
Chapter 1

Learning from Productive Schools

In its broadest sense, this book is about the “biographies” of 15 productive elementary schools in Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United States. The selected schools are called “productive” because they show—each in its own unique way—that learning can be enriched by a culture of effective educational creativity in schools partly designed as open learning communities. The development of new ideas to raise instructional quality is informally expected to be a major task of any reflective practitioner (cf. Schon, 1991).

It goes without saying that internal productivity and creativity require external support—a matter that will be addressed in what follows. Yet the core of this book is about what happens *inside* a productive school and what makes its patterns of practice particularly attractive. This includes school-based initiatives to acquire external support or advice.

DEFINING A PRODUCTIVE SCHOOL

The term “productive” encompasses more than intellectual curiosity, creative thought, or arguing for an exciting initiative in one’s own school. We conceive of a school as a productive organization if it succeeds in putting a shared innovative idea into lasting practice. “Productive” means working effectively to implement *and* institutionalize the idea or vision. It means to reinvent *and* to protect something new against traditional routine; to develop implementation procedures *and* to try them out repeatedly; to give “fuzzy” ideas a chance to emerge *and* to support their elaboration; to learn how to master the new *and* to cooperate with others so that experiences can be exchanged and efforts mutually supported.

We felt it necessary to study the processes inside a school that encourage the teaching staff to provide and extend opportunities for activity-based learning. A cross-case comparison of successful practices in several countries was also considered necessary. We initiated an internationally-oriented design to reconstruct and compare the biographies of elementary schools where activity-based practices endured. We were interested in both the character of the science instruction and the means by which it was sustained over time.

This project allowed researchers from four countries to examine the lasting implementation of hands-on science activities in elementary schools: What was the nature of the science education which took place? What were the outcomes for students? How were activity-based approaches effectively continued? What was done to encourage and support self-renewal inside the schools? As the research developed, the emphasis shifted more and more to the *process of sustained productive renewal*.

By looking at productive schools, we have had the opportunity to see what *really works in practice*. The insights gained have the potential of helping others see how to go from a vision of what is desired to creating programs in which the vision becomes reality.

TWO FACES OF THE STUDY

We are playing, so to speak, with two balls at the same time: one is the *science activity domain* and the other is the *school improvement domain*. Both are strongly intertwined; our book is about the nature of this interplay. Before attending specifically to how these two domains are addressed in our case studies, however, some background information is relevant.

The nature of elementary science education

Although the nature of teaching and learning in science for children is of long standing interest, during the last third-of-a-century it has received intense and sustained attention, both in a theoretical sense and in the development of classroom materials. Examples of significant innovative published materials can be seen in three of the four countries which are part of this research. AKTIF, the program recently developed at IPN in Germany is an example. It uses an integrated approach to exploring nature, combined with the development of basic mathematical skills and students' use of language and writing; its primary aim is to develop improved instruction and activity-based learning through discovery.

The major example of an elementary science education curriculum from the Netherlands is the NOB project of the National Institute for

Curriculum Development (SLO). It is centered on integrating major elements of the science subject-matter domain, including biology, chemistry and physics, and is intended to foster an activity-based approach to learning science. The United States has seen substantial activity in this area as well, beginning in the 1960s with projects such as the Elementary Science Study (ESS), Science—A Process Approach (SAPA), and Science Curriculum Improvement Study (SCIS), which were developed with funding from the government's National Science Foundation. Similar funding has created a new generation of such projects in the current decade.

Both practical curriculum development work and theoretical analysis raise many questions, most of which are not new but are of continuing interest. Examples include the following:

- Which science concepts and core educational ideas are of greatest value to children?
- To what extent should an understanding of the nature of scientific investigation be a curricular goal?
- To what extent should this understanding be pursued in the context of technology- and science-related societal issues?
- To what extent is science learning best pursued in an activity-based manner?

School improvement: another focus of concern

In addition to our focus on the nature of elementary school science education, the means by which school change and improvement come about is of major interest. Again, this topic is not new. Experience has shown that the science-curriculum work described above has not had the full impact on school practice that was originally intended. Many questions arise as to why this is so. Research on this topic has been noteworthy, but questions such as the following remain:

- To what extent is it possible for science curricula to be developed external to a school and then imported into the school setting?
- What assistance do teachers generally need to initiate curricular change?
- How significant to the adoption of activity-based science education are the problems of providing student materials?
- To what extent can curricular change be initiated in a centralized manner and to what extent must it be decentralized to the individual school level?
- To what extent is change restricted by teacher beliefs and values or by cultural or institutional barriers?

PROJECT IMPACT

Our case studies provide insights into questions such as those raised above. By looking at schools where activity-based learning in science exists, and by understanding some of the history of how these schools reached this point, it is possible to gain some understanding of how other schools could move to a similar position.

At the same time that this potential is being noted, it is well to acknowledge that this research does *not* provide definitive answers to the full set of such questions, or even to those given as examples above. The project was not designed with such a purpose as its goal. It is interpretive research; the intent was to look at productive schools in considerable detail for the insights that could be gained about elementary school science education. It is also comparative research; it compares cultures and learning processes on the elementary school level.

Along with this disclaimer, however, we want to promise to return to these questions, since it is largely such questions that make the research of interest. In the analysis provided later, such matters will reappear. It will then be time to address the *relevance* of such questions, which may be of greater or lesser interest within different national contexts.

SCHOOL BIOGRAPHIES

With the school as the unit of analysis, the knowledge provided and experiences related in this book to some extent—as noted at the beginning of this chapter—have the character of biographies of the 15 schools. They reveal how fragile innovative efforts can be and what is needed to anchor them in the culture of a school.

Researchers are recognizing that—particularly in science studies—educational research should more vigorously pursue research questions such as the following:

How are reform initiatives enculturated into to the process of schooling? What are the impediments to reform, as well as the constraints upon the implementation of a reformed curriculum? What constitutes reasonable measures of successful curriculum reform? (Shymansky & Kyle, 1991, p. 17)

Questions of this nature are the focus of concern for our research. The process of *enculturation*—of building the new into the setting called “school”—occurred step by step in all the IMPACT cases. Our study is about the process of enculturation and its dependence upon mutual

learning and competency development. In view of this specification, our key question can be stated as follows: *What makes sustained improvement in elementary school science happen over the long run?*

Our major concern was to study in depth what these schools actually did to create an effective and motivating learning environment and an active culture of cooperation and school-based development. We were less interested in looking at doubtful short-term success, and particularly interested in portraying innovative practice profiles which lasted for more than a year or two.

In developing such portraits, and in gaining insights into the cultures of individual schools (Sarason, 1971), we focused our analysis on the specific subject of science—including technology—and sought to better understand the life of an innovative effort until it was finally institutionalized. As activity-based learning methods are internationally accepted as a key to increased quality in science education, we chose to study these methods as displayed within the real curricular and instructional practices of schools. This international acceptance is backed by empirical research. In the United States, for example, meta-analyses conducted by Shymanksy, Kyle and Alport (1983) and by Bredderman (1983) both point clearly to increased learning for elementary school science instruction based on activities using manipulative materials. (Walberg, 1991, p. 46) concluded that the “new” science courses “produced superior learning on tests of their intended outcomes, and they often produced no worse learning on traditional achievement tests of science content.” We observed classroom work, as well as instructional activities conducted outside the classroom, with particular attention to activity-based learning in the sciences for 9- to 10-year-old children.

Although the findings were analyzed with the school as the unit of analysis, a district organizational level was involved in some cases as well. The focus was on the schools, not on national systems; we summarized the activity patterns the schools have in common—and the practical knowledge they provide—for others who seek to improve schools and to create productive learning environments.

A RECONSTRUCTIVE VIEW

We follow a *reconstructive* model of analysis. Particularly in the domain of instructional research and school improvement, investigators still often prefer to pursue the what-is-missing issue instead of asking why specific new ways of mastering educational demands grow and gain power. We consider learning from such new ways to be as helpful as

the analysis of problems at hand. Reconstructing the conditions under which sustained improvement occurs is the specific strategy which we apply. We analyze why it is that carefully selected productive schools were able to institutionalize activity-based learning in elementary science teaching: What did they do on the school and classroom level? And what can we conclude from the interplay of these levels of practice?

Much past research attends to these issues. Walberg (1984) claims evidence that high quality instruction has a paramount impact on learning results. On the instructional level, he investigates the influence of open education on student learning. Drawing upon the meta-analysis studies of Hedges, Giaconia & Gage (1981), and Raven (1981), he concludes that "students in open classes do not do worse in standardized achievement and do slightly better on several outcomes that educators, parents, and students hold to be of great value" (Walberg, 1984, p. 25). In this context, Walberg refers to cooperativeness, creativity, independence, lifelong learning abilities, self-reliance, and critical thinking.

So we considered it necessary to study the instructional practice profiles of our schools in depth. We went to the schools and observed many lessons. We interviewed teachers, principals and students, and analyzed documents and school curricula. In order to gain the needed objectivity and to have a basis for making comparisons across many school sites, a conceptual framework and a variety of research protocols were developed. The methodological foundations of this multi-method, multi-site approach are described in the following chapter. This strong analytical base provides a foundation for an expectation of valid understandings of the conditions under which innovative efforts are more likely to occur *and* to survive.

We gained new insights into long-term institutionalization of school-based innovations. The majority of evaluation studies of school improvement have been limited to the analysis of short-term effects. We thought it much more realistic to study long-lasting efforts which finally become part of daily school life. Our camera focuses on the various faces of innovative practices, particularly on the processes of *initiation, implementation, and institutionalization* within a school.

Critical Literacy as a Pedagogy of Empowerment

Within the last decade, conservative and progressive theorists have placed the issue of multiculturalism at the core of the debate about education and democracy. Multiculturalism, to the conservatives, poses a problem. The conservative position sees contemporary America as a country that is in the state of moral decay. They perceive present day American life as being dismantled and Western culture being diminished by the concept of cultural difference that engages issues of race, class, gender, and ethnicity. Much of what depicts multiculturalism within the conservative position in schools is developed around a view of pluralism based on the notion of a “common culture.”¹ A pluralistic view of multiculturalism recognizes that the “common culture” of the United States is made up by diverse racial and ethnic groups, yet it goes no further. Rather, its position defends the dominant culture and supports and contains those who are in power.² (Power, in this sense, means exercising control over others.) There is no attempt to interrogate the notion of power and how in some cases dominant groups are given more privilege while marginalized groups are silenced within this view of multiculturalism. Furthermore, there is no understanding how Eurocentric curriculum excludes and marginalizes the voices and subjectivities of children who do not exist within the confines of the dominant group.

To strive for a democratic multicultural society that challenges the totalizing and often racist views of a conservative notion of multiculturalism is a difficult task. But if we aspire to a goal of developing a critical citizenry whose actions are informed by democratic principles of justice that address issues of oppression and discrimination, then what is needed is a view of multiculturalism and literacy that provides a lan-

guage for naming and transforming the ideological positions and social conditions that obstruct these possibilities. Hence, the concept of literacy is central to any notion of educational reform which presupposes a particular critical reading and transformation of the world. Literacy in this sense is informed by the broader project of educating students and teachers to advance the imperatives of a cultural democracy.³ This project of liberation and social transformation will allow for the creation of multiple possibilities where hope is shared.

Within the dominant discourse, literacy is defined largely through liberal and conservative perspectives that tie its function to the dominant culture's ideological standards.⁴ Basic skills and technical training permeate school curriculum in order to train students to become workers for jobs that require functional reading and writing. In this instance literacy is linked to the job market and serves specific economic interests.⁵ In another form, literacy is defined by the need for understanding the masters in Western tradition which translates into a form of privileged cultural capital and serves to reproduce pathways to power.⁶ In both instances literacy serves the dominant culture's ideological functions to sustain existing power relations.

For a multicultural democratic society to thrive, any discourse about literacy needs to acknowledge the multiplicity of literacies that surround us. In other words, it needs to address the question of social usage, which suggest at least three forms of literacy: functional, cultural, and critical. In this case, these forms of literacy would be linked to developing particular skills and knowledges that offer students a range of possibilities that would be necessary for realizing democratic public life. For example, beyond functional literacy, people need forms of literacy that provide multiple languages that allow communication across lines of cultural difference. They also need modes of critical literacy that challenge the idea of identity as singular, autonomous, and uniform; that is, a mode of critical and cultural literacy that provides three things. First, a critical literacy can provide the pedagogical conditions for understanding how identities are constructed through different subject positions. In other words, it allows students to see how they can and do make history in ways that think, feel, act, love, and create mean-

ing to their world. Second, literacy as a critical and cultural discourse functions in this case as a form of address which provides the opportunities for understanding how subjectivities, experience, and power come to bear on educational discourse and practices. This enables students and teachers to understand how one's own subjectivity as well as others is constituted in language. Third, a critical and cultural literacy provides a location from which expression and action proceed. Put more sharply, literacy needs to be viewed within an ethical and emancipatory discourse that provides a language of hope and transformation that is able to analyze, challenge, and transform the ideological and social conditions that undermine it. In this case literacy is not a technical skill to be acquired or a "great book" to be read. Rather, literacy is a historical, theoretical, and ideological referent that allows for a pedagogy for understanding how people negotiate and translate their relationship to everyday life. Such a literacy would allow for a form of pedagogy which offers the relationship among discourse, social action, and historical memory. It is also a form of social praxis that is directed at self and social transformation which allows for the invention of new identities as active, social agents for social change. In other words, it offers an alternative form of literacy to the dominant discourse that gives a critical reading of how power, ideology and culture work to disempower groups of people while privileging others.

A pedagogy of critical literacy offers a language of critique that allows us to view major flaws in dominant educational theory. The use of the term pedagogy is deliberate, for it means much more than simply "teaching." Pedagogy is more complex and encompassing because it represents many aspects of educational practices that include the practice of a particular curriculum used within the classroom, the strategies and techniques used by the teacher, and how the curriculum is taken up by both the teacher and the students. This notion of pedagogy does not address methodology of classroom practices in the form of "what works" but rather situates practice within a realm of cultural politics. Therefore, literacy as a form of cultural politics allows us to explore the complexity of power relations as well as challenge the discourse of the dominant culture.

A critical literacy and pedagogy of empowerment are not new concepts but have evolved substantively over the past two decades.⁷ Their roots can be found grounded in the work of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator and philosopher, who is viewed by many educators and social theorists as the most influential theorist in critical literacy and pedagogy based on his ability to interrelate theory, ideological commitment, and political practice.⁸

Before discussing the specifics of Freire's work, it is necessary to place Freire within an historical and a political context. Unless one understands the context of Freire's work, it is difficult to understand and interpret his pedagogy which is grounded in liberation theology and as a response to colonialist and imperialist settings.⁹

Paulo Freire re-articulated the politics of literacy in the early 1960s during the rise of a popular, radical revolutionary movement in Brazil. At that time the prevailing educational theory was dominated by positivistic and pragmatic assumptions. Freire's theory for education as a practice of freedom and liberation quickly became a popular alternative. His initial pedagogical formulations grew out of a concern for the masses of poor and uneducated Brazilian peasants exploited because of their illiteracy. Freire's liberatory pedagogy offered these people the necessary tools needed to struggle against their own oppression. Inserting literacy within a historical discourse, Freire argued that literacy was the precondition for not only forms of social and political agency but also social transformation and emancipation. In the most general sense, Freire's theoretical and political position generated an approach to literacy that addressed four major issues. First, it linked the issue of literacy to understanding how power, inequality, and domination undermine the possibilities for social agency. In doing so, Freire not only revealed how a sense of collective agency is fashioned within structures of domination, but how such structures can be understood and refashioned through a notion of literacy that is at once political and pedagogical. Second, Freire made it clear that literacy is not about simply reading the word, but most importantly about how people's social identities are constructed within asymmetrical relations of power. Literacy in this sense is not merely functional but is a productive force that signals how

identities are shaped within an existing social order, become complicitous with that order, and also have the possibility of challenging existing relations of power. Third, Freire offered a theory of literacy that helped to illuminate how the dynamics of domination work at the discursive level. Refusing the essentialism and determinism that characterized many orthodox, left views of social change, Freire made the issue of literacy central to understanding the notion of cultural hegemony. After Freire, it becomes difficult to understand hegemony outside of the domain of language, pedagogy, and culture. Finally, Freire has not been content to simply retreat into the language of critique, to document how cultural domination works at the level of daily life; on the contrary, he has developed a notion of literacy that is propelled by a desire to create immediate and imaginary possibilities for redefining human agency and social struggle as both a political practice and a prospect for emancipatory struggle. Consequently, Freire developed a theory and practice of literacy within a discourse that appropriated many of the categories of critical social theory (these include existentialism, phenomenology, Hegelian dialectics, and historical materialism). Eventually, his proposal for a pedagogy for oppressed people had a major impact upon progressive educational settings, not only in Latin America but worldwide.

In what follows I will elaborate on the fundamental categories that inform a Freirean pedagogy of literacy and identify the major contributions of Freire's work.

TRADITIONAL EDUCATIONAL THEORY AS BANKING EDUCATION

Liberatory learning opposes conventional education in many ways. Traditional educational theory views knowledge as objective and in practice it incorporates a rote learning process described as the "banking model" of teaching.¹⁰ In this model teachers possess objective knowledge and transmit this knowledge to waiting students who consume and in many cases are asked to spew it back without questioning the knowledge put forth. According to Freire this model of teaching turns students into

receptacles to be filled by the teacher. The more completely he fills the receptacles, the better the teacher he is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are.¹¹

Within this model, the teacher, on the one hand, is seen as the expert and holds authority over the important knowledge to be given out while, on the other hand, this model positions students in a way that requires them to take passive roles in order to succeed. “Banking education” reflects a particular view and set of values based on the attitudes and practices influenced by those in power. Freire lists the characteristics of this model:

- (a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
- (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
- (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
- (d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly;
- (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice and the students comply;
- (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
- (h) the teacher chooses the program content and the students adapt to it;
- (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority, which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
- (j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects.¹²

In this instance, Freire speaks narrowly about methodology in a way that confirms the tendency of much of traditional educational theory towards microanalysis. Yet within this limited discourse around banking education Freire makes his central point: “the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority, which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the student.”¹³

In this model, knowledge is perceived as static and unchanging. There is no understanding of how knowledge gets produced or how knowledge needs to be extended to the voices and histories of the children in the

classroom. Rather, inhabited in the unspoken experiences, students' own constructed knowledge, brought into the classroom resides hidden away in shame and worthlessness for some. Furthermore, issues that illuminate how class, race, sexual orientation, and gender function as part of the discourse of schooling are either ignored or subverted. Within the varied parameters of this discourse, there is a functionalism and reductionism that abstracts knowledge from power, equity from excellence, and ideology from cultural practices. Issues of management and procedure freeze knowledge and pedagogy in forms of monumentalism and transmission that deny the historically and socially constructed nature of all knowledge, discourse, and practice. Freire posits dominant educational theory less as an absence, an ignorance so to speak, than as a form of symbolic violence that is rooted in systematic forms of exclusion and marginalization. Rather than expanding on the notion of democracy, ethics, and social justice, banking education reflects the logic of the marketplace generated by the language of management, accountability, and efficiency as the primary platform from which students are taught to understand the world. In the final analysis, traditional educational theory is framed in a way that situates most students to conform, to follow authority, to accept a passive role imposed on them and to eventually become dominated by the institutional forces governed from above.

LITERACY AS CULTURAL POLITICS

Freire's compassion for human beings translates into a political commitment for equality, social justice, and empowerment. The basic foundation of Freire's theory is the project of liberation and social transformation. In other words, he believes that if our goals are shaped by the desire to live in a critical democracy, then it is necessary to construct new social formations that liberate and empower people oppressed by structures and ideologies which dominate them.¹⁴

Freire's pedagogy is multifaceted and incorporates two distinct yet integrated aspects of literacy: "reading the word and the world." In other words, emancipatory literacy requires us to read the text in the world dialectically.

Reading does not consist merely of decoding the written word or language; rather, it is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world.¹⁵

For Freire and Donaldo Macedo, understanding the world means understanding oppression in order to provide both oppressed groups and dominant groups with the possibility of acting upon and overcoming such oppression. In this case literacy is viewed as and in need of a definition in political and ethical terms. In effect, literacy cannot be disengaged from relations of power. By placing literacy within a realm of politics that views the social, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of everyday life as primary categories to be engaged, cultural workers, who in this case are educators, can understand how literacy functions to either empower or disempower people. As Freire and Macedo point out, "literacy is analyzed according to whether it serves to reproduce existing social formations or serves as a set of cultural practices that promotes democratic and emancipatory change."¹⁶ Therefore, literacy as a form of cultural politics requires us to explore the complexity of power relations that both enable and silence social groups as well as challenge the exclusionary and often colonizing discourse of dominant culture. In practice, liberation becomes possible when the student can reflect upon the essentially constructed aspect of literacy production and in doing so is able to link a critical analysis of "words" with the "world." In addition, by discovering they are creators of culture, individuals also discover that they can transform culture as part of a broader struggle to eliminate diverse forms of oppression, while simultaneously inserting themselves as active agents and shapers of history.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AS LIBERATORY LEARNING

Freire views schools not as instructional sites designed only to transmit knowledge but rather as cultural sites that embody particular discursive formations and social practices that produce values, social relations, and forms of knowledge that legitimate the few who are in power. What Freire rightly challenges is the notion that schools convey a common culture, when in fact they support the dominant culture.

Although in saying this, I don't want to suggest that all cultural relations are asymmetrical in terms of power. Some relations are relations of equality. Nevertheless, according to Freire, all aspects of schooling are produced within cultural codes that produce and sustain particular forms of speaking, knowledge, cultural relationships, experiences, styles, and histories. In this sense, schooling produces a narrative in which selective histories, voices, and social identities fade in and out of focus, legitimated or marginalized on the basis of how particular forms of cultural capital sustain or challenge a dominant cultural agenda/hegemony. For Freire, literacy is the discursive face of power, domination, resistance, and agency. It both expresses the privileged positions of dominant groups in schools and it creates a referent for counter narratives and desires. Most importantly, literacy marks schooling as a cultural politics and site of struggle. Contrary to traditional educational theory, Freire's approach to critical pedagogy views knowledge as something to be analyzed and understood by students and informed by their own experiences and their understanding of the world. In this case, students become active participants in their own education by becoming "real" subjects in history. By learning to read the world critically, not only are students given the opportunity to break out of a culture of silence, but they are also invited to reclaim ownership over the process of change by taking control of the direction of their lives and histories. This is a pedagogy in which dialogue is the central category for recovering one's voice; it lays the foundation for emancipation.¹⁷

CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND CULTURAL ACTION

Central to understanding the world critically is the practice of "conscientization," the awakening of one's political and personal consciousness, which involves dialogue and critical analysis. In other words, critical consciousness becomes the crucial basis that exposes domination and creates knowledge about the distinctions between culture and nature. Within a critical pedagogy, the cultural experience of the students is the foundation for defining the social world, thus allowing for the opportunity to understand the concrete conditions of their daily lives, and the

limits placed on them by oppressive situations. Such a pedagogy invites students to challenge these situations; therefore, the questioning of power and knowledge becomes the central element in the development of a critical consciousness through a problem solving process. Yet, conscientization is not an end in itself but is always joined by meaningful praxis (the dialectical interfacing of knowledge and power), which is generated by reflection and action. By emphasizing action/reflection in which the student views knowledge within her or his own concrete experience, rather than the rote learning process generated by the "banking model," the learner becomes actively involved as a subject of her or his own education rather than an object of the educational system.

Another critical element in Freirean thought is the rejection of vanguardism. He does not believe that intellectuals are the chief bearers of knowledge nor does he summon teachers to liberate people without their reflective participation which would objectify them. Rather, Freire stresses that both students and teachers be self-emancipated by taking charge of their own liberation. It is not the role of the educators to become the executors of transformation but rather, Freire defines a pedagogy of the oppressed as:

a pedagogy which must be forged with, not for, the oppressed in the incessant struggle to regain humanity. This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation. This is a theory of overcoming alienation, not domination.¹⁸

In other words, students and others must not share power simply over access to knowledge, but also over the conditions essential to the very construction of knowledge and culture. This is no small matter since it implies that people in any pedagogical site can only become agents when they are equipped with the knowledge necessary to make choices, shape their own identities, and insert themselves into the past and present as a fundamental part of their attempt to shape the future. Though it has become commonplace to identify Freire's pedagogy as politically charged, it is important to stress that central to his educa-

tional philosophy is the assumption that the act of knowing is never static but must be seen as meaning-in-process, which can only be understood through the lens of politics and power. Issues regarding who speaks, for whom, and under what conditions cannot be reduced or understood as merely methodological or empirical issues.

It appears (to me) that what is at stake for Freire is the issue of how power and knowledge come together within particular historical, social, and cultural configurations to produce specific cultural narratives, social identities, and ethical forms of address. For Freire, this is not only a hermeneutic or cultural issue. That is, he does not believe that every form of domination can be explained from or relegated to the spheres of culture and discourse. He is well aware that politics is, in part, about the effects of cultural practices, but that real pain, suffering, and domination exceed a merely cultural and discursive referent. The issue of the political has a social gravity that is about more than rationality and discourse; it has a material gravity that takes account of institutions, identities, and other material forms that cannot be only explained away through cultural and discursive analysis. The sphere of social and material gravity requires more than cultural analyses; it requires real action, struggle, and movement. Politics in the Freirean sense combines the theoretical importance of cultural critique with the grounding that action requires when it has to confront material forms of domination and struggle. Hence, critical pedagogy, as cultural action for liberation, is always driven by concrete political questions and concerns and while these concerns can be the focus of different struggles and interests, they need to address issues of inequality and transformation.

In pedagogical terms, Freire argues that fundamental to an emancipatory educational process is the communion of the nature of learning with the dreams, experiences, histories, and stories that students bring to their classroom. In addressing this connection, Freire writes:

Narratives of liberation are always tied to people's stories, and what stories we choose to tell, and the way in which we decide to tell them form the provisional basis of what a critical pedagogy of the future might mean. Such a pedagogy recognizes that identity is always personal and social that while we cannot predict the path of

historical action or name human agency in advance, we can never give up the struggle for self-formation and self-definition such that domination and suffering in this society are always minimized.¹⁹

It is within these narratives and a language of critique that Freire requires educators to identify the nascent possibilities inherent in existing social relations. By linking critical knowledge with cultural action, people become active participants in society by shaping economic, social, cultural, and subjective formations that constitute their lives. Freire calls upon both teachers and students to participate.

To invent new identities as active, cultural agents for social change means to refuse to allow our personal and collective narratives of identity to be depoliticized at the level of everyday life.²⁰

By refusing to accept a static vision of the future in favor of one that speaks to a more liberated humanity, potentialities are created within a Freirean pedagogy for recognizing new social spaces, practices, and pedagogical possibilities.

LIBERATORY CLASSROOMS

In an attempt to test and measure knowledge, current reform movements reduce teachers to roles of clerks and managers, whose primary function is to service state documents and implement state mandates under the guise of accountability.²¹ Furthermore, “teacher proof” curricula, typical of current educational management schemes is forced upon whole school districts to allow for “common” knowledge to be transmitted without error or deterrence. However, school curriculum needs to be defined in a way that doesn’t view knowledge as static and complete merely to be transmitted from teacher to student. Rather, curriculum needs to be seen as a combination of not only knowledge but social relations and values that represent particular ways of life. What this means is that student experience, culture, and history must be given an important position in analyzing knowledge, always identifying it as a part of the relationship between culture and power. In this instance, teacher’s roles are not seen as clerks but as transformative intellectuals

who need to understand how school knowledge is produced, where it comes from and how it serves the interests of some while oppressing some. In addition, teachers must understand students' cultures within their classroom so as to confirm students' experiences, which are at times contradictory and need to be challenged, and to legitimate all students as subjects in history.

Freire's approach to learning offers both students and teachers the opportunity for empowerment. The liberatory classroom is an antiauthoritarian setting where teachers and students work and learn together. In Freire's terms, liberatory pedagogy requires a number of considerations. First, teacher/student relations must be viewed more dialectically. This suggests more than simply asserting that students must be actively involved in the learning process. It also suggests calling into question the ways in which power and authority structure the interrelated roles of teaching and learning.

For Freire, teachers and students must refuse to be either experts or simply learners. First, their roles must be mediated by the dual task of teaching and learning, producing information and critically mediating what is taught. This is not to suggest that teachers abandon all forms of authority or that their exercise of all authority is strictly authoritarian. On the contrary, Freire is insistent that teacher authority be asserted rather than abandoned within a project that provides the conditions for students to be able to learn how to exercise emancipatory forms of authority.²² In this case, teachers have to become what Henry Giroux calls border crossers.²³ They have to learn how to listen to their students, be self-reflective about the nature and politics of their own location, and situate themselves in a form of ethical address that provides the opportunity for students to both speak and be responsible for the consequences of what they say without feeling terrified that their identities are on trial each time they venture into a new language or think and speak "risky" thoughts.²⁴

Second, Freire politicizes the very notion of methodology by asserting the primacy of the problematic. That is, he believes that agency begins when students not only have access to different forms of knowledge, but also when they have the opportunity to interrogate all propo-

sitions, cultural practices, and disciplinary assumptions. To engage knowledge through dialogue is to assert both its historically and socially constructed nature, and its relationship to particular narratives and ways of life. Needless to say, for Freire, this is not a methodological assertion but a political and philosophical issue that makes dialogue and knowledge contingent upon cultural practices that advance rather than restrict the opportunity for students to name, read, and interpret the world critically as part of a broader project of recognizing the need to also change it when necessary.

Third, Freire is insistent that learning be related to the stories and experiences that constitute the narrative identities, in all of their complexity and contradictory nature, that students bring to school. In a more general sense, Freire is not just affirming student experience; he is making central to any form of critical pedagogy the issue of how such identities are shaped and produced outside of the immediacy of a given educational context. This suggests developing pedagogical processes committed to inserting students in forms of learning in which they become the subject rather than the object of knowledge, social relations, and forms of school organization.

Finally, Freire posits as part of his pedagogy the problem of how human beings learn. If subjects often become complicitous with their own domination, the issue of how they learn to insert themselves in beliefs and practices that contribute to their own domination must be understood as a pedagogical issue. Freire suggests that this is not merely an issue of rationality but also one of learning unconsciously through the gravity of social practices inscribed on how one learns through an infinite number of school routines, rituals, and relations.²⁵ In this instance, learning becomes an ongoing process in which a dialogue takes place around knowledge situated within the everyday lives and contradictory experiences of both the students and teachers who inhabit this space. Furthermore, based on a dialogic methodology, the problem solving process engages learners to see themselves as subjects in history by both understanding the limitations placed on them by the structures of domination and learning how to challenge and transform the situation. Therefore, to further enhance liberatory pedagogy, teachers must

allow for the creation of new spaces to develop in their classrooms that allow different voices to be heard and legitimated in order to appreciate the nature of difference and develop a democratic tolerance for each other.

In the following chapter I want to build upon the work of a number of contemporary theorists to both critique and extend Freire's work, on the one hand, and theoretically expand the critical relationship between literacy and pedagogy on the other.

NOTES

1. The notion of 'common culture' erases the institutional, economic, and social structures that designate how dominant configurations of power privilege some cultures over others. See Diane Ravitch, "Diversity and Democracy: Multicultural Education in America," *American Educator* (Spring 1990), 16–20, 46–48.
2. Numerous sources on power and schools include Seth Kreisberg, *Transforming Power: Domination, Empowerment and Education* (Albany, N.Y.: Suny Press, 1992); Morse Peckham, *Explanation and Power* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1979); Stuart Clegg, *Frameworks of Power* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publishers, 1989); Steven Likes, ed. *Power* (New York: NYU Press, 1986); Thomas Wartenberg, ed. *Rethinking Power* (Albany, N.Y.: Suny Press, 1992); Dennis Wrong, *Power* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988).
3. For an analysis of the relationship between literacy, democracy, and critical citizenship, see Henry A. Giroux, *Schooling and the Struggle for Public Life* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo, *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* (New York: Bergin and Garvey, 1987); Patrick Shannon, ed., *Becoming Political* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1992); Colin Lankshear and Peter McLaren, eds., *Critical Literacy* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1993).
4. For an excellent history and analysis of the literacy movement in North America, see John Willinsky, *The New Literacy* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Patrick Shannon, *Broken Promises* (New York: Bergin and Garvey, 1989). For an excellent analysis of the range of conservative and right wing views of literacy, see Candace Mitchell and Kathleen Weiler (eds.) *Rewriting Literacy: Culture and the Discourse of the Other* (New York: Bergin and Garvey, 1992). One of the most comprehensive analyses of lit-

- eracy as a form of cultural politics can be found in William C. Green, *After the New English: Cultural Politics and English Curriculum Change*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Murdoch University, 1991; Allan Block, *Occupied Readings* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995).
5. Roger I. Simon, Don Dippo, and Arleen Schenke, *Learning Work: A Critical Pedagogy of Work Education* (New York: Routledge, 1991).
 6. Two most recent examples of this position can be found in Alan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987); E. D. Hirsch, Jr. *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1987); Dinish D'Souza, *Illiberal Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1991).
 7. See Patrick Shannon, *Broken Promises* (New York: Bergin and Garvey Press, 1989); Harvey Graff, *Literacy and Social Development in the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Donald Macedo, *Literacies of Power: What Americans Aren't Allowed to Know* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1994).
 8. Paulo Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom* (Cambridge: Harvard Educational Review, 1970); Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin Books, 1972); Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973); Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy in Process* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978); Paulo Freire, *The Politics of Education* (New York: Bergin and Garvey Press, 1985); Paulo Freire and Donald Macedo, *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* (New York: Bergin and Garvey, 1987); Paulo Freire and Ira Shor, *A Pedagogy for Liberation* (New York: Bergin and Garvey Press, 1987); Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope* (New York: Continuum, 1994).
 9. See Carlos Torres, "From Pedagogy of Oppression to A Luta Continina," Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard, eds. *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
 10. For a representative collection of traditional, liberal, and radical discourses in curriculum theory, see Henry A. Giroux, Anthony N. Penna, and William F. Pinar, eds. *Curriculum and Instruction* (Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing Company, 1981); James R. Gress and David Purpel, eds. *Curriculum: An Introduction to the Field* (Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing Company, 1988); William Schubert, *Curriculum Perspective, Paradigm, and Possibility* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1986); David Pratt, *Curriculum Planning* (New York: Harcourt, 1994); William Pinar, *Understanding Curriculum* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995).
 11. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, op. cit., p. 58.
 12. Paulo Freire, *Ibid.*, p. 59.
 13. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, op. cit., p. 59.

14. Exemplary examples of this aspect of Freire's thought can be found in a number of chapters in Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard, eds. *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Irene Ward, *Literacy, Ideology and Dialogue: Toward a Dialogic Pedagogy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994).
15. Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo, *Literacy*, op. cit., p. 29.
16. Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo, *Ibid.*, p. viii.
17. A theoretical and practical application of this issue can be found in Bell Hooks, *Talking Back* (Boston: South End Press, 1989); Michelle Fine, *Framing Dropouts: Notes on the Politics of an Urban Public High School* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991).
18. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, op. cit., p. 34.
19. Paulo Freire, "Foreword," Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard, eds. *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 6-7.
20. Paulo Freire, "Preface," *Ibid.*, p. 7.
21. The most recent reform document that legitimates this approach is: *America 2000: an Education Strategy* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1991).
22. For two excellent discussions on the politics of authority from a feminist and critical pedagogy perspective, see Kathleen B. Jones, "The Trouble with Authority," *Difference: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3(1) (1991), pp. 104-127; David Sholle, "Authority on the Left: Critical Pedagogy, Postmodernism, and Vital Strategies," *Cultural Studies* 6(2) (May 1992), pp. 271-289.
23. Henry A. Giroux, *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education* (New York: Routledge, 1992).
24. Roger I. Simon, *Teaching Against the Grain* (New York: Bergin and Garvey, 1992).
25. Peter McLaren, *Schooling as a Ritual Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1986); Philip Corrigan, *Human Capacities* (New York: Routledge (1990); Lois Weis, *Between Two Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 1985).