weapon for change for the disenfranchised in the slums of Brazil and elsewhere."
Frances Rafferty, The Times Educational Supplement,
 29 October 1993, p.6

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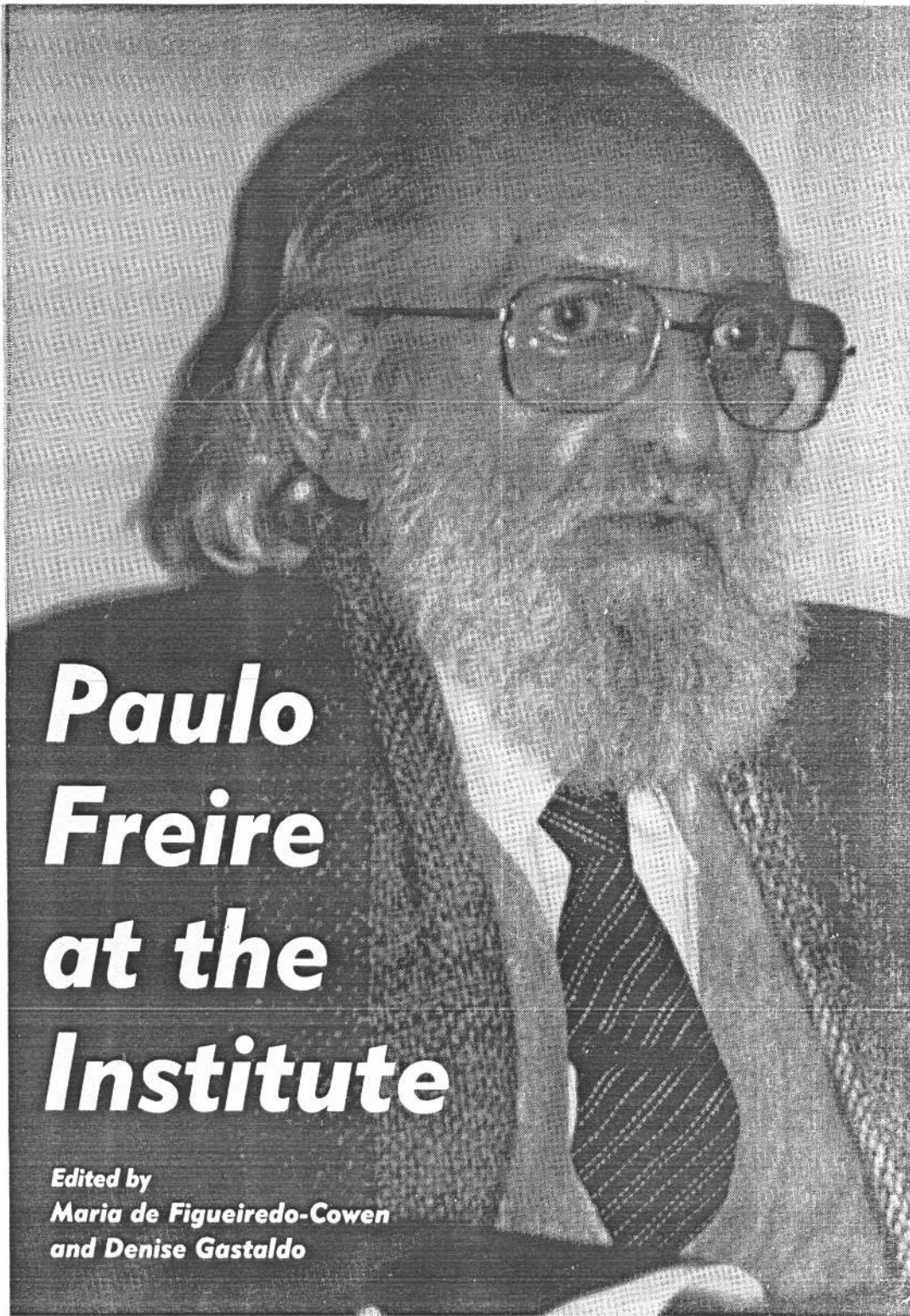


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Edited by Maria de Figueiredo-Cowen and Denise Gastaldo

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Paulo Freire
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34. Freire, P. *Professora sim, tia não*, op.cit., p.10.
35. The kindergartens are more susceptible to this kind of exploitation. See Chapter 6: Section 4, "International Financial Aid".
36. Translated by the Editors: Freire, P. *Professora sim, tia não*, op.cit., p.10.
37. Freire, P. *Pedagogia da esperança*, op.cit., pp.47-48.
38. Freire, P. *Política e educação*, op.cit., p.100.
39. Translated by the Editors: Freire, P. *Pedagogia da esperança*, op.cit., p.11.
40. Freire, Ana Maria A. Notes. In: Freire, P. *Pedagogia da esperança*, op.cit., pp.206-7.
41. Interview with the Editors, in London, 31 October 1993.

The Progressive Teacher

Paulo Freire

It is a great pleasure for me to be here at the Institute. I have been here before, twenty years ago. Today, although I am not feeling very well, I think I can survive at least one morning.

When I was flying from São Paulo to London, I asked myself about what could I talk about this morning. It is not always easy to speak about oneself. Sometimes I have asked myself: "What difficulty could there be in speaking about myself?" But it is difficult exactly because I do not know very well what should be the best approach. In the plane I remembered that I was bringing in my luggage three of my latest books, in Portuguese, to give to the Library of the Institute. The first one is **Pedagogy of Hope – a reencounter with the Pedagogy of the Oppressed**. This book emerged as a distortion of my initial intention – I had thought of writing a new introduction to the **Pedagogy of the Oppressed** in which I would say something about its history. I was attempting to write something about what the **Pedagogy of the Oppressed** did, and is still doing, through the languages into which it has been translated. But at some point in my writing, I discovered that what I was writing was not a new introduction. It was a new book. Then **Pedagogy of Hope** emerged. Instead of presenting the history of the **Pedagogy of the Oppressed**, I wrote something else – another book. This book is now being translated into English or "American".

My other book, on which my talk will be based this morning, is *Professora sim, Tia não*. Twenty years ago, a new dominant ideology became fashionable in Brazil. This new ideology attempted to de-professionalise the teacher, by suggesting that children call their teachers "aunties". The implicit message from the dominant groups was (and has been): 'How can you go on strike if you are aunties and the children are your nephews and nieces?' When I wrote this book I aimed at criticizing the de-professionalisation of the teacher. So, when I was asking myself what I could say here, I remembered the book *Professora sim, Tia não*, which is made up of 'Letters to teachers'. In one of these Letters I discuss the qualities or the virtues I think we should have as teachers if we are

progressive teachers. I did not write about the virtues of the reactionary teacher because this is the duty of a reactionary thinker, which I am not. In that particular Letter what I did was to try to clarify what we have to do and what we should become (or try to become) by teaching in a progressive way.

My first point about this issue is: Why do I admit the existence of progressive teachers and the existence of reactionary teachers? If I understand education as a practice which cannot be neutral, I have to accept the dichotomy, progressive teachers and reactionary teachers, precisely because I do not accept the notion that all teachers are making something that is equal for all of us. I remember in the seventies the discussions I had in this country and also in Germany when I said that there is no neutrality in education. For some people that was a scandalous statement. Today I think I would not cause scandals when I say such things. Of course one of the elements of the educational practice whose technical name is "directivity" (*diretividade*) tells us something about the impossibility of being neutral in the practice of education. The "directivity" of education means that education starts from a given level and goes beyond itself. It also means that education has always implied utopias, dreams, desires, and values. I cannot simply say: I educate for nothing. Even the most naive educators and incompetent educators have to think about their own practice, and to think about why they work as a teacher. When, for example, we think about teachers' salaries in Brazil we realise that is rather difficult to remain in the profession. Today two hundred thousand teachers in São Paulo have been on strike for sixty-five days precisely because they insist on going on being teachers. This means that they have a kind of a dream. I am not a teacher because I was told that teaching is beautiful. I am a teacher because I love the beauty of teaching. There is a certain beauty in the very process of being a teacher. The bad aspect of this process is when, in our teaching, we contradict our dreams.

Thus the notion of "directivity" of education does not allow education to be a neutral process. We ought to clarify for ourselves what are our dreams, and how to put them into action. For example, I can have the dream – for me very ugly – of maintaining the *status quo* of society as it is now. It is a right which we have, the right of loving the stability of society. As with any other Brazilian, it would be perfectly possible for me to say, 'I am happy with the social situation of my country; with the number of people who cannot eat every day'. I then would work through a kind of educational practice in which I would try to maintain this situation with no attempt to unveil the reality. What is impossible, is to be neutral.

Sometimes we are not clear about what we would like to do in the world. One of our tasks, I think, is to clarify what we would like to do. It is during the

process of acting as a teacher that we begin to understand what we would like to do. In my case, I am in the world because I would like to accomplish one of my tasks which is to contribute to changing the world. I discovered that very early in my childhood. I could not have come to the world in order to preserve the world as it is. I do not believe in immobility in history. I want to make some contribution to change, to transformation because it is by transforming the world that we can make it better.

When our task begins to become clear, we have to take charge of our praxis in a much clearer way. Then we discover the need to become more and more competent in order to do what we would like to do, to make what we would like to make. Along these lines, there is a Letter in which I discuss the qualities or the virtues of the progressive teacher. It is important to say that when I speak about qualities or virtues, I am not speaking about qualities we are born with. I am speaking about something which we make, we build by doing, by acting. I am sure that no one was born as she or he is; one becomes. We never **are**, because in order to be, it is necessary not to be. In other words, it is necessary to become. It is in becoming that I make myself. I am not, if I do not become. First I become. And I become to the extent to which I do what I would like to become. I have never received the gift of being a teacher, as I am. I became. Thus virtue means that I have to create quality by putting into practice the quality I would like to have.

One of the virtues of the progressive teacher is humility. To be humble does not mean to be afraid of doing things. On the contrary. To be humble pushes me towards acting without thinking that by acting I am the best. To be humble does not mean to love being loved. To be humble implies understanding oneself in the process of being with all the abilities and all the faults; to accept oneself as one who is becoming. To be humble is neither to deny nor to emphasize the values we think we have. It is to live more or less in peace. To be humble is not to be afraid to be criticized, not to be full of yourself because some people said you are interesting. To be humble means to resist compliments. In some cases compliments may be destructive. Sometimes it is necessary to be strong in order not to be destroyed by compliments.

We are not born with virtues or faults. We create them. Sometimes we do not have enough time in the world in order to learn these simple things. We are so interested in finding ourselves beautiful and good that we do not have time to discover that we are not so beautiful and so good. Humility is a strong exercise we have to practise in every moment of our life. It is an exercise which implies some courage. It is also a particularly difficult exercise when we have contradictory feelings – from wishing to be humble to finding it bad to be humble. The progressive teacher, no matter where she or he teaches, in schools

or at universities, has to practise humility. I also think that the reactionary teacher would be a better reactionary if she or he were humble. I will illustrate this point. Suppose that a student asks a question which is not very well formulated, a kind of naive question. Then the teacher emphasizes precisely the naivety of the student, and ironically answers as if saying: "Please, first become competent and afterwards come back to ask your question". This is terrible. Possibly this student will never ask another question again, and will never trust the teacher from that moment on. The teacher will have created a barrier making the relationship impossible. The humble teacher also accepts being criticized by the student. She or he can only teach humility through examples. Humility is not something which we can speak about with an absence of humility. I cannot make an arrogant speech to teach humility. This is absolutely impossible.

Another quality which comes together with humility is the ability we have to love. When I say to love I mean to love the very process of teaching; to discover how beautiful it is to be involved in the process of teaching to the extent that the process of teaching is directed towards the process of education, which is rather different from training. Philosophically speaking, training is a very bad word, with very narrow limits in semantics. Educating involves ethics and aesthetics hand in hand; it is beautiful because it is ethical. During the very process of teaching I have to discover that I am inside another process which is the same one which is the process of education. This is beautiful in itself. If I am not able to discover how teaching has to do with beauty, it is not easy for me to love teaching. That is why I said earlier that my point is not about loving students because they are persons, but it is about loving both the object – students – and the process of teaching. The more I do that, the more I discover the need to be humble. It is impossible to think of separating beauty from teaching; beauty from ethics; and the love for students from loving the process through which I must love the students. I love my students not because they are in a room where I am a teacher. I love my students to the extent in which I love the very process of being with them.

The next quality of the progressive teacher is related to the previous one. I should not transform the students into mere shadows of myself. I cannot consider the students as mere objects of the process of teaching where I am the subject. Therefore I have to acknowledge that the students are subjects in the process of learning as well as I am the subject of the process of teaching. However different we – myself and the students – are, students are students, and the teacher is teacher, both students and teacher being the subjects of the process of education. And there is here a contradiction: I cannot teach a subject and have the students as mere objects of my teaching. The students are subjects

of their process of learning on the very first day of the academic year. Generally, the students arrive without knowing very clearly that there is something which we name subject or object, given the tradition of the authority of the teacher. I would like to emphasize that I am not saying that the teacher should lose her/his authority. No! No! No! I do not accept that. What I am trying to say is that the authority of the teacher does not diminish the freedom of the student. One has to grow up through the contradiction of one with the other. In other words, there is no freedom without authority, there is no authority without freedom. It is through the contradictory relationships between authority and freedom that we can experience the value and the need for limits. Without limits there is no possibility for freedom and without limits there is no possibility for authority. What I am saying is that both teacher and students must be subjects of the process of education. In my view to love teaching and to love students is part of the process of developing or helping the development of persons.

Another virtue I now would like very much to emphasize is the virtue or quality of tolerance. This virtue, which is also a political virtue, is very difficult to create. The progressive teacher has to be tolerant. Tolerance is the quality of creating something against certain dimensions of ourselves. It is the ability to enjoy difference. It is to learn from the difference. It means not to consider ourselves better than others precisely because they are different from us. When we think about tolerance we immediately think about racism which is the strongest negation of being tolerant; it is the lowest level of the negation of the differences.

In Brazil, for example, the lack of tolerance concerning political choices is incredible. This is true also inside the universities. That is why I think we have the right to be different from the other. Here I remember the first group of graduate students I had at the Catholic University in São Paulo, coming back from exile in 1980. I had asked the students to write a paper. One of them handed in his paper and said: "I already know that you will not like my paper, and I will be given a low grade". I took the papers home, read them all, and marked them, writing my comments. I easily identified the paper of that student because it was very reactionary. Seriously reactionary. Competently reactionary. He was not lying in the text. He was defending a different position vis-à-vis my position. I gave him ten, the highest grade. I wrote on his paper: "In spite of my total disagreement I gave you ten as a sign of respect for your seriousness, but please try not to be so reactionary". He could not believe it when he saw his mark. I told him: "Look, I did not come here to mark your ideology which I think is horrible, terrible. But I respect you". At that moment I think I gave him something more than a grade of ten. He understood that I was able to have empathy with him, especially because he was antagonistic to me. I think that a

teacher who is not able to do that cannot teach; she or he cannot speak about education as an educative process. Nevertheless, the fact of being tolerant does not mean that we have to become indifferent or irresponsible. No. The tolerant teacher tries to understand the weaknesses of the students without however helping them to be weak; she or he challenges the students to be stronger, not to be lazy. The teacher is tolerant when she or he understands the difficulties the students have, and she or he tries to help the students. She or he does not humiliate the students, does not destroy their dreams.

Of course, those qualities I have been talking about have to be created. We have to create them even when we are challenged by the students. We have to come to the classroom with the objective of making the student go beyond us. It is not so easy for the students to overcome the age, the knowledge, and the experience we have. But, from time to time a student asks a question which challenges us in such a way that we do not know very well how to answer. The intolerant teacher will lie in such a situation. The tolerant teacher will have the courage to say: "I am sorry. I do not understand your question. I am not able to answer it today. But I will study it". I never forget, for example, when I was very young and had just begun my teaching career at the university. One day a student asked me a question whose answer I did not know. I said: "Are you free this weekend?" She replied: "Yes, I am". I then said: "I invite you to come to my house, to have lunch with my family, and to spend some time with me in my small study. There I have very good books where I am sure we will be able to answer your question. If you accept my invitation, I will be very happy". She accepted it very eagerly, and we spent the whole Saturday together.¹

Now, as my final point, I will tell you that one of the issues we face as teachers is the possibility (or not) of creating in ourselves the quality of being consistent and coherent. I think that the first quality – or its absence – the students perceive in a teacher is lack of consistency. For example, how is it possible for a teacher to speak about democracy at the same time as she or he says to the student 'shut up!'. Two absolutely contradictory things. This does not mean that by being democratic she or he has to permit everything. Maybe in some moments as a democratic person you have to say 'shut up'. But, you have to have some conditions in order to say that. For example, when you have to fight. Democratic persons are not prevented from fighting. They have to fight even for democracy. However what is unacceptable is to exercise contradictory values through practice. In other words, to say one thing and to do another. The students will easily perceive the contradiction. I remember when I was living in Geneva where a great friend of mine was at the University of Geneva studying authoritarian regimes. She was quite pleased with the course because the teacher was really very competent. But also very authoritarian. In

a particular day, the topic was authoritarianism. The teacher discussed it, revealing her position which was against authoritarianism. At a given moment during the lecture my friend took a cigarette out of her bag. Whilst still listening very carefully to the teacher, she started to light the cigarette. The teacher then said, looking at my friend: "Do you know who I am?" What a fantastic question! My friend said that she was so puzzled that she did not grasp immediately the purpose of the question. She thought that the teacher was asking her an absurd question. Her reply was: "Yes, I do, you are the teacher". The teacher says: "How funny. I thought that if you knew who I am you would not even take out a cigarette without my permission". Hearing that, my friend got hold of her books, stood up and said to the teacher who remained silent: "Professor, many thanks for your three lectures. You are very competent, but very contradictory. I am no longer your student because you are a total disappointment." And she left. I wonder how it is possible to speak about democracy, and about freedom with no respect for the freedom of the students. How is it possible to speak about consistency without being consistent?

This case makes me think of a very difficult thing which is to try to combine words and action. Of course, it is impossible to be absolutely consistent. No one is. First, if someone is invariably consistent she or he would not know that she or he is consistent. You can only understand consistency if you experience some degree of inconsistency. Secondly, to be consistent all the time may be a disaster. We must experience some inconsistency within limits, in order to discover the need to be consistent.

My very final point. We must fight for the qualities and virtues I have been talking about. This must be a daily exercise. I am 72 years old. Therefore, my teaching load is not very heavy at the Catholic University. But I am writing a lot. Occasionally I give public lectures in different countries. However I could not do that if I were not, like today, looking for consistency, loving what I do, trying to be humble, controlling my vanity, accepting the differences; it is an exercise for every day. Thank you very much.

NOTE

1. Editorial Note: At this point, someone brought water to Paulo Freire who, thinking it was time to finish his talk, said: "I also have the experience of bureaucratization of time. I always understood schedule as an attempt to command time. But I am the subject of schedule and not the object of it. Last year in December I gave a public lecture in Gothenburg, Sweden, in an international conference. It was not very clear how much time I had for my

paper. At a given moment the organizer, a beautiful woman, very specialized in controlling time, brought me a gift. Puzzled, I asked: 'Is it time for me to stop?' And she said: 'Yes'. Then I replied: 'Of course, I will obey. I will stop because first of all you have the power. But before I stop I have something to say to all of you, and to you, Madam: Yes, I will stop, but I cannot understand why you paid two first class tickets for me and my wife to come from Brazil, so far away from here. You are also paying me a very high fee, and you do not allow me to finish my speech. Nevertheless, as you are paying me, I will stop.'

Nita is just reminding me that the end of my lecture in Sweden was very appropriate because I was speaking about the bureaucratization of the mind. And I added: 'One of the things we should fight against above all in this so-called First World is how we become servants of time which we think we command. How can you put together first class tickets, a high fee and not permit me to finish the speech? How is it possible? You did not understand anything I told you here. Nothing at all. I should be in Brazil, in my house, writing.'

Literacy in Brazil: The Contribution of Paulo Freire¹

Ana Maria de Araújo Freire

As Paulo Freire has written:

The meeting did not take place in a formal hall but in the shade of an enormous and very ancient tree. The people demonstrated their hospitality by receiving the delegation in the inviting shade of that tree, in intimate relation with their own natural world.

My impression was that the shaded area beneath that tree was a kind of political-cultural center – a place for informal conversation – where they made their work plans together. I also thought how such a place, taking advantage of the shade, might be used for programs of nonformal education.

As I went toward the tree, admiring its thick foliage, I remembered that it had been in the shade of just such trees that Amílcar Cabral met with armed militants during the struggle to evaluate their action against the colonialist armies. At such times, military and tactical analyses never failed to be accompanied by political discussions and debates about culture. Through this means the permanent leadership squadrons were formed. . .

This was not the false hope of one who hopes for the sake of hoping and lives on the basis of vain hope. Hope is true and well founded only when it grows out of the unity between action that transforms the world and critical reflection regarding the meaning of that action. . .

Referring to the violence of the colonialists, one of them bowed low and bowed again, curving his body, living the word with which he described the terrible treatment received. He walked from one side to the other within the circle of shade in which he stood, using the movements of his body to express some aspect of the story he told. None of them spoke ecstatically, disassociating his body from

Table 1: Learners in Kenyan and Tanzanian Literacy Programmes: their previous attendance at Primary School

	Kenya	Tanzania	
	All Ages	All ages	Those aged 45+
	%	%	%
None	44	40	49
A little	36	13	14
4+ years	20	47	37

Carr-Hill and Carron (1994)

Paulo explained how he has asked to become national coordinator of a literacy campaign for Brazil in January 1964; but that the coup of April 1964 effectively put an end to any possibility of a mass campaign along the lines he had suggested. Given the preceding analysis of mass campaigns, whilst we are, of course, very lucky that to have Paulo with us, perhaps he was lucky he was not given the opportunity to fail.

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Reply to Discussants

Paulo Freire

I am not sure whether I will succeed but I will try to give answers to the three questions raised here. I will start by replying to the first one which refers to newspapers in Brazil. Generally speaking, I think that we have not yet got a newspaper able to write in popular language. When I say popular language I am saying something about the syntax of the working class, and the semantics of the working class. I will not speak about pronunciation because this is not necessary. Generally we write for the people, the popular mass, in the same language as you demonstrated in the second and third page of *Folha de São Paulo*¹. Usually, newspapers are elitist. Like the *Folha de São Paulo*, the *Estadão* tries to reach the popular areas, but only on the front page. The other pages are written for us, the educated people. There are also newspapers which think that they are trying to communicate with the popular sectors. But all they do is to report on crimes. That is for me a very mistaken view of what people understand. These papers reduce the ability of people to read and understand by focusing only on crimes, deaths, and accidents. Also, the language is terrible.

When we are working with literacy programmes (and there are groups in Brazil doing it very well), we have first to challenge the students to begin to write their own texts. It is impossible to split reading from writing, and from speaking. When we start speaking we have already inside us the ability to speak, and the possibility to write. This phenomenon is an historical one, from the earliest times: human beings started saying the words after they had transformed reality. Firstly they transformed reality; secondly they gave names to that transformation, to the objects. In the evolutionary process, the first human beings already had the possibility to write the words they were speaking. Today, when a child begins to grasp language socially (no one teaches language to anyone; we teach grammar, but not language which we grasp socially through social practice) she or he is just waiting for writing. One of the scandals of high levels of illiteracy is that illiteracy represents a violence against the natural possibilities and the natural tendency of human beings. This is a crime. To prevent people from writing and reading is a violence. It is a kind of castration of human beings.

In a way we are preventing human beings from doing something which they have the right to do i.e. to read and to write.

But, the process of reading does not mean literally reading written words. Above all comes reading the world as an anticipation of reading words. We first read reality and afterwards we read the texts. In other words, we first read the context and afterwards we read the text. Reading the text must be preceded by the reading of the context. In the last analysis reading texts is a dialectical exercise which leads us permanently to the reading of the original context. One of the mistakes we make as professors at the university is the mystification of reading written words. I know of some examples where graduate students are asked in one semester to read three hundred books. That explains how some suicides happen. I always ask myself if those professors have really read three hundred books. There is also the case of professors who suggest the reading of some books from page 5 to page 25. Why? What right do I have to say to the students that they are able to read just from page 5 to page 25? What I should say is that such a chapter has challenged me a lot. As a result I read these books. I can say that, but I cannot determine the pages for the students to read. This is an authoritarian stance by the teacher.

I now would like to come back to the problem of reading and writing. I am sure that cultures such as ours as well as African cultures are dominantly, and sometimes totally, based on oral language. The experience is an experience of an oral culture. The memory is oral, as in Africa. To work in cultures such as those is completely different from working in those cultures which have a strong experience of written language. I remember when I came to Paris in May 1968 at the very moment of the Sorbonne invasion. In June, I bought 25 essays which had been published about me. This is an example of a reading and writing culture. The French people write their history every day. I do not know if they write very well, but they do write. I then said to myself that in Brazil we only have two or three books about 1964. Even today we do not have solid books analysing for example some very important aspects of popular education before the 1964 coup d' état. It is very sad that a book in Brazil is considered a bestseller if three thousand copies are sold in the first edition. But three thousand copies should be sold just in a small neighbourhood of São Paulo. We have 14 million people in São Paulo. However we do not have one million readers. Much depends on the lack of spending money for books; also many people are not able to read; and, lastly, a good number do not like to read, even if they are at the university. One of the things we should do in Brazil is to increase and to improve the experience of reading.

You asked my opinion about the degree of elitism and of populism in different sections of the *Folha de São Paulo*. I think that maybe all the big

newspapers in Brazil have this dual characteristic. Some newspapers are formally elitist. Others are completely elitist. I think that the *Estadão* is a totally elitist newspaper, nevertheless, it attempts to transfer elitism to the masses. Suppose I am an elitist man. I could well think of techniques to use in order to encourage the readers to be elitist like me. This is a political and ideological task. I think that completely elitist newspapers do that. The formally elitist newspapers are elitist from the tactical point of view. I think that this is not good. A progressive newspaper would have to reach the masses without having to make such a concession. I would have to study, I would have to do some research in order to reach the people with less difficulty. But not through a kind of concession like this. I should be consistent in my choices.

As regards the second question, I have to confess to all of you that when I think about language, when I try to understand the mysteries of the language, i.e. how language is acquired socially, I am especially concerned with the political dimension of the language. I have been trying to work as much as I can on a scientific approach and on scientific findings which could help me to minimize mistakes, but my real preoccupation has been a political one. Of course, ethically speaking, I think that in everything we have to consider the ethical, as well as the aesthetic aspects. I never separate one from the other, they come together. I think that ethical behaviour is beautiful. I have really been trying to make the process of teaching how to read and to write very political. It does not make sense, for example, to teach the Brazilians how to read and write through a method that does not stimulate ways towards possible changes in the reality of Brazil. It is as if I am saying to those illiterate people that what they need immediately is simply to write and read the words. But, to write and to read what? To write and to read in favour of what? That is, what is our objective in reading? Reading for me is not a neutral activity. I read because I need to read, because I need to transform the reality into something better. The good books are those which challenge me in understanding reality better and, consequently, I become more competent to transform that reality.

I am a politician 24 hours a day. This does not mean, nevertheless, that I am a candidate for the Senate of Brazil. I do not feel competent for that. But as an educator, my work is always illuminated by my political choice. Of course we cannot be politicians singlemindedly. We also have to have science. No matter which country and the culture we are working in, it is impossible to think about literacy without reading Piaget and Vygotsky. How can I understand the very process of acquiring language without reading Vygotsky? I am only sorry that I did not find Vygotsky until ten years ago. Prior to that time Vygotsky was unknown in Brazil and in Latin America. Similarly I only read Gramsci when I was in exile. I read Gramsci and I discovered that I had been greatly

influenced by Gramsci long before I had read him. It is fantastic when we discover that we had been influenced by someone's thought without even being introduced to their intellectual production.

Of course we have to be very careful in our teaching, whether we are teaching literacy or any other discipline. We should always do it well. Those of us who have some experience in teaching literacy to adults recognize how difficult is the moment when a worker of forty, thirty, or twenty years of age holds a pen for the first time. It is a rather different experience when, for example, I naturally pick up a pen to write. My brain controls the strength I have to use, in order to manipulate the instrument. But the worker never had before this idea of the relationship between the strength the brain puts in the action and the weight of this instrument. His experience had been so far with an axe or a hammer. He then transfers the same command to the muscular system when holding the pen. The other difficulty they face is the lack of confidence. I remember, when I lived in Recife, I hired a painter, an illiterate worker, to paint the rooms of my house. In one of the rooms I had asked him to draw a horizontal line about ten to fifteen centimetres to the ceiling, as it was very fashionable at the time. The decorator came to the room and did the proper measurement in order to draw the horizontal line up to which he would have to paint. I was fascinated with the way he did it. He measured the wall and hammered two small nails one in each corner to get the same height. Then he linked both nails with a string which had a kind of brown colouring. He then went up a ladder, held the string with the tip of his fingers, pulled the string, releasing it immediately afterwards. And there was the line drawn on the wall. It was perfect. He did not shake at all when he did it. However, in the circle of culture every time he had to use a pencil, he could not hold it still; his hand used to shake.

In Brazil I used to start my literacy lessons with a discussion about culture. It was a very simple conversation with ten codifications, whose reading or decodification would give us an introductory understanding of what culture is about. I was full of happiness when I started to perceive the results of that discussion – when the illiterate workers realised that to make culture was also to transform a world which had not been made by them. They understood that culture also came from the processes of transformation of the world which we accomplish. Culture was also a poem, as if created by a great poet. It was the sculpture of a great artist. But it was also the way they spoke. In many occasions I heard the workers in the circles of culture saying things such as “I do this, therefore I make culture”. Only then had the illiterates finally understood that we can transform a reality which we did not make, and we can transform the reality which we make. History, culture, politics – all these things are made by us. But, if I can transform the world which I did not make with or without a

sophisticated technology, we are also able to transform reality, historically and politically. Thus they got much confidence in themselves through the simple discussion of culture. That is what culture really means. I firmly believe that it is much more important for the illiterate to understand their context, than just to be able to read in an alienated way. For me, the question of how to teach, to read, and to write is immediately linked to a political issue. This does not mean, for example, that in literacy classes for adults, you never have time to teach them how to read and to write because you are making politics. This is wrong. This is an absurdity. If we are there to teach them how to read and to write that is what we must do. But, in doing that, we can never dissociate the teaching of writing and reading from the understanding of reality. Further, from an ethical point of view, we do not have the right to say to the illiterate that the only good thing is to belong to the Workers' Party. No, I do not have this right. But, I have the duty to say that there are five, six, seven parties. I have the duty to discuss the ideology and the political choices of these different parties. I have also the duty of telling them which is my choice. I do not accept neutrality which is to have a kind of hypocritical posture in the world. What I cannot do is to lie, or to impose my choice upon them.

I now turn my attention to the third question raised by my discussants. This question is very interesting. I have been asked if, had the 1964 coup d'état in Brazil not happened, my work would have failed or succeeded. First, it is too difficult to answer a question like that in historical terms. But it is a good question. At least some Brazilians, in their negative criticism of my work, were able to find something positive by saying that one of my major pieces of luck was the coup d'état. In their view the coup spared me a tremendous disaster. I am not sure about that. On the contrary, I think that if the coup d'état had not happened we would have been very successful all over Brazil. We had examples of success. In Brasília, for example, for three or four months we had the opportunity to work with thousands of illiterate workers. We organized three hundred cultural circles, around Brasília in the satellite towns, with excellent results. The first experience in Northeast Brazil, in Angicos, in the State of Rio Grande do Norte², was also very good. I had there three hundred illiterate workers reading and writing just before the coup d'état. Recently my wife and myself went there. We met ten of those three hundred illiterate workers. One of them was an old man, eighty-five years old, but still in very good health. In the sixties he had made a fantastic speech to the President of Brazil, João Goulart when he visited Angicos. We also met a forty-two year old woman, the daughter of a couple of illiterate workers who had followed the programme. As a child she used to come with her parents to the circle. There she learned how to read and write. She told us that when President Goulart visited Angicos he was so

impressed with her ability to read a newspaper that he promised her a gift. When asked what she would like to have, she said she wanted a school bag. She got it. More importantly, she became a teacher because of that experience. When asked by my wife what she would like to have now as another gift, she said: "Dignified treatment for teachers." What a fantastic demand! Of course, she did not learn that with the literacy process. She learned it through life, by living and by experiencing herself the lack of respect with which the politicians in Brazil and the State treat educators. It is a colonial tradition. Brazil in this aspect, and in some others, is still a colony.

Therefore I think I can say that, if it were not for the coup d'état, we would have had major success. Two main reasons permit me to say that. First, my work had been embedded in the theoretical foundations of psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics. These two fields of study are nowadays very much oriented by the writings of Vygotsky and Luria. I acknowledge also that most probably the recent contributions of sociolinguistics would perhaps make me review some of my previous experiences.

The second reason needs to be explained in the context of Brazil's political momentum. Brazil entered the fifties and sixties with a populist government. New power relations had been developed between the popular and the ruling classes. This populist political alliance is sometimes very interesting because it is ambiguous. The populist leader stimulates people to political participation and, simultaneously, sustains a political option to that of repression. This contradiction is well represented by the popular saying: to light a candle to God and another to the devil. The populist leader needs the support of the masses. Without the masses on the streets, for example, it would be impossible for the government to act along the lines of populism. Then what happens (and this is the main contradiction or ambiguity of the populist system)? The leader invites the people to the squares and to the streets because he or she needs the masses' participation. This becomes a practice. The masses learn how to come by themselves. In a given moment in the populist experience there are two options: one is to transform the populist experience into a revolutionary experience with the populist government being forced to commit suicide in order to be born again as a revolutionary one. This is very difficult. The other option is for the Right to seize power because of the political emptiness. In the sixties Brazil went through that experience with Goulart, a real populist leader, a greater leader than any among the right wing. Under Goulart there was mass participation in Brazilian political life. The masses could be seen in the streets; they could be heard using a different language.

I remember a very interesting event which illuminates well my point. Being Brazilian, I really enjoy football. My team in Recife was Santa Cruz, the

team of the masses. All its supporters were fanatic to the point of crying and tearing up their membership cards every time Santa Cruz lost a game. Once I was at the stadium, in the part favoured by the masses. I noticed nearby a very well dressed man, in a white suit, and a tie, very unusual. He was probably a supporter of Náutico, the opposite and aristocratic team. He was most certainly out of place in that part of the stadium. Santa Cruz was winning by three goals to nil. Suddenly, a young black and healthy Santa Cruz supporter, full of emotion and enthusiasm, looked at the Náutico group of supporters and addressed them in a very dirty language: "What a bunch of assholes!" The smart man reacted by taking out his membership card and saying arrogantly: "I do not permit such a language in my presence". The black youngster, with no hesitation, stood up and replied, looking first at his friend and then at the arrogant man: "That chap is completely mad. Look, you had better put your card back in your pocket. Otherwise I will take it, tear it up, and beat you up". This was said in incorrect syntax, but full of rhythm. I enjoyed the dialogue very much and the prompt counter-reaction of the elegant man: he put his card back in his pocket and left. This would never have happened fifty years earlier. In the early sixties it was completely viable. The coup d'état destroyed all that. After 1964 the dominant-dominated relationship was once again enforced. The open and primitive patterns of oppression that followed the coup d'état reached all social strata. My liberating theory was no exception. Thank you.

NOTES

1. Editorial Note: Gunther Kress, in his discussion during the Seminar, used examples from the *folha de São Paulo*, among other papers.
2. Editorial Note: Calazans Fernandes and Antonia Terra published recently a detailed account of the Angicos' experience, considered "the first experience, in Brazil . . . introducing the concept of dialogical learning in the teacher-student relationship." For further information, see: Fernandes, C. & Terra, A. *40 horas de esperança - o método Paulo Freire: política e pedagogia na experiência de Angicos* [40 hours of hope - Paulo Freire's method: politics and pedagogy in the Angicos' experience]. São Paulo: Ática, 1994.

Some Issues: Neutrality, Respect for the Students, Epistemological Curiosity, and International Financial Aid ¹

Paulo Freire

1. NEUTRALITY

I repeat now that there is no neutral education. Not only for me. For you also. For everyone. It is important to think about the ethical and political consequences of the impossibility of the educational practice being neutral. Non-neutrality does not depend only on you or on me; it comes from the nature of the process. I would say it is ontological. It belongs to the nature of education. You raised the issue when you asked the question earlier. You said that if there is no neutral education who then establishes the ends, the objectives, the dreams? It is a very good question. I have a strong empathy with this ethical question. For me, what the real democratic teacher has to do is, first, make clear to the students of the impossibility of neutral education.

Second, I am convinced that dreaming is part of my ontology. In my point of view, philosophically speaking, it is impossible for one to be a human being without dreams. Dream is not a figure of speech such as a noun or an adverb or even an adjective in my existence. Human existence substantively demands dreams. There are lots of explanations for that, but I do not wish to use too much time in this issue. In spite of their individual nature, dreams are also historical and social. We produce dreams and we are produced by dreams in history. Then, the teacher would, as much as possible, make clear to the students that human existence implies the production of dreams which end up by producing human existence, and in this human existence, the conflicts, the choices, and the decisions – all these things are enveloped in and are enveloping my human and social existence.

Third, a good teacher who has a very solid and ethical posture has to proclaim to the students that she or he also dreams and what her or his dreams are about. I do not accept this kind of "neutered" teacher who hides her or his dreams because she or he is afraid of not respecting the students. No, I do not disrespect the students if I tell them the kinds of dream I dream: my utopia. I would disrespect the students if I try to impose on them, surreptitiously or clearly, my dream. Suppose, for example, that if you do not think like me, then I will not give you the grade you need to pass. This would be immoral. The teacher may well speak about her or his dream explaining that there are other dreams different from hers or his. But as a teacher I have the duty to fight in order to defend my dream. That is my presence in the world and means for me a permanent struggle in order to materialize my dream. My dream is not just to read books about the issues I love. I need to study, I need to read, and I need to become more and more competent. This is also my duty. It does not matter if I am reactionary or if I am progressive. What is important for the students is to know what is the choice. I think that one of the most important things for a teacher is to make her or his choice clear. It is equally important to make clear the duty and right she or he has to fight for this choice. The problem the teacher faces is how to be really careful not to impose her or his choice on the students who, in turn, must be the subjects of their own choice. I should make clear what my political choice is. I should also make clear to the students that I will try to convince them about my choice. Because of that I think that teaching is also an act of conversion. How is it possible for me to believe in some ideas and not to try to convince people that I am right? I could not teach.

The issue in teaching is not only to say that education cannot be neutral. This is a statement which I can prove scientifically, philosophically, epistemologically. But, this is not fundamental. For me this is only a starting point. What is fundamental for me is to defend my democratic position, and not only the right I have to eat well. I have to have indignation because in my country, Brazil, there are 32 million people in extreme poverty. I cannot sleep well if I do not say at least once a day that it is immoral. This is absolutely immoral. This is real pornography.

2. ON HOW TO RESPECT THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDENTS AND TO BE EFFICIENT

This morning when I spoke about the qualities of the progressive teacher, I thought it was implicit in my speech that those qualities are not received as a gift nor do they exist outside of history, outside of context. The context of the

school has to do with the context of the region, has to do with the context of the country, has to do with the context of the continent. What I want to say is that there is no history just inside the minds of the human beings. History is something concrete which make us while we are making it. I also spoke about the concepts of the democratic relationship between the teacher and the students.

I will tell you now a very interesting story. I personally lived at Harvard University and also at the University of Geneva. I remember Harvard, in 1969 (and it is not much more different today), I wrote two texts. In one I tried to make clear to the students what the act of reading and the act of studying meant for me. I remember being very careful – I did not want to give to the students as readers the impression that I did not believe in them as readers. I also gave some suggestions about reading: how to read a text, how to use the instruments without which we cannot read very well². I wrote this paper and I wrote another one which I named 'draft programme' in which I said that the draft programme was to be discussed by all of us. Through our discussion we could then organize, create, and produce a new programme of activities. The programme belonged to us and not only to me. I have the right to make the programme and traditionally the teacher is the only one able to do that. But this is not fully true. We teachers have to work with the students. Then, in our first session I spoke to the students about my experience in Northeast Brazil, about my exile which was just beginning, about my reactions, and the cultural differences I was experiencing in the States, and those I had experienced in Chile. The following day we all agreed to discuss the draft programme and the paper on reading. I used to smoke a lot at that time. I smoked maybe three cigarettes in silence, absolute silence, the students over there and myself here, I am very patient and I kept on smoking and smoking. We were even able to hear the silence. How very uncomfortable it is when you can hear the silence! Then one of the students said: "Dr. Freire, I think I speak on behalf of my colleagues." The colleagues became very happy to having someone as a spokesman. He went on saying: "We found your text about reading very good. We think your draft programme should be the adopted programme."

Do you know what I did? This is the reaction of those who would like to continue to obey without struggling, without thinking, without discussing, without participating. There were two possibilities to make a tremendous mistake – politically, philosophically, and pedagogically speaking. The first possible mistake would have been to tell to the students that they were incapable, and lazy people, and that I was not going to work with them. The second possible mistake would have been to accept happily their conclusion and go home full of pride because the students of Harvard considered my draft programme an excellent programme. However I could not accept that. I told them that we

were going to start discussing the first issue suggested on the programme immediately. I would speak for ten minutes. Afterwards, they would discuss what I had said. I started my short talk by challenging the students. Two months later we had finished the programme, working with questions and through challenges. I remember well that first day in Harvard. When I asked one of the students why he was asking me a question and what he was thinking of understanding in having asking this question, he did not know the answer. He did not know why he was asking the question. He did not know what he would like to know by asking the question. I explained that I could only ask a question if I knew the kind of knowledge I was lacking, and what I needed to become knowledgeable about the topic. That is the only reason for asking a question.

That experience with the students in Harvard was very interesting for me. I learned at that time that asking questions is a kind of pact between teachers and students. The students ask questions and teachers go home very happy because they can say that the students are alive in class. For me this is not enough. I do not want to know that the students are alive. I want to know that they are alive because they want to know something. I remember a similar situation in Geneva where I learnt a great deal from one of the students. We had a session to evaluate what we had done during the semester. One student said very bluntly: "Paulo, you made a mistake in the first seminar. You did not wait for us to 'kill' you as a centralizer of power. You committed suicide in our presence. We were hoping to accept in time your 'death' as an authoritarian teacher. You should have remained alive so we could have 'killed' you."

This rather interesting observation shows us the need to act according to the situation of the students, the atmosphere of the country, the educational background of the students at home, and the tradition of the country. As teachers, sometimes we need to start a course by demonstrating our power. However, when during the course the power relations are re-balanced, we should never deny our authority. We should start by giving examples of what it means to be a democratic authority in the classroom, what it means to be an authoritarian authority. We must in many ways respect the context of the students in order to be efficient, and to help in the realization of our dreams. By doing so we are also able to demonstrate the impossibility of being neutral.

3. EPISTEMOLOGICAL CURIOSITY

As human beings, we should be absolutely aware that we have to face antagonisms. History is this. I remember in the seventies, some months after the publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, I received a letter from a young

man from an Asian country. The letter read something like this: "Paulo Freire, I got the English translation of your book which I found very exciting. I invited a group of colleagues who are secondary school teachers to study your book. Immediately we started using your ideas. Soon afterwards we lost our jobs." I wrote back to him and I said that I had lost my job before having written the book. Therefore there is no neutrality in the world, and not only in education. I always say I cannot be neutral even when I say: Good morning! It depends on my intonation, and on my body movements. As teachers, we are inviting and challenging the students to be real human beings.

What is really to be a human being? Of course, there are lots of signs which tell us what a human being is about. When intellectually we ask ourselves which is the major characteristic that permits us to understand that we are human beings, we are then talking about epistemological curiosity. What is then epistemological curiosity? First I would like to point out that epistemological curiosity is an invention of human beings. As human beings, like any other animal, we are curious by nature. We are permanently aware of something around us. We are always in a state of constant desire to know about even the smallest things surrounding us i.e. a sudden noise. We turn around to understand what is happening. This is a simple and naive curiosity. But, when I speak about epistemological curiosity I am not referring to our natural pre-disposition towards the unknown. Epistemological curiosity is another kind of curiosity which is precisely that curiosity in which we have methodically organized spontaneous curiosity. What I want to say is that from that spontaneous curiosity I am able to build up another kind of curiosity which has a certain level of methodological rigour. Therefore I make it possible for the naive curiosity to become a serious and rigorous curiosity which methodically goes towards the object I have vis-à-vis myself and which I want to know. This epistemological curiosity explains the existence of science. The other (naive) curiosity stays at the level of common sense.

I am not saying here that we should be against common sense. On the contrary, we should respect it, and by respecting it, start from it to reach another degree of knowledge. This is what science does. Scientific discoveries are sometimes a result of mistakes. One of our tasks should be to de-mystify science. Positivism greatly emphasized one of the mistakes of science i.e. the belief in being certain. One of the characteristics of the postmodernism is not to be too certain. This is epistemological curiosity. It is through this kind of curiosity that we can approach the world, and ourselves. We ourselves are objects of our knowledge, and of our act of knowing. This also makes me a human being.

Suppose you are teaching economics. If you do not consider your students as human beings capable of using epistemological curiosity, there is no sense

in your teaching. What you are doing is merely providing superimpositions of knowledge. What you have to do as a teacher is not to impose on the passive body of the student your package of knowledge. On the contrary, what you have to do is to challenge the epistemological curiosity of the student. This is to challenge, first of all, the body of the student in order for the body to organize her or his own epistemological curiosity. We are doing the opposite at the universities. We are covering the epistemological curiosity with a veil instead of unveiling knowledge. We do not improve epistemological curiosity. Even when reading books what we try to do is to memorize them and not to know the context of the book. The content of books can only become knowledge through epistemological curiosity. Nevertheless, to the extent that we begin to ask questions to provoke the epistemological curiosity of the students, without which it is not possible to know, their curiosity becomes more curious. The more curiosity is curious the more the rigidity of power is threatened. This is why under some political regimes we cannot ask questions precisely because to ask questions is to challenge.

I remember when I arrived in Geneva in the seventies and participated in a meeting with Christian ladies. A fantastic story was told. They said they were working in Geneva with immigrant children of Portuguese, Italian, and Spanish workers. They were teaching sexuality to those adolescent immigrants. One of the women said in her speech that the group was trying to get some financial help for the programme. They went to see some industrialists to whom they spoke about the experience. One of them agreed to give a large quantity of Swiss francs. Two months later this man received the ladies to report back on the programme. One of the ladies spoke very happily because she was totally convinced about the good results of the project. She pointed out how the teenagers were asking questions about sexuality, with no fear or inhibition. At the end, the industrialist said that he was immediately withdrawing any further help. The ladies were astonished. The industrialist went on to explain the reason for his decision: "If today, in the discussions about sexuality with these adolescents, they feel so free to ask questions, I wonder what kinds of question they will be asking when the issue is on social justice. I want workers who are well behaved, who are docile, and who do not ask questions". This is a good example of domination, of power.

Finally, because this issue is of an ethical nature, I wonder if we have the right to work against us. When we lose our job it is as if we are fighting against us. But it also depends on the understanding we have of what it means to work in favour of us. In my opinion, losing my job does not always mean that I am working against me. Working against me always means to work against others. I would rather die. I prefer not to live if I say, for example, that it is decent and

beautiful that 32 million Brazilians are prevented from eating. This is neither beautiful nor decent. It is immoral. It is an absurdity. It is a crime. What we have to do is to invite the students not to be silent vis-à-vis this immorality.

I defend in Brazil a kind of pedagogy I call 'pedagogy of the indignation'. This is the only way that can explain my presence in the world. It does not mean however that I am crazy. I have to have tactics to get and keep a job. It is necessary that the teacher knows, for example, to remain silent on Monday, and to speak out on the following Monday. We teachers must know also the context in which we are working to be able to perform the great job we have. The great job is to be in the world in order to do something positively for the transformation of the world.

4. INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL AID

When I was Secretary of Education of the City of São Paulo, I was asked to receive a mission from the World Bank/Washington. In the meeting, to which I had also invited my assistants, the President of the mission said the purpose of their visit was to offer 50 million dollars to be spent in our programmes. I was puzzled because I had not asked for any loan. The offer was tied to some conditions. For example: I could use the 50 million dollars only in kindergarten schools. Secondly, the teachers should not necessarily have pedagogical training (he spoke about 'democracy' in the teaching process). I would have to give the 50 million dollars to private institutions which would not be responsible for paying back the loan. I would have to. There were other requirements but I discussed only these three. I then asked them one question: "Let us forget now the Bank and the Secretary of Education of São Paulo. Let us think of ourselves. Suppose that you ask me for three thousand dollars. I have just that to lend to you. But I will do that with some conditions. For example, I give you three thousand dollars but you have to buy fifty bits of underwear made in Recife; one hundred fifty pairs of shoes produced in Timbaúba (a town in Pernambuco, famous for its shoes); and ties made in São Paulo. Would you accept that?" They said they would not. I then said: "What makes you think that I would accept your offer? Who do think I am? A Brazilian who becomes Secretary of Education to betray his people? No. It would be better if our discussion finishes here. It is not possible for us to receive your money. I do not need your money. There is another reason why I say no to you. I will not help Brazil to increase its debt. I know what it means in monthly interest to pay back a large loan." I was asked another question which I thought was offensive: "If the Mayor, Luiza Erundina (a fantastic woman), accepts our offer, what would then happen?" I

replied: "I will resign as Secretary and I will denounce her to the press. This is how I am, and I have nothing to do with your dreams." When I was asked about my conditions for accepting the money, my answer was: "You give us 50,000,000 dollars, and never ask anything about it. I will do what I think best with the money. The people of São Paulo will see the results of how the money is spent. I can never agree to paying it back to you. Thank you." The following day I went to the office of Mayor Erundina and I told her all about the meeting. Smiling, she said she had appointed me Secretary of Education because she was sure of my attitudes in situations like that one.

I do not want to give the impression to all of you that I am a sectarian person. No, I am not. I have written a lot of pages against sectarianism. I am radical. Yes, I am a radical man. I go deep. I think we have to talk with different people, including our opponents. I am always open to discussion. But, if we need money to implement educational projects and programmes, we must be the owners of the destiny of the money. No country or international agencies can ever impose conditions on anyone, on any country.

NOTES

1. These issues were raised by the audience in different moments of the Seminar.
2. For some scholars, consulting dictionaries or encyclopedias is a waste of time. For me, the use of these instruments is part of my reading and writing. I write for example three or four hours each day in my house and I consult dictionaries, encyclopedias, dictionaries of philosophy, of sociology, and of ideas. Sometimes I spend one in every four hours a day consulting dictionaries. I look for the meaning of words, for synonyms and antonyms. It is my work, my job and I cannot read without this exercise.