
First Words

A Pedagogical Trap



I HAVE JUST FINISHED READING THE GALLEYS, hot off the press, before the final printing hits the bookstores, of my book *Pedagogy of Hope: A Re-Encounter with Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which was first written in Portuguese and published by Paz e Terra in December 1992.

The title *Pedagogy of Hope* was not planned, as is sometimes the case when we write books. The title came about from discussions with friends, among them Werner Linz, the North American editor of *Pedagogy of Hope*, concerning the dynamic that takes place when the writing of a text shapes the thinking of the author. In this case, the seeds of *Pedagogy of Hope* were planted during my thinking about the major themes I elaborated in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The truth is that writing is not a mere mechanical act preceded by a greater, much more important act: the act of thinking in an organized manner about a specific object, a process through which the thinking subject begins to understand more profoundly the object of his or her thinking, a process that will inevitably lead him or her to learn about the *raison d'être* of the object of his or her thinking. This process leads the author to know the object more intimately. From this point on, then, the author, purely mechanically, writes about what he or she knows concerning the object of his or her prior thinking. No! This is not exactly how these things take place. At this very moment, even as I am writing about this process—in other words, about the relationship between thinking, doing, writing, reading, thought, language, and reality—I experience the solidarity among these diverse moments that makes it impossible to separate and dichotomize them.

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This does not mean that after thinking or while I think I should automatically write; it does mean, however, that while I think I consciously and expressively remain aware of the possibility of writing and that, in

the same manner, while writing I continue to think and rethink what I had already thought before.

One of the violences perpetrated by illiteracy is the suffocation of the consciousness and the expressiveness of men and women who are forbidden from reading and writing, thus limiting their capacity to write about their reading of the world so they can rethink about their original reading of it.

Even if illiteracy does not wipe out the socially created relationships between language, thought, and reality, it is a handicap that becomes an obstacle to achieving full citizenship.

Illiteracy is a handicap to the extent that in literate cultures it interdicts the illiterates by preventing them from completing the cycle in the relationship between language, thought, and reality and by closing the doors to writing, which represents an important and necessary means of understanding that relationship. We must remember that there is a dynamic movement between thought, language, and reality that, if well understood, results in a greater creative capacity. The more we experience the dynamics of such movement, the more we become critical subjects concerning the process of knowing, teaching, learning, reading, writing, and studying.

In the end, and in its more profound reading, to study involves the establishment of linkages among these relationships. It is important that I make it clear, even if I repeat myself a little, that the writing process that brings me to my desk—with my special pen, with my sheets of blank, unlined white paper (which is a precondition for me to write)—begins before I even reach my desk; it begins when I act or practice or when I fully engage in reflection concerning the object of knowledge. The writing process continues when I put down on paper, in the best way that I can, the provisional results (and they are always provisory) of my reflections. I continue to reflect while writing, thus engaging more deeply another issue that I had not taken too seriously in my earlier reflections about the object under study or about my practice.

That is why it is not possible to reduce writing to a mere mechanical act. The writing act is much more complex, and it requires more than thinking without writing.

In fact, my initial intention was to write a preface or a new introduction to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in which I would rethink some of my positions by revising some of its central themes and also by addressing some of the criticism this book received and continues to receive. And it was through the process of throwing myself into this effort for months that what should have been an introduction became a new book, *Pedagogy of Hope*, almost taking the form of memories of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

writing
as studying

Similarly, even though I am still immersed in *Pedagogy of Hope*, filled with the hope that I wrote it feeling challenged by the many themes that still remain open to new reflections, I now throw myself into a new experience, just as challenging and just as fascinating: that of dealing with a theme that must be denuded to be made clearer. This does not mean, however, that as the active agent of the denuding process I have the last word regarding the truth concerning the themes under discussion.

The title *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach* presents us with an announcement that requires a first effort if it is to be understood. In other words, we must make an effort to understand as fully as we can, an effort not simply to understand the reading of each of the constituent words of the title but to comprehend more deeply the force of reading that each individual word requires when it is inserted in a web of relationships.

The synthetic or simplified discourse, which is somewhat communicative, could be expanded as follows: My intention here is to demonstrate that the task of the teacher, who is also a learner, is both joyful and rigorous. It demands seriousness and scientific, physical, emotional, and affective preparation. It is a task that requires that those who commit themselves to teaching develop a certain love not only of others but also of the very process implied in teaching. It is impossible to teach without the courage to love, without the courage to try a thousand times before giving up. In short, it is impossible to teach without a forged, invented, and well-thought-out capacity to love. Here is how we make the link to the subtitle, *Letters to Those Who Dare Teach*. We must dare, in the full sense of the word, to speak of love without the fear of being called ridiculous, mawkish, or unscientific, if not antiscientific. We must dare in order to say scientifically, and not as mere blah-blah-blah, that we study, we learn, we teach, we know with our entire body. We do all of these things with feeling, with emotion, with wishes, with fear, with doubts, with passion, and also with critical reasoning. However, we never study, learn, teach, or know with the last only. We must dare so as never to dichotomize cognition and emotion. We must dare so that we can continue to teach for a long time under conditions that we know well: low salaries, lack of respect, and the ever-present risk of becoming prey to cynicism. We must dare to learn how to dare in order to say no to the bureaucratization of the mind to which we are exposed every day. We must dare so that we can continue to do so even when it is so much more materially advantageous to stop daring.

None of this, however, should turn the task of teaching into a form of paternalistic coddling that leads to *laissez-faire* and accommodation because, in our exemplary mission as caring teachers, we cannot reconcile a nurturing posture with acts of rebellion, with protest, or with

strikes by teachers, just to mention a few examples. The teaching task is above all a professional task that requires constant intellectual rigor and the stimulation of epistemological curiosity, of the capacity to love, of creativity, of scientific competence and the rejection of scientific reductionism. The teaching task also requires the capacity to fight for freedom, without which the teaching task becomes meaningless.

What seems to me to be necessary in any attempt to understand the title *Teaching as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach* is that though one should never oppose the nurturing aspect of teaching, one should never reduce teaching to merely a feel-good process, particularly to a paternalistic nurturing that takes the form of parental coddling. Teachers can have children and can therefore be parents. In the same manner, a parent can be a teacher, which means working with students. This does not, however, mean that the task of teaching transforms a teacher into his or her students' parent, nor does being a parent imply that one is automatically a teacher of his or her own children. Teaching is a profession (not the technical meaning of professionalization) that involves a specific task, a specific militancy (in the sense of advocating for students), and specific requirements for its implementation. Being a parent involves mostly the relationship of experiencing parenting. Being a teacher implies the responsibility to assume the demands of a profession, whereas parenting should not be viewed as a profession. In other words, what I am trying to make clear is the tendency in Brazil in the last three decades to reduce the role of teachers (particularly women) to a parenting role that devalues teaching—which, by its very nature, involves rigorous intellectual pursuits—by holding teachers responsible for assuaging all the ills of society, particularly the cruel and unjust presence of human misery that directly affects in multiple ways the students they teach.

The problems of teaching imply educating and, furthermore, educating involves a passion to know that should engage us in a loving search for knowledge that is—to say the least—not an easy task. It is for this reason that I stress that those wanting to teach must be able to dare, that is, to have the predisposition to fight for justice and to be lucid in defense of the need to create conditions conducive to pedagogy in schools; though this may be a joyful task, it must also be intellectually rigorous. The two should never be viewed as mutually exclusive.¹

Refusing to identify the role of teaching with that of parenting does not in any way diminish or devalue the role of parenting. By the same token, accepting the reduction of teaching to mere parenting does not translate automatically into the valorization of teachers. It does, however, in the Brazilian context, take away certain professional responsibilities of teachers: the responsibility to be permanently engaged in a pro-

fessional development that points to the realization of a political project. In the Brazilian context, this political project is undermined when teachers are reduced to a merely parental role. For example, how can parents go on strike against parenting their children? Thus the dominant ideology in Brazil, by equating teaching with mothering (which also carries low cultural currency in Brazilian society), makes it impossible for teachers to dare to go on strike to remedy the unjust conditions under which they work and through which their students are being denied their rights as citizens to the best possible education.

In my view, the refusal to identify teaching with parenting is informed, above all, by two main considerations: On the one hand, such a refusal prevents the distorted comprehension of the task of teaching, and on the other hand, it makes it easier to unveil the ideological fog that deceitfully covers the intimacy of the false identification. The identification of teaching with parenting that has been emphasized throughout the country, particularly in private schools, is tantamount to declaring that teachers, as good parents, should never go on strike. One has never seen a thousand mothers and fathers go on strike in order to better their children's development. It is this ideology that takes away from teachers the necessary ability to protest in favor of their students by demanding better working conditions from school administrators and politicians. This ideology has enabled a great number of parents, particularly from the ruling class, to prevent teachers from exercising their duty to protest unacceptable working conditions. The same ideology also works to prevent, let us say, teachers from striking to protest the miserable working conditions in many public schools.

I still vividly remember how the former president of the association of public school teachers in the state of São Paulo, Professor Gumercindo Milhomem, responded when, some years ago, the families of students in the statewide public schools criticized teachers for striking. These families accused teachers of hurting their children by failing to meet their professional responsibilities and their duty to teach. Milhomem responded by pointing out to the families the error of their accusation: He reiterated that the striking teachers were in fact teaching their students an important lesson by giving them concrete testimony of the substantive meaning of struggle and other lessons in democracy.

I hold that these lessons were and are still needed in our country.

It is also important to make it clear that in talking about the ideological fog, I did not in any way mean that ruling-class parents had conspired to undermine the resistance of a sector of the working class. Nor did ruling-class parents meet secretly to obfuscate reality by creating the concept "school dropout" or by using the preposition "out" in proclaiming that "there are eight million Brazilian children out of school." The

use of linguistic manipulations to hide a particular ideology does not necessarily mean that the dominant class schemed to develop discourses disguising concrete situations that in reality either push students out of school or prevent them from going to school. In reality, we do not have children who drop out of school for no reason at all, as if they just decide not to stay. What we do have are conditions in schools that either prevent them from coming to school or prevent them from staying in school. The same ideology that leads to language manipulation attempts to reduce teachers to mere coddlers.

However, even if the ideological fog has not been deliberately constructed and programmed by the dominant class, its power to obfuscate reality undeniably serves the interests of the dominant class. The dominant ideology veils reality; it makes us myopic and prevents us from seeing reality clearly.

The power of the dominant ideology is always domesticating, and when we are touched and deformed by it we become ambiguous and indecisive.² It is easy to understand an observation that a young teacher from the São Paulo school system made during a conversation with me: "How can we expect teachers to abandon their position as unreflective and uncritical coddlers and assume their role as teachers? [A teacher's] fear of freedom leads to a false sense of security in schools informed by a paternalistic nurturing, something that cannot exist if he or she takes on the full responsibility of a teacher."

In the ideal situation, no matter how progressive or reactionary a school administration may be, the teachers always define themselves as such. The sad reality is that they oscillate between being paternalistically well-behaved nurturers under authoritarian administrations and rebellious teachers under democratic school administrations. My hope is that by freely experimenting in open administrations teachers will maintain their commitment to freedom and their desire to create, as they must if they are going to fully assume their role as teachers, as professionals with the duty to set an example for their students and their students' families in rejecting, with dignity and energy, the arrogance and absolute will of some so-called modern administrators. But their duty to reject absolute power and authoritarianism in whatever form they take should not be done in isolation in the name of Maria, Ana, Rosália, António, or José.

This position, through which the teacher becomes a role model setting forth the values of democracy, raises three basic requirements:

1. The project of democracy must never be transformed into or understood as a singular and individual struggle, even, as often

happens, in the face of cheap persecution against this or that teacher for reasons that are purely personal.

2. Furthermore, teachers should always stick together as they challenge the system so that their struggle is effective.
3. Just as important as the first two requirements is that teachers exercise their right to demand and fight for permanent and ongoing teacher preparation—a preparation that is based in the experience of living the dialectical tensions between theory and practice. Teachers must think about practice in terms of developing more effective means of practice, must think about practice and begin to recognize the theory inherent in it, must evaluate practice as a means of theoretical development and not merely as an instrument to punish teachers.

The evaluation of teachers' practice is necessary for a number of reasons. The first is part of the very nature of practice: All practice presents to its subjects, on the one hand, a program of action and, on the other, a continuous evaluation of the program's objectives.

However, to program and to evaluate do not represent two separate activities, one preceding the other. They represent activities that are in a permanent relationship.

The initial development of a program of study that leads to practice is sometimes changed according to insights gained from the evaluation that the practice has undergone. To evaluate almost always implies readjusting and reprogramming. For this very reason, an evaluation should never be considered the final step of a particular practice.

The second reason evaluation of practice is necessary is that the educators responsible for a program of study need to know, at each step of the way, how well they are achieving their objectives. In the end, evaluation is a process through which practice takes us to the concretization of the dream that we are implementing.

In this sense, the evaluation of practice represents an important and indispensable factor in the preparation of educators. Unfortunately, we almost always evaluate the teacher personally instead of his or her practice. We evaluate to punish and almost never to improve teachers' practice. In other words, we evaluate to punish and not to educate.

Another mistake we often make—due possibly to our loss of focus—is to evaluate students not to enhance our practice but to punish them. This is evident in our preoccupation regarding the context of our practice and our related objectives. On the other hand, this mistake manifests itself in the fact that we almost always defer our evaluation to the end of the teaching process. It seems that a good beginning for a good

practice would be to evaluate the context within which the practice takes place, which means recognizing what is taking place in the context, as well as how and why it is taking place.

In this way, the critical thinking about the context, which implies its evaluation, precedes the very planning of the educational intervention that we and those we work with hope to implement in a particular context.

Even though she has criticized some aspects of such programs, Professor Madalena Freire Weffort has defended teacher-preparation groups in which teachers, directors, pedagogical coordinators, cafeteria workers, school guards, janitors, and parents participate. These groups follow the model that we developed while I was secretary of education for the city of São Paulo under the administration of Mayor Luíza Erundina. Our model differed radically from the so-called vacation courses in the traditional in-service teacher training in which the scientific preparation of those invited to teach or to give conferences did not really matter much. In general, in this context the teachers receiving training expose themselves, whether they are curious or not, to discourses by those who have been chosen as experts. This type of discourse almost always fails for a number of reasons that we know too well.

Prepackaged Teacher Education

We must scream loudly that, in addition to the activism of unions, the scientific preparation of teachers, a preparation informed by political clarity, by the capacity of teachers, by the teachers' desire to learn, and by their constant and open curiosity, represents the best political tool in the defense of their interests and their rights. These ingredients represent, in truth, real teacher empowerment. Empowerment includes, for example, teachers' refusal to blindly follow prepackaged educational materials produced by some experts in their offices to unequivocally demonstrate their authoritarianism. The development of the so-called teacher-proof materials is a continuation of experts' authoritarianism, of their total lack of faith in the possibility that teachers can know and can also create.

What is ironic in all of this is that sometimes these experts, who overload their teaching packages with detail, even explicitly promote their materials by stating that one of the main objectives of their teaching packages (though they don't call their materials "packages") is to train prospective teachers to become critical, daring, and creative. And the parody of such an expectation lies precisely in the shocking contradiction between the expressed aim and the teachers' passive behavior, enslaved by the packages themselves, domesticated by the teachers'

guides, limited in their adventure to create. Their autonomy and the autonomy of their schools are restrained from producing what the prepackaged practice promises: children who enjoy freedom, who are critical and creative.

I believe that one of the tactical paths that competent and politically clear teachers must follow is to critically reject their domesticating role; in so doing, they affirm themselves professionally as teachers by demythologizing the authoritarianism of the teaching packages and their administration in the intimacy of their world, which is also the world of their students. In their classrooms, with the doors closed, it is difficult to have their world unveiled.

It is for this very reason that authoritarian administrations, even those that call themselves progressives, try through various means to instill in teachers a fear of freedom. When teachers become fearful, they begin to internalize the dominator's shadow and the authoritarian ideology of the administration. These teachers are no longer alone with their students because the force of the punitive and threatening dominant ideology comes between them.

This is the least expensive form of control, and in a way it is also the most insidious. But there is another means of control that is linked to technology. From his or her office, the school principal can control by watching or listening to what teachers do in the intimacy of their classroom.

Teachers know that the principal cannot check on twenty, fifty, two hundred teachers at the same time, but they also know that at any given moment they might be watched. Thus, inhibitions arise. In these situations, teachers become what Ana Maria Freire³ calls "interdicted bodies." In other words, they are forbidden to be.

This type of teaching and learning must be well supported technically, and it has to be carefully guarded against any type of political teaching and learning so that schools remain the dreams of those who intend to preserve the status quo.

Treating schools as nonneutral spaces does not mean turning them into a political base for the party in power. However, it is impossible to deny that the political party running the government must have a pedagogical position that is consistent with its political options, its ideological characteristics, and its governmental practices. Either these political preferences are recognizable, or they are laid bare through the government's political choices. They are explicit in the electoral campaign phase; they are revealed in governmental plans and in budget proposals, which are also political and not merely technical tools.

They manifest themselves in the fundamental goals for education, health, culture, and social programs; they are recognizable in the poli-

tics of taxation, in the desire or lack thereof to change the politics of public expenditures, in the joy with which the administration prioritizes the beautification of affluent neighborhoods while abandoning the ghetto areas to decay.

In particular, how can one expect a government that makes its elitism and authoritarianism manifest to consider in its politics the autonomy of schools?

Perhaps this contradiction could be done under the rubric of post-modern liberalism. How can an authoritarian government allow janitors, cooks, administrators, students, and parents to really participate in schools as part of a large community? How can one expect an authoritarian administration to govern collaboratively, to experience the good and the bad of a democratic venture?

How can one expect authoritarians to accept the challenge of learning with and from others, to tolerate difference, to accept living in the permanent tension between patience and impatience; how can one expect them not to be sure that they are right about certainties? Sectarian authoritarians live in a closed circle of their own thoughts, a circle in which they never allow doubt concerning the truth, much less its rejection. An authoritarian administration runs away from democracy like a devil from the cross.

Solidarity between a school's administration and its teachers, students, janitors, parents, and other members, a solidarity whose need we have been talking about among ourselves, would fully exist if the administration of public affairs were not truly involved with dreams and with the struggle to materialize those dreams, if the administration of a city, a state, a country were neutral. But even if all aspects of the administration of public affairs could be reduced to a purely technical task, this task could still never be neutral. And this reduction to the merely technical does not exist.

I see two central aspects in this discussion. On the one hand, we still lack a critical understanding of government, political parties, politics, and ideology. It is widely believed, for example, that administration depends entirely on the person elected to head the executive branch. Everything is expected of him or her for the first week in office. There is no understanding of government as a totality.

Recently a friend told me she had been told by her hairdresser, a regular patron of the Municipal Theater, that for years he had been convinced that there could hardly have been anyone in charge of the city's Department of Culture since its creation who was more competent and critically committed to it than was Marilena Chaui. "I didn't vote for Suplicy, however," said my friend's hairdresser, "because Erundina, just as PT⁴ as she is, did not undertake any major projects." To this man, a lover

of the arts, dance, music, and culture, none of what had been achieved by the Department of Culture had anything to do with Erundina; and furthermore, none of it could be listed under *major projects*.

"When we took over the city's Department of Education," recently declared the then secretary Mário Cortela (I was witness to this fact), "63 percent of its schools had deteriorated, some were actually condemned. We now leave the department with 67 percent of its schools in excellent condition."

Only overpasses, tunnels, and landscaped squares in the fortunate sections of the city would qualify as major projects.

The second aspect I would like to focus on here is the responsibility of citizenship. We will only come to terms with this problem through a critical awareness of our social and political responsibility as a civil society, a responsibility not to take over the state's role, letting it sleep undisturbed, but to learn to mobilize and organize so that we can better supervise the state as it fulfills or fails to fulfill its constitutional duty. Only this way will we be able to move toward a broad dialogue, at the center of society, bringing together its legitimate representatives and political parties, both conservative and progressive, in order to set limits compatible with the different interests of society's various segments, that is, limits to which these different political-ideological forces could accommodate to bring about continuity in public administration.

It seems lamentable to me that material projects and social programs should be abandoned primarily or even exclusively because the new administrators have personal grudges against their predecessors and thus paralyze something of social significance.

On the other hand, I cannot see why, or how, an administration that takes office on the basis of progressive discourse and proposals should maintain, in the name of administrative continuity, programs that are undeniably elitist and authoritarian.

Neoliberal discourse sometimes criticizes progressive candidates and parties, accusing them of being obsolete because they are ideological; they say that the people no longer accept such discourse, that they now accept only technical and competent discourses. But there is no technical and competent discourse that is not naturally ideological as well.

As I see it, what the people refuse more and more, above all when it comes to progressive parties, is the parties' antihistorical insistence on behaving like Stalinists. Some progressive parties lose their sense of history and behave in a way reminiscent of traditional movements from the beginning of the century, threatening and suspending activists whose behavior does not please them. The leadership of such groups does not realize that they could not survive even if they were to keep themselves current, let alone if they stay traditionally arbitrary. History requires

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them to become postmodernly progressive. That is what the people expect; that is what voters, sensitive to and synchronized with history, dream of.

I believe that what the people reject is sectarian verbiage and aged slogans; it has not always been easy for us to realize that one cannot, in critical terms, expect a popular government from an authoritarian and elitist candidate or party. In seeking a greater understanding of what constitutes good or bad public spending policy, which is associated with the issue of what is or is not a major project, we are led into distortions. I do not believe we can overcome the causes of such distortions only by working through factual obstacles, by being more critically aware of objective data about reality. We have to work through ideological obstacles; if we do not, we cannot pave the way for a lucid realization, for example, that between me and the candidate I vote for there is much more than an affective relationship or one of gratitude. If I am thankful to a reactionary person, I can and should express my gratitude to him or her. But my gratitude cannot become involved in public interest. If my utopia, my dream, for which I fight side by side with so many others, is the antagonistic opposite of the reactionary candidate's dream, I cannot vote for him or her. My gratitude must not lead me to working against my dream, which is not exclusively mine. I do not have the right to expose that dream to *pay a debt* that is mine alone.

Voting for candidate A or B is not a matter of helping A or B become elected but, rather, of delegating to someone at a certain level of political power the possibility of fighting for a possible dream. Under no circumstances, then, can I or should I vote for someone who, if elected, will fight against my dream.

It is unbelievable that we continue to vote for progressive candidates to the executive branch but for reactionary ones to the legislature simply because they may have used their position to help us at some point.

Let us return for a moment to the understanding of what is considered a major project. This understanding is strongly marked by the dominant ideology. Just as only those who have power define or determine who does not, they also define what is in good taste, what is ethical, what is beautiful, and what is good. The popular classes, subordinate as they are, obviously internalize many of the dominant ideology's value criteria, just as they do the dominant ideology. However, we must recognize that this is a dialectic process, not a mechanical one. Thus the popular classes at times—especially when they find themselves experimenting with the struggle for their rights and interests—resist the dominant classes' attempt to subjugate them. Sometimes they remake the dominant ideology with their own elements. In any case, however, to many members of the popular classes major projects are those that are also

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deemed so by the dominant classes. Avenues, gardens, the beautification of what is already beautiful in the city, tunnels, and overpasses are projects that might undeniably be somewhat in the interest of the popular classes, given that the city is a whole, a totality. They do not, however, meet the primary needs of the popular classes, whereas they do meet those of the well-off classes.

I do not want to even suggest that a progressive, democratic, radical, but nonsectarian administration would stop responding to the challenges with which it struggles in the richer areas of the city solely because they *are* the problems of the rich. Rigorously speaking, the problems of the city are the city's problems: They do affect both the rich and the poor, although certainly in different ways. What is not acceptable is that a progressive administration should not feel compelled by a duty they may not decline to prioritize public spending as a function of the real, glaring, and often dramatic needs of exploited populations.

A serious, democratic, and progressive administration must not hesitate between, on the one hand, beautifying the already beautiful and allowing the rich to avoid paying taxes and, on the other, paving kilometers of streets in the dispossessed and ignored areas of the city, taking care of sanitation, building schools (with which we could reverse the quantitative deficit in our education, which is not observed in the *fortunate* sections of the country), providing enough and ever-better health care, multiplying the number of day care centers, or caring for the people's cultural expression.

I have tried to make clear my thesis that since the Right continues to exist, progressive or left political parties must not fall for the argument that ideologies are gone, and that from this starting point they must move to understanding the political struggle as a colorless, odorless dispute. It is a dispute in which only technical competence and competence in better communicating the government's aims and objectives really matter.

It is interesting to observe that the victorious candidate in a past São Paulo mayoral race insisted that he only proposed "issues of an *administrative* nature and not of a *political* or *ideological* one." And he did not do so without revealing his great effort in convincing himself that *administrative issues*, pure and chaste, untouched by the *ideological* and the *political*, are indeed neutral.

There has never been such a savvy administrator, one who could touch the world, interfere in it, with the justice of his or her technical knowledge, one so great and so pure as to be seductive. Such a person would have the power to abolish social classes; to ignore the fact that existential differences between the rich and the poor necessarily generate, in different people, different ways of being, different likes and dreams,

different cultures, and different ways of thinking, of acting, of valuing, of speaking; and to ignore the fact that all this has to do with political choices, with ideological paths.

The more the Left allows itself to dance to this tune, the less pedagogically it is acting and the less it contributes to the development of critical citizenship. Thus my insistence in repeating that the progressives make a mistake in not producing campaigns with ideological content. Such campaigns should be made better and better, making it clear to the popular classes that class differences (which they at the very least have a sensory knowledge of; it comes to them through their skins, their bodies, their souls) cannot be denied and that class differences have everything to do with political projects, with the aims of the government, and with its composition. They must understand that electoral discourse is one thing and that postelection reality is another. Fernando Affonso Collor de Mello called himself the candidate of the shirtless, and yet never have the shirtless among us been more naked and tragically lost than during the period of absurdity and lack of decorum that was his government.

The mistake of the Left has almost always been their absolute conviction of their certainties, which makes them sectarian, authoritarian, and *religious*. In their conviction that nothing outside of themselves made any sense, in their arrogance, in their unfriendliness toward democracy, the dominant classes had the best medium for implementing and maintaining their "dictatorship of class."

The mistake today, or rather the risk, is that, stunned by all that has happened since the changes in the former Soviet Union, the Left may either reactivate the fear of freedom, the aversion to democracy, or apathetically succumb to the myth of capitalist excellence, thus wrongly accepting that political campaigns are not ideological. There is yet another mistake or risk, that of believing in reactionary postmodernity, according to which the death of ideology has led to the disappearance of social classes, dreams, and utopias as well, making public administration purely a technical matter, detached from politics and ideology.

These mistakes are the only explanation for the fact that up until recently leftist activists would accept posts in governments that were contrary to their erstwhile convictions. If there are no longer social classes, if everything is more or less the same thing, if the world has gone opaque, the technical instruments with which such a world operates cannot be any less murky.

✓ That the dominant classes would disseminate the ideology of ideological death, whether believing or disbelieving it, seems like behavior typical of them.

That a person who was progressive yesterday should become reactionary today seems possible, if regrettable. What I cannot accept is for

this leap from one extreme to the other to be spoken of as if, because there are no more poles, no left, no right, one had simply walked or moved on the same plane, as if the move was technical, *odorless, colorless, tasteless*. No, not that!

Teaching Is Not Coddling

Why do I allow myself to detour from the basic issue of the role of teachers as teachers and not as coddling parents? It is exactly because this detour is purely fictitious.

The attempt to reduce teachers to the status of coddling parents represents an “innocent” ideological trap in that, under the illusion of softening teachers’ lives, what is in fact being attempted is to soften the teachers’ capacity to struggle or to keep them occupied in the implementation of their day-to-day tasks. For example, teachers’ capacity to struggle involves their capacity to challenge their students, from an early to a more adult age, through games, stories, and reading so that students understand the need to create coherence between discourse and practice: a discourse about the defense of the weak, of the poor, of the homeless, and a practice that favors the haves against the have-nots; a discourse that denies the existence of social classes, their conflicts, and a political practice entirely in favor of the powerful.

It does not seem right to me to defend or to simply accept as normal the profound difference that sometimes exists between a candidate’s preelection and postelection positions. It does not seem ethical to me to live this way or to defend this contradiction as acceptable behavior. It is not with these kinds of practices that we foster a vigilant citizenry, which is indispensable to the development of democracy.

Finally, the thesis that teachers should be teachers and not coddling parents points to the fact that we all have the privilege and the duty to fight for the right to be ourselves, to opt, to decide, and to unveil truths.

Thus a teacher is a teacher whereas a parent (coddling or not) remains a parent. It is possible to be a parent without loving one’s children, without even liking being a parent, but it is not possible to be a teacher without loving one’s students, even realizing that love alone is not enough. It is not possible to be a teacher without loving teaching. But it is easier, as a teacher, to say that one does not like to teach than, as a parent, to say that one does not like that role. Reducing teachers to the role of parents implies playing with parents’ inherent fear of rejecting their roles as such.

It is also possible to be a teacher without struggling for the rights that would enable one to carry out one’s duty as a teacher. But the reader of this book retains the right, in being a teacher or in pretending to be, to want to view his or her teaching role as a form of parental coddling.

NOTES

1. See the work of George Snyders, *La Joie à l'école* (Paris: PUF, 1986).
2. Anoréa Pellegrini Marques.
3. Ana Maria Freire, *Analfabetismo no Brasil: Da Ideologia da interdição do corpo a ideologia nacionalista ou de como deixar sem ler e escrever desde as catarinas (paraguaçu), filipas, madalenas, anas, genebras, apolonios e gracias até os severinos* (São Paulo: Cortez Editora, 1995).
4. PT stands for Partido Trabalhista, the Workers' Party.

First Letter

Reading the World/Reading the Word

NO TOPIC COULD BE A BETTER SUBJECT for this first letter to those who dare teach than the critical significance of teaching and the equally critical significance of learning. There is no *teaching* without *learning*, and by that I mean more than that the act of teaching demands the existence of those who teach and those who learn. What I mean is that teaching and learning take place in such a way that those who teach learn, on the one hand, because they recognize previously learned knowledge and, on the other, because by observing how the novice student's curiosity works to apprehend what is taught (without which one cannot learn), they help themselves to uncover uncertainties, rights, and wrongs.

The learning of those who teach does not necessarily take place through their apprentices' rectification of their mistakes. Their learning in their teaching is observed to the extent that, humble and open, teachers find themselves continually ready to rethink what has been thought and to revise their positions. Their learning lies in their seeking to become involved in their students' curiosity and in the paths and streams it takes them through. Some of the paths and streams that students' at times almost virgin curiosity runs through are pregnant with suggestions and questions never before noticed by teachers. But now, as they teach, not as *bureaucrats of the mind* but reconstituting the steps of their curiosity—the reason their conscious bodies, sensitive and touched, open up to the students' *guesses*, their innocence, and their discrimination—teachers who perform as such have a rich moment of learning in their teaching. Teachers first learn how to teach, but they learn how to teach as they teach something that is relearned as it is being taught.

The fact, however, that teachers learn how to teach a particular content must not in any way mean that they should venture into teaching without the necessary competence to do it. It does not give persons a license to teach what they do not know. Teachers' political, ethical, and

professional responsibility puts them under an obligation to prepare and enable themselves before engaging in their teaching practice. Teaching requires constant preparation and development on the part of teachers, as is made clearer and clearer by their teaching experience, if well lived and apprehended. Such development is based on a critical analysis of their practice.

Let us begin from the learning, uncovering experience of those who are preparing for the teaching task, which necessarily involves *studying*. Obviously, my intention here is not to prescribe rules that must be strictly followed; that would be in shocking contradiction to everything I have talked about so far. On the contrary, what I am concerned with here, in line with the spirit of this book, is challenging its readers around certain points and aspects, demonstrating that there is always something different to be done in our educational day-to-day, whether we are involved in it as learners, and thus as teachers, or as teachers, and thus as learners as well.

I would not like to even give the impression that I am seeking to absolutely clarify the issues of *studying*, of *reading*, of *observing*, of *recognizing* the relationship between objects in order to get to know them. I will be trying to clarify some points that deserve our attention for a more critical understanding of these processes.

Let us begin with *studying*, which though involving *teaching* on the part of the teacher also involves a previous and concomitant learning on the part of the teacher and a learning either by students who are preparing to teach tomorrow or re-creating their knowledge to better teach today or by those who, children still, find themselves in the initial stages of their schooling.

An individual's preparation for learning, studying, is before anything else a critical, creative, re-creating activity. It does not matter whether one engages in it through reading a text that deals with and discusses a certain content proposed by a *school* or whether one starts from critical reflection on a certain social or natural occurrence that then leads to the reading of texts suggested by one's own curiosity or intellectual experience or suggested by others.

Thus, from a critical perspective, one that does not dichotomize between commonsense knowledge and the other more systematic, more precise knowledge but, rather, seeks a synthesis of opposites, the act of *studying* always implies that of reading, even if it is not reduced to it. Reading of the word enables us to read a previous reading of the world. But reading is not purely entertainment, nor is it a mechanical exercise in memorization of certain parts of a text.

If I am really studying, seriously reading, I cannot go past a page if I cannot grasp its significance relatively clearly. My solution does not lie

in memorizing portions of paragraphs by mechanically reading—two, three, four times—portions of the text, closing my eyes and trying to repeat them as if the simple machinelike memorization could give me the knowledge I need.

Reading is an intellectual, difficult, demanding operation, but a gratifying one. Nobody studies authentically who does not take the critical position of being the subject of curiosity, of the reading, of the process of discovery. Reading is searching for, seeking to create an understanding of what is read; thus, among other fundamental points, the correct teaching of reading and writing is of great importance. It is not just that teaching reading is engaging; it is a creative experience around *comprehension*, comprehension and communication. And the experience of comprehension will be all the deeper if we can bring together, rather than dichotomizing, the concepts emerging from the school experience and those resulting from the day-to-day world. One critical exercise always required in reading, and necessarily also in writing, is that of easily moving from *sensory experience*, which characterizes the day-to-day, to *generalization*, which operates through school language, and then on to the tangible and concrete. One of the ways we can accomplish this exercise is through the practice that I have been referring to as “reading of a previous reading of the world,” and here, “reading of the world” should be understood as the “reading” that precedes the reading of the word and that, equally concerned with the comprehension of objects, takes place in the domain of day-to-day life. The reading of the word, also a function of a search for text comprehension and thus of the objects contained therein, directs us now to a previous reading of the world. I must make it clear that this reading of the world, which is based on sensory experience, is not enough. But on the other hand, it must not be dismissed as inferior to the reading of the abstract world of concepts that proceeds from generalization to the tangible.

A literacy student from the northeast was discussing, in her culture circle, a codification¹ representing a man who created a clay vase with his own hands. The discussion involved the “reading” of a series of codifications, which in fact are representations of concrete reality, which is culture.

The concept of culture had already been apprehended by the group through the effort of *comprehension*, which characterizes the reading of the world or the *word*. The woman's memories of her previous experience and her sensory understanding of the process by which the man worked the clay to create the vase told her that the making of the vase was the sort of work with which he made a living. Just as the vase was only an object, it was the product of his work, which, once sold, made his and his family's lives viable.

“codes” of discourse

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Now, going beyond the sensory experience, the woman took a fundamental step: She reached the ability to *generalize*, which characterizes “school experience.” Creating a vase through transformative work over clay was no longer only a means of survival but was also a means of creating *culture*, of creating *art*. For this reason, by revisiting her previous reading of the world, of the day-to-day activities in the world, that northeastern literacy student, proud and secure, said, “I create culture. I do this.”

I have also had the opportunity to witness a similar experience from the point of view of the intelligence of people’s behavior. I have referred to this fact before in my writing, but there is no harm in bringing it up again.

I found myself on the island of São Tomé, in the Guinea Gulf off the western coast of Africa. I was with local educators, taking part in the first development program for literacy teachers.

The national commission had picked the small village of Porto Mont, a fishing community, as the center of all program activities. I suggested to the local educators that the development program not follow certain traditional methods that tend to separate theory from practice and that we not engage in any sort of work or activity that essentially dichotomized theory and practice either by underestimating *theory*, denying it any importance, by exclusively emphasizing *practice* as the only thing to really count, or by undermining practice by focusing only on theory. On the contrary, my intention was to have, from the very beginning, direct experimentation with the contradictions between theory and practice, which will be the object of analysis in one of my letters.

I refused, for this very reason, a schedule that reserved the initial moments for so-called theoretical presentations on fundamental content for the development of the future educators. In essence, that meant moments reserved for the speeches of the people deemed better able to speak before others.

My conviction lay elsewhere. I was thinking of a sequence of activities in which, in just one morning, we could discuss some key concepts—codification and decodification, for example—as if it were a time for *presentation* but without thinking even for a second that presentations were sufficient for the mastery of certain concepts. What was needed was a critical discussion of the practice in which the educators were about to engage.

Thus, with that basic idea accepted and put into practice, the future educators were asked to coordinate a discussion about codifications in a culture circle with twenty-five participants, who were aware that the activity addressed the professional development of educators. Prior to that, a discussion had been held about the political nature of their task,

for all classrooms

the task of helping us in a professional development effort, and they knew that they were going to be working with young people in a process of professional development. They knew that neither the teachers they were to work with nor they themselves had ever done anything like what they were going to do. The only difference that marked them was that the participants could only read from the world, while the young teachers in training read the word as well. They had never, however, discussed any codifications or taught literacy before.

Each afternoon in the program, four trainees took charge of the two-hour work sessions with the twenty-five participants. Those responsible for the program watched silently, taking notes. The theory behind the trainees' actions was revealed the following day during the four-hour evaluation and development seminars, when the mistakes, the errors, and the good points in their performance were discussed in the presence of the entire group.

The glitches and mistakes that had already been made and analyzed were hardly ever repeated. Theory emerged soaked in well-carried-out practice.

During one of these afternoon sessions—in a discussion about a codification depicting Porto Mont with its little houses lined up along the beach, facing the ocean, and a fisherman who walked away from his boat holding a fish—two of the participants stood up, as if they had planned it, walked to the window of the school where we were, looked at Porto Mont in the distance, and faced the codification that depicted the village once again and said, “Yeah, this is what Porto Mont is like, and we didn't even know it!”

Up until that point, their “reading” of that locale, of their private world, a reading made extremely close to the “text,” which was the context of the village, had prevented them from *seeing* Porto Mont as it was. A certain dullness had veiled Porto Mont. The experiment they were conducting, of “taking some distance” from the object, the Porto Mont *codification*, allowed them to make a new reading, one more truthful to the text, to the context of Porto Mont. The taking of distance that the reading of the codification afforded them brought them closer to Porto Mont as a text being read. This new reading re-created their previous reading; that is why they said: “This is what Porto Mont is like, and we didn't even know it!” *Immersed* in the reality of their small world, they were unable to *see* it. By taking some distance, they *emerged* and were thus able to see it as they never had before.

To study is to uncover; it is to gain a more exact *comprehension* of an object; it is to realize its relationships to other objects. This implies a requirement for risk taking and venturing on the part of a student, the subject of learning, for without that they do not create or re-create.

For this reason also, as I have said so many times, *teaching* cannot be a process of transference of knowledge from the one teaching to the learner. This is the mechanical transference from which results machinelike memorization, which I have already criticized. Critical study correlates with teaching that is equally critical, which necessarily demands a critical way of comprehending and of realizing the reading of the word and that of the world, the reading of text and of context.

This critical way of comprehending and realizing the reading of the word and of the world lies, on the one hand, in not dismissing simpler language, "unguarded," innocent language. It lies in not devaluing such language because it is based on concepts developed in day-to-day experience, in the world of sensory experience. On the other hand, it also lies in moving away from the concept of "difficult language," impossible language, as development occurs around abstract concepts. This critical way of comprehending and realizing the reading of text and context does not exclude either variety of language, of syntax. It does recognize, however, that writers using scientific, academic language cannot become simplistic even though they must attempt to become more accessible, clearer, simpler, less closed, and less difficult.

No one who reads has the right to abandon the reading of a text because it is difficult, because he or she does not understand the meaning, for example, of a word such as *epistemology*.

Just as bricklayers require a collection of tools and instruments, without which they cannot build up a wall, student-readers also require fundamental instruments, without which they cannot read or write effectively. They require dictionaries,² including etymological dictionaries, dictionaries focusing on verbs and those looking at nouns and adjectives, philosophical dictionaries, thesauruses, and encyclopedias. They need comparative readings of texts, readings by different authors who deal with the same topics but with varying degrees of language complexity.

Using these tools is not, as many may think, a waste of time. The time one spends when one reads or writes, or writes and reads, on the use of dictionaries or encyclopedias, on the reading of chapters or fragments of texts that may help a more critical analysis of a topic, is a fundamental component of one's pleasurable task of reading or writing.

When we read, we do not have the right to expect, let alone demand, that writers will perform their task, that of writing, and also ours, that of comprehending the text, by explaining every step of the way, through footnotes, what they meant by this or that statement. Their duty as writers is to simply and *lightly* write, making it easier for the reader to attain understanding but without doing the reader's job.

A reader does not suddenly comprehend what is being read or stud-

ied, in a snap, miraculously. Comprehension needs to be worked, forged, by those who read and study; as subjects of the action, they must seek to employ appropriate instruments in order to carry out the task. For this very reason, *reading* and *studying* form a challenging task, one requiring patience and perseverance. It is not a task for those who, excessively hurried or lacking humbleness, transfer their weaknesses to the author, whom they then blame for being impossible to study.

It is important to make clear, also, that there is necessarily a relationship between the level of content in a book and the reader's actual level of development. These levels depend on the intellectual experience of both reader and author. The comprehension of what is read is tied to this relationship. When those levels are too far apart, when one has nothing to do with the other, all efforts toward *comprehension* are fruitless. In such cases, there is no consonance between the author's view of the necessary treatment of the topic and the reader's ability to apprehend the language required for that treatment of the topic. That is why studying is a preparation for knowing; it is a patient and impatient exercise on the part of someone whose intent is not to know it all at once but to struggle to meet the *timing* of knowledge.

The issue of the necessary use of the instruments indispensable to the task of reading and the work of writing raises a concern with the purchasing power of students and teachers, in light of the high costs of basic dictionaries, philosophical dictionaries, and so on. Being able to have access to such resources is a material right of students and teachers alike; this right corresponds to schools' duty to make these materials available by creating and furnishing libraries that are open on realistic schedules. Demanding this access is a right and duty of students and teachers alike.

I would now like to return to something I referred to previously: the relationship between reading and writing, which should be understood as processes that cannot be separated. They should be understood as processes that must be organized in such a way as to create the perception that they are needed for something, a perception, as Lev S. Vygotsky³ emphasized, of being something that children need and that we too need.

Initially, oral expression precedes writing, but writing has encompassed oral expression ever since the moment **humans** became able to express themselves through symbols that said something about their dreams, their fears, their social experience, their hopes, and their practices.

When we learn how to *read*, we do it upon the writing of someone who previously learned how to read and write. As we learn how to read, we are preparing to immediately write the talk we socially construct.

In the literate cultures, without reading and writing it is impossible to study, to seek to know, to learn the subjectivity of objects, to critically recognize an object's reason for being.

One of the mistakes we often make is to dichotomize reading and writing and, even from children's earliest steps in the practice of reading and writing, to conceive of these processes as detached from the general process of knowing. This dichotomy between reading and writing follows us forever, as students and as teachers. "I have a tremendously hard time writing my papers. I cannot *write*" is the comment I hear most frequently in the graduate programs I have been involved with. Deep down, this fact reveals the sad fact of how far we are from a critical understanding of what it means to teach and to learn.

It is important that we take critical ownership of the formation of our selves, which socially and gradually, over time, become active and conscious, speaking, reading, and writing, and which are both inherently and socially constructed. In other words, we must not only realize what we are, but we must also fully embrace ourselves as these beings "programmed for learning," as François Jacob⁴ put it. Then we must learn how to learn; in other words, we must, among other things, recognize that oral and written language, their use, are equally important objectively.

Those we study, and those we teach and thus study as well, require that we not only read texts but write notes, write book reports, and compose small texts about the things we read. We must read the works of good writers; of good novelists, poets, scientists, and philosophers; of those who do not fear working their language in search of beauty, simplicity, and clarity.⁵

If our schools, from the earliest grades, were to devote themselves to the work of nurturing in students a taste for reading and writing and were to maintain that nurturing throughout their school lives, there would possibly be fewer graduate students who spoke of their inability to write or their insecurity about writing.

If studying were not almost always a *burden* to us, if reading were not a bitter obligation, if, on the contrary, studying and reading were sources of pleasure and happiness as well as sources of the knowledge we need to better move about the world, we would have indexes that were more indicative of the quality of our education.

This is an effort that should be initiated in grammar school, should be intensified during the stages of literacy development, and should continue without ever stopping.

It is undeniably important to read the works of Jean Piaget, of Lev S. Vygotsky, of Emilia Ferreiro, of Madalena F. Weffort, among others, as

well as to read the work of specialists who deal, strictly speaking, not with literacy but with the reading process, such as Marisa Lajolo and Ezequiel T. da Silva.

If we think about the intimate relationship between reading, writing, and thinking and about our need to intensely experience this relationship, we might accept the suggestion that at least three times a week we should devote ourselves to the task of writing something. That writing could be notes about something read, a commentary about some event reported in the media, a letter to an unknown person—it doesn't matter what. It is also a good idea to date and keep these writings and, a few months later, critically analyze them.

Nobody can write who never writes, just as one cannot swim who never swims.

Though I underscore here that the use of written language, and thus of reading, is tied to a society's material development, I would like to emphasize that my position is not an *idealistic* one.

Just as I refuse any *mechanistic* interpretation of history, I refuse any *idealistic* one as well. The former reduces conscience to a mere copy of society's material structures; the latter subjects everything to an all-powerful conscience. My position is a different one: I understand that these relationships between conscience and the world are dialectic.⁶

What is not appropriate is for us to wait for material transformations before we begin to face up to the problem of reading and writing correctly.

A critical reading of the texts and of the world has to do with the changes in progress within them.

NOTES

1. About codification, reading of the reading world, of the sense word, exact common knowledge, learning, and teaching, see Paulo Freire, *Education as the Praxis of Freedom* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra), *Education and Change* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra), *Cultural Action for Freedom* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1970), *Pedagogy of Hope: A Return to the Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1992), and *The Importance of the Reading Act* (São Paulo: Cortez, 1992); Paulo Freire and Sergio Guimaraes, *About Education* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1987); Paulo Freire and Ira Shor, *Fear and Daring: The Educator's Day-to-Day* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra); Paulo Freire and Donald Macedo, *Literacy, Reading of the World, and Reading of the Word* (Westport, Conn.: Bergin and Garvey, 1987); Paulo Freire and Marcio Campos, "Reading of the World—Reading of the Word," *Courier de L'UNESCO* (February 1991).

2. See Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*.

3. Luis C. Moll, ed., *Vygotsky and Education. Instructional Implications and Applications of Sociohistorical Psychology*, 1st paperback ed. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

4. François Jacob, "Nous sommes programmé mais pour apprendre," *Courrier de L'UNESCO* (February 1991).

5. See Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*.

6. To this end see Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*.