

# **From a Pedagogy for Liberation to Liberation from Pedagogy**



by Dana L. Stuchul, Gustavo Esteva, and Madhu Suri Prakash

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Paulo Freire was a prominent member of a group of brilliant intellectuals and activists, who revealed — particularly to privileged audiences — the horrors of modern oppression. In the steps of Franz Fanon, they fostered a new awareness of the condition of the world's social majorities after World War II.

In Latin America, Freire was inspired by the revolutionary ethos stimulated by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara in the 1960s. Like many others, however, Freire searched for an alternative to guerrilla warfare and terrorism to promote profound social change: Revolution would arise neither by pen nor by sword, but via enlightened literacy.

Freire gained fame and fortune for his ideas on literacy and education. Banking education — the dominant curriculum and pedagogy of classrooms and campuses for credentials, careers, social caste or pedigree — came under Freire's critical scrutiny. He denounced its flaws with great effectiveness. Thousands, perhaps millions, of young people found in his writings a source of inspiration for their activism on behalf of peoples' liberation. His many followers applied his method with courage and ingenuity all over the world. In the years following the

publication of his pedagogy, Freire remained highly fashionable, particularly within certain professional educational circles of industrial countries.

Given the well-established image of Freire as a progressive, radical or even revolutionary educator, it may seem preposterous, outrageous or even ridiculous to present him — as we do in this essay — as a conservative thinker and practitioner. Even more, on both theoretical and political grounds, we present him as a colonizer.

We strongly believe that Freire was a man of integrity, faithful to his beliefs and possessing profound social commitments. He was particularly committed to deep social transformation for liberating the "oppressed," as he called them. Yet, in spite of his intentions, we observe that he adopted assumptions or presuppositions, which served the system he wanted to change. Instead of its transformation, his ideas nourished its conservation and reproduction. In making this claim, we hope that our observations may help to explain the frustration we have sensed in many of his followers and practitioners of his ideas — frustration arising from their accommodation within the very system against which they were courageously rebelling after being educated by Freire. We also hope that these will help those involved in learning societies develop greater clarity about their own efforts.

## **I. The Corruption of Awareness**

During the 1960s, a new awareness emerged among sections of the educated elite across the world. Surveying their social, political, and environmental landscapes, they recognized serious wrongs in it: growing social injustice; wars like the one being waged in Vietnam; the failure of the progress promised for the post World War II period. They wanted change.

Yet, if you want to change the world, you need to be aware of the direction of the global change you think is needed. You need a catholic (universally human) vision of both the desirable outcome for everyone and the way to achieve it. And if you do not suffer the illusion of being god, such consciousness should include the identification of the actors, subjects, agents who would produce the global change of which you are "aware."

Freire's pedagogy was born out of this kind of universal conscience.<sup>1</sup> Freire had it. He imagined the direction and nature of change. He identified the agents for that change. And, he dedicated his life to promoting the change he conceived. The way which would enable that change was education. Freire's catholic mission: secular salvation via education.

The unsatisfactory conditions of the world had already a universal name, even a global identity by the 1960s: underdevelopment. The Peace Corps, the Point Four Program, the War on Poverty and the Alliance for Progress contributed to root into both popular and enlightened perception the notion of underdevelopment, coined by Truman on January 20, 1949. These programs also

deepened the disability created by such a perception. None of those campaigns, however, were comparable to what was achieved by Latin American dependency theorists and other leftist intellectuals dedicated to criticizing all and every one of the development strategies that the North Americans successively put into fashion to counter underdevelopment everywhere (Esteva, 1992). For them, as for many others, Truman had simply substituted a new word for what had already been there: backwardness or poverty. They attributed such conditions to past looting (a.k.a. colonization), as well as to the continued raping caused by capitalist exploitation. The neologism coined by Frank aptly summarized the prevailing political perception: development (capitalism) develops underdevelopment (1969).

Trapped within an ideological dispute, very virulent at the time, many activists took sides: to get cured of underdevelopment, their countries needed to get cured of capitalism. Instead of a party, to develop the conscience or organization necessary for leading the people to their emancipation, *guerrilleros* will conscientize the people — through word and praxis — in the nature of their oppression: leading them in the struggle to dismantle the dominant system; bringing them the right and appropriate kind of development; offering them the promise of their emancipation.

While sharing the critique and purposes of the *guerrilleros*, Freire drew a line separating his thinking and action from theirs. He explicitly rejected the use of violence for seizing political power, in the

name of revolution and liberation, and its usual outcome: an authoritarian state. Freire wanted the change to start with the people themselves, with their conscientization, their awareness. Convinced that both oppressors and oppressed were dehumanized by oppression, he assumed that a new consciousness would enable both to be fully human again. This consciousness, by itself, would give them the capacity to dissolve the oppression.

According to Freire, "the oppressors, who oppress, exploit and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both" (1996). The oppressed, however, cannot liberate themselves by themselves. They are submerged within oppression, in the world of the oppressor; they are dehumanized, divided, inauthentic beings. They need an outside critical intervention.

According to Freire, a pedagogy was needed to conceive and implement such intervention — a pedagogy of the oppressed. Such pedagogy could not be developed by the oppressors. "It would be a contradiction in terms if the oppressors not only defended but actually implemented a liberating education" (1996). It can neither be implemented through "systematic education which can only be changed by political power" (1996). The oppressed neither have that political power nor should they seize it. What is thus needed is a group of liberated pedagogues, fully conscientized themselves in the

pedagogy of the oppressed. The liberated would conceive educational projects, which should be carried out with the oppressed in the process of organizing them. At first a pedagogy of the oppressed, this pedagogy would then become a pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation, a pedagogy of humankind.

Freire used many titles for his mediators, his agents of change, in different moments of his life and work, describing them in different ways. Yet, he always wrote for them. He did not address himself to the oppressed, who had lost their humanity. Instead, he addressed the mediators. Freire's pedagogy is, therefore, best understood as a pedagogy for mediators *qua* liberators. Freire wrote for critical educators, revolutionary leaders, social workers, organic intellectuals, a motley crowd of characters who in his view could and would dedicate themselves to the liberation of the oppressed. He attempted to teach them the moral and political virtues, as well as the technical tools, that would enable them, through their own liberation, to perform the function he ascribed to them. They become a substitute for a revolutionary party or for guerrilla activities. Once liberated, they become, for Freire, the new enlightened vanguard that would make possible the desirable change.

There is no need to assume, like Peter Berger, that Freire's consciousness raising implies the arrogance of higher-class individuals with respect to the lower-class population (Berger, 1974). Neither does he attribute to them an ontological or

existential sickness. He is most certainly not a racist. Freire merely assumes that the oppression suffered by the oppressed has radically disabled them. The oppressed can neither liberate themselves from oppression, nor can they even perceive fully this oppression. Thus, the mediator must endow the oppressed with both awareness and conscience. In both cases, what is supposedly needed is a abstract, rational perception, with a specific theory about the oppression and its causes. Such theory takes for granted: 1) that such awareness defines "true" reality, 2) that the oppressed lack such awareness and conscience, and 3) that such awareness and conscience are preconditions for liberation and transformation to occur.

Freire's position belongs to a distinctly modern (and therefore, Western) tradition. At the beginning of modernity, Hegel stated it in very clear terms: people cannot govern themselves; someone needs to govern them. This apothegm has been the premise, the point of departure, for all the dominant political theories and practices of the last two centuries. It implies that if people cannot govern themselves, they cannot change by themselves. They cannot, therefore, liberate themselves from any form of oppression. The underpinnings of this tradition and conviction are well known. They are embedded in the unilinear, evolutionist vision of the world, which presupposes the equally Western conception of the autonomous individual and of Western rationality/science. An enlightened elite should guide the masses of individuals along their evolutionary path, sometimes controlling them,

sometimes subordinating them to the dominant system, and at other times, leading them in the process of substituting one system for another.

This perspective, however, implicitly or explicitly dismisses, suppresses, or disqualifies the abundant historical evidence of how people have governed themselves or have rebelled by themselves against all sorts of oppressors, through what Teodor Shanin calls "vernacular revolutions" (1983). The term "vernacular" means native, indigenous, not of foreign origin or of learned formation (OED). The antonyms of vernacular are: cosmopolitan and worldly-wise, artificial and subtle, expert, official, universal and scientific.

According to the dominant modern perception, vernacular initiatives and movements — expressing the rebellion of the oppressed against their oppressors or at least their resistance — are unseen, irrelevant, or non-existent. Or, even worse, they are viewed as counterproductive, traditionalist, parochial, fundamentalist, reactionary or counter-revolutionary, because they do not follow the official program. The only movements or initiatives taken into account are those conceived and promoted by cosmopolitan, universal, educated agents of change, agents who educate the people towards progress, pointing the way out of the vernacular towards the universal ... the global.

Yet, no longer can the existence of vernacular revolutions be denied. With the insurrection of dominated knowledge, as Foucault (1992) calls it, a whole corpus

of revisionist literature provides documentation of changes, initiatives and movements born among the people themselves, in their vernacular realms (Frank 1987, Eyerman and Jamison 1991, The Ecologist 1992, Esteva and Prakash 1998, Negri 1999).

What is therefore increasingly in question is the real nature and potential for transformation of the conscience which all sorts of revolutionaries have attempted to instill in the people in order to promote their own projects. For some, this has been but another form of colonization, not of liberation. As Wendell Berry puts it: "In the formula Power to the People, I hear 'Power to me, who am eager to run the show in the name of the People.' The People, of course, are those designated by their benevolent servant-to-be, who knows so well what is good for them" (1972).

Often, when it becomes impossible to deny the very presence and the social and political impact of peoples' initiatives or vernacular revolutions, the dominant reaction is to associate them with prominent characters or charismatic leaders. Such attributions of the origins and orientations of peoples' movements to enlightened or educated leaders legitimizes the prejudice that nothing progressive can happen without mediators.<sup>2</sup>

The construction of mediators, intrinsic to Freire's pedagogy for liberation, expresses thus a corruption of his awareness of oppression. It operates as a veil, hiding from the supposedly "liberated" agents of change their own

oppression — the fact that their conscience is still embedded in an oppressive system and thus becomes counterproductive — adding oppression to the oppressed, disabling them while dismissing, denying or disqualifying the fullness of their initiatives. This operation does not only imply a specific, untenable arrogance: the hubris of possessing the true, universal conscience. It also serves the purpose of legitimizing the right of intervention in the lives of others.

## II. The Corruption of Love

Similar to liberation theology (an option for the poor) courageously adopted by an important sector of the Catholic Church in Latin America, Freire finds a foundation and a destiny for his theory and practice in the ideal of solidarity. Solidarity expresses an historical commitment based on a universal ethics. Solidarity legitimizes intervention in the lives of others in order to conscientize them. Derived from charity, *caritas*, the Greek and Latin word for love, and motivated by care, by benevolence, by love for the other, conscientization becomes a universal, ethical imperative.

Certainly, Freire was fully aware of the nature of modern aid; of what he called false generosity. He identified clearly the disabling and damaging impact of all kinds of such aid. Yet, for all of his clarity and awareness, he is unable to focus his critique on service. Freire's specific blindness is an inability to identify the false premises and dubious interventions — in the name of care — of one specific class of service professionals: educators.

In its modern institutional form, *qua* service, care is the mask of love. This mask is not a false face. The modernized service-provider believes in his care and love, perhaps more than even the serviced. The mask is the face (McKnight 1977). Yet, the mask of care and love obscures the economic nature of service, the economic interests behind it. Even worse, this mask hides the disabling nature of service professions, like education.

All of the caring, disabling professions are based on the assumption or presupposition of a lack, a deficiency, a need, that the professional service can best satisfy. The very modern creation of the needy man, a product of economic society, of capitalism, and the very mechanism through which needs are systematically produced in the economic society, are hidden behind the idea of service. Once the need is identified, the necessity of service becomes evident.

In this way, Freire constructed the human need for the conscience he conceived. In attributing such need to his oppressed, he also constructed the process to satisfy it: conscientization. Thus, the process reifies the need and the outcome: only conscientization can address the need for an improved conscience and consciousness and only education can deliver conscientization. This educational servicing of the oppressed, however, is masked: as care, love, vocation, historical commitment, as an expression of Freire's universal ethic of solidarity. Freire's blindness is his inability to perceive the disabling effect of his various activities or strategies of conscientization. He seems

unaware that the business of modern society is service and that social service in modern society is business (McKnight 1997). Today, economic powers like the USA pride themselves in being post-industrial: that is, smokestacks and sweatshops have moved to the South in an economy retooled for global supremacy in providing service. With ever-increasing needs, satisfaction of these needs requires more service, resulting in unlimited economic growth.

Freire was also unaware that solidarity, both the word and the idea, are today the new mask of aid and development, of care and love. For example, in the 1990s, the neoliberal government of Mexican president Carlos Salinas used a good portion of the funds obtained through privatization to implement the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad. The program was celebrated by the World Bank as the best social program in the world. It is now well-documented that, like all other wars against poverty, it was basically a war waged against the poor, widening and deepening the condition it was supposed to cure, a condition that, in the first place, was aggravated by the policies associated with the neoliberal credo.

Freire could not perceive the corruption of love through caring, through service, and particularly the impact of the corruption which occurs when the oppressed are transformed into the objects of service: as clients, beneficiaries, and customers. Having created a radical separation between his oppressed and their educators, Freire was unsuccessful in bringing them together, despite all his attempts to do so through his dialogue,

his deep literacy — key words for empowerment and participation. All these pedagogical and curricular tools of education prove themselves repeatedly to be counterproductive: they produce the opposite of what they pretend to create. Instead of liberation, they add to the lives of oppressed clients, more chains and more dependency on the pedagogy and curricula of the mediator.<sup>3</sup>

During the last several centuries, all kinds of agents have pretended to "liberate" pagans, savages, natives, the oppressed, the under-developed, the uneducated, under-educated, and the illiterate in the name of the Cross, civilization (i.e. Westernization), capitalism or socialism, human rights, democracy, a universal ethic, progress or any other banner of development. Every time the mediator conceptualizes the category or class of the oppressed in his/her own terms, with his/her own ideology, he is morally obligated to evangelize: to promote among them, for their own good, the kind of transformation he or she defines as liberation.

In response to colonization, Yvonne Dion-Buffalo and John Mohawk recently suggested that colonized peoples have three choices: 1) to become good subjects, accepting the premises of the modern West without much question, 2) to become bad subjects, always resisting the parameters of the colonizing world, or 3) to become non-subjects, acting and thinking in ways far removed from those of the modern West (Quoted in Esteva and Prakash 1998).

The assumption of Freire is that his oppressed are trapped within the dominant ideology, that they have been de-humanized by the system, that they are its subjects. But his rebellion, as much as his solidarity, succeeds at best in creating the condition of a bad subject, a rebel subject. In this way, neither Freire nor his conscientizers can perceive their own oppression. By reducing his definition of himself, of his own being, to the terms of the oppressor, even to resist or oppose him, Freire can not even conceive of the possibility of becoming a non-subject.

In rejecting the need of mediators and the dominant paradigm which holds that the people cannot govern themselves or change and rebel by themselves autonomously, we are of course affirming the opposite: that the people can govern themselves. Even more, it is our contention that people liberate themselves from oppressors only when both the initiative and the struggle come from them; from within themselves rather than from external agents of change. Instead of pro-motion (which operates under the assumption that the people are paralyzed or are moving in the wrong direction), those taking initiatives at the grassroots to govern themselves autonomously or democratically speak of co-motion — moving with the people, rather than moving the people. In Spanish, the word *conmover*, *conmoción*, is instructive and strong in its denotation. *Conmoción* means not only to dance with the other the common tune (which does not necessarily define a common conscience). It also denotes moving together with the heart and stomach, not only with the brain, with rationality. The



real plurality of the world is manifest in a pluralist attitude, fully respecting both the radical otherness of the other and their visions and initiatives. Co-motion may thus operate as a vaccine against the corruption of love.

### **III. Resisting Awareness: The Case of Literacy**

Like Marx, Freire professed a profound fascination for modern technology. Like Marx, he recognized that technology is not neutral; that it can be used as a vehicle of oppression. But like Marx, he seemed unable to discover the nature of technological society and to find in *la technologie* itself, as defined by Ellul (1964), a source of oppression and alienation.

In no other aspect is his silence or denial more evident than in the case of the alphabet: the tool of literacy. It is to the alphabet and to literacy that Freire dedicated his life. Literacy was his chosen field and until his end, he dedicated himself to promoting it and its tools. Courageously, he denounced the deficiencies and perversions of the literacy promoted and imposed by banking education. From these critiques followed Freire's proposed paths to liberation: the appropriation of the tool, its pedagogy and curricula, as well as the skills engendered by the oppressed themselves. He insisted on the importance of a "critical appropriation" of literacy so that oppressors can no longer oppress the oppressed.

Here, Freire confines himself to the critical question of who owns the tools

and curricula of literacy as well as to their means and ends. He does not venture the distance required to see how the tool itself tames people, reducing and confining them to the operations of the textual mind. Freire's historical perspective does not extend itself to examine the social construction of the textual mind. Neither does he reflect upon the implications of the textual mind for the human condition, including social organization and its system of domination (Illich 1993).

In his denunciation of the discrimination suffered by the illiterate, Freire does not see, smell, imagine or perceive the differential reality of the oral world. While aspiring to eliminate all these forms of discrimination from the planet, he takes for granted, without more critical consideration, that reading and writing are fundamental basic needs for all humans. And, he embraces the implications of such assumptions: that illiterate people are not full human beings.

Freire's pedagogic method requires that literacy should be rooted in the socio-political context of the illiterate. He is convinced that in and through such a process, they would acquire a critical judgement about the society in which they suffer oppression. But he does not take into account any critical consideration of the oppressive and alienating character implicit in the tool itself, the alphabet. He cannot bring his reflection and practice to the point of establishing clear limits to the alphabet, like with many other modern tools, in order to create the conditions for the

oppressed to critically use the alphabet, instead of being used by it.

As Plato suggested, the text is radically uprooted from any concrete, living experience, no matter how much it evokes living and concrete experiences or is written or read in a very concrete and alive situation. The textual mind is constructed according to that model. The textual mind thinks of speech as frozen; of memories as things that can be saved and recovered; of secrets that can be engraved within the conscience and thus examined; and of experiences that can be described. In writing texts, the modern individual "looks" for the proper word to say what he wants to say. He thinks that he can fix in line what has happened — in his life, his job, his country — and mummify them, only to resurrect them later. A text is in a sense past speech, but speech which has suffered a radical transformation, so radical that perhaps it can no longer be called speech.

In the world of orality, where the oath is law, words are the fabric of human interaction. Modern men are men in context. The word context still describes the weaving of words, the connection between the parts of a discourse, the parts around a "text" which determine its meaning. But it also means today how men and woman are woven together, connected. They are connected through texts. Their minds are constructed in the shape of texts — uprooted, homeless texts. And they feel unbearable loneliness unless they find their contexts, to connect themselves to others through pertinent texts.

Modern mentality — whether that of Freire's oppressor or oppressed — is inextricably shaped by the alphabet. Liberation cannot come from literacy — not even critical literacy, Freirean style. Liberation comes with the autonomy of assuming a critical distance from the alphabet, from the recovery and regeneration of our minds, currently trapped and embedded within texts.

We recognize and celebrate that most people on earth are either functionally or absolutely illiterate: that is, non-alphabetized. Tragically, with each and every literacy campaign, their way of life and cosmovision are at risk of being disqualified. Thus, in departing from Freirean pedagogy and liberation, interest in the autonomy or liberation of the non-alphabetized by the literate must also be accompanied by the sense and feeling of the association between our texts and their oppression.

#### **IV. Resisting Love: The Case Against Education**

Freire's central presupposition: that education is a universal good, part and parcel of the human condition, was never questioned, in spite of the fact that he was personally exposed, for a long time, to an alternative view. This seems to us at least strange, if not abhorrent.

Freire was explicitly interested in the oppressed. His entire life and work were presented as a vocation committed to assuming their view, their interests. Yet, he ignored the plain fact that for the oppressed, the social majorities of the

world, education has become one of the most humiliating and disabling components of their oppression: perhaps, even the very worst.

Education creates two classes of people: the educated and the uneducated or undereducated. The educated, a minority, receive all kinds of privileges from their position. The rest get all kinds of deprivation and destitution. No literacy campaign or educational project has or can overcome that deprivation and destitution in any society. Why did Freire close his eyes to such facts? Like all other educational reformers, he concentrated his efforts on polishing and cosmetizing people's chains. This further legitimized and deepened the oppression he was supposedly struggling against.

The uneducated are not able to read the texts of the educated. But they are not stupid.<sup>4</sup> They retain their common sense. In the era of accelerated educational reforms, the uneducated are better equipped to accept the fact denied by the educated: the foolishness of placing faith in the possibility of secular salvation through education. The growing awareness among the illiterate, the uneducated, and the undereducated about this situation, coupled with many other facts, is allowing an increasing number of them to think that perhaps the beginning of the end of the era of education has already begun.

For the experts, the contemporary state of education is dire. The educational system becomes more oppressive to those enrolled within it, even as it expands. With every step of its expansion, teaching

becomes more mechanical, monotonous and irrelevant. Students discover faster than their teachers how irrelevant their learning is; how little it prepares them to do useful work or to live.

Despite this, the reform proposals proliferate. Grouped into three categories of reformers, some look to improve the classroom: its methods, equipment or personnel. Others attempt to liberate it from any bureaucratic imposition: promoting teachers, parents, and communities as the principal decision-makers for determining the content and methods of education. Still others attempt to transform the whole society into a classroom: with new technologies substituting for the closed space of the classroom, providing for open markets and remote teaching. Whether reformed, free or a world-wide classroom, these reforms represent three stages in the escalation of interventions to increase social control and to subjugate people.

The most dangerous reformers are today those who promote the substitution of the classroom for the massive distribution of knowledge packages via global communication technologies. These reformers go further in establishing knowledge consumption as a basic need for survival. While traditional reformers are still promising more and better schools, these current reformers are at this moment winning the race. They present themselves as the only ones who will be able to achieve the goal, accepted by everyone: equality of access.<sup>5</sup> Rather than diminishing the need for classrooms, these reformers extend its function. Theirs is an attempt to transform the

global village into an environmental womb in which pedagogic therapists will control, under the appearance of a free market, the complex placenta necessary for nourishing every human being. Furthermore, the regulation of intellectual rights, now being negotiated in international institutions, will serve to protect the corporations which produce and distribute the knowledge packages that from now on will define education in the global campus.

Educators continue to educate the world in the fallacy that education is as old as the hills. However, the idea of education is exclusively modern. Born of capitalism, education perpetuates it. The past is colonized every time the cultural practices or traditions for learning or study of pre-modern or non-modern peoples are reduced to that category understood as education.

Education, like capital, was initially promoted through force. Today, police and armies are still used to extend and deepen educational control. However, education has now been established as a personal and collective need. Like other needs, it has been transformed into a right. More than bureaucratic imposition, education has become a legitimate and universally accepted social addiction — it stimulates knowledge consumers to freely, passionately, and compulsively acquire their chains, thus contributing to the construction of the global Big Brother.

Globalized markets simply cannot absorb the masses. Increasingly, people become disposable human beings — unavailable for capital to exploit them. However, by

giving them, with public funds, access to knowledge packages, capital educates them as consumers and prepares them for the moment in which it can subsume them again in the system of exploitation.

These "disposable" people have started to react everywhere. There is a proliferation of initiatives escaping the logic of capital. Everywhere, disposable people are transforming the drama of exclusion into an opportunity to follow their own path and to create by themselves their own life. One of their first steps is to escape education.

Given the fact that education is the economization of learning, transforming it into the consumption of a commodity called knowledge, people are recovering their own notions of learning and living free of educational mediation. Since the noun "education" imposes a completely passive dependence on the system which provides education, people are substituting this noun with the verbs "to learn" and "to study." Unlike the noun, these verbs reestablish the autonomous capacity for building creative relationships with others and with nature — relationships which generate knowing, wisdom. People are again acknowledging that to know is a personal experience, and that the only way to know, to widen the competencies for living, is to learn from the world, not about the world. Their hope: that the extinction of the ritual of schooling and of the myth of education is appearing on the horizon — the beginning of an era ending privilege and license (Illich 1971).

Freire was entirely unable to anticipate such evolution or even to perceive the nature of the problem. He was thus unable to perceive the victimization created by schooling and education and to derive the pertinent conclusions. He was unable to bring his brilliant critique of "banking education" to education itself.

The very modern idea of teaching everything to everyone, of providing the same knowledge to every member of a society, of educating all of them to give to them vital competence, transformed learning and knowledge into a commodity. It applied to learning the premise of scarcity: the economic principle that man's wants are very great, not to say infinite, but his means are limited, although improvable. The logic of this assumption defines the economic problem *par excellence*: to allocate resources (limited means to alternative, unlimited ends). Once defined as education, the conditions for learning, always sufficient in every culture for its own requirements, became scarce. Once the premise of scarcity became the main principle of organization for society, with modernity and capitalism, the allocation of means for learning and for the distribution of the new commodity called knowledge, always limited, started to follow the pattern of injustice: some had access to them; others did not. Furthermore, the ways and means of learning still available for the destitute were restricted, eliminated, or radically devalued. The very experience of knowing was transmogrified into the mechanical consumption of abstract, unfleshed, disembodied, genderless texts, now called "knowledge."

Freire's pedagogy of liberation, viewed with archeological eyes, is yet another modern tool and technology used against vernacular probity and honor. The universal conscience and the institutional rules guarding it are doomed to colonize, standardize, and tame the wilderness of what still remains vernacular.

## V. Liberation From Pedagogy

There are teachers — past and present — whom we admire. We admire them for different reasons and in different ways. They come from completely different worlds. We admire the kind of impact each of them has had or is having in their worlds; an impact so profound and powerful on their people that it spills over into other worlds; of the Other who does not belong to the world of each of these.

The teachers we admire have not prided themselves in being professional teachers. In fact, even those who were professionals chose to abandon their profession: to become, so to speak, professional dropouts. Here, for matters of variety and spice, we will limit ourselves to identifying only three. Three de-professionalized teachers, belonging to three worlds so different ... they might as well be three distinct planets.

For clarifying the issues of this essay, we chose to reflect on the life, the work, and the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, Subcomandante Marcos and Wendell Berry. Purposely, we juxtapose them to exacerbate their radical and dramatic differences—personal and cultural: an international teacher of peace from India;

a ski-masked combatant in an indigenous, Zapatista army from Mexico; a North American farmer-poet from Kentucky.

Is it absurd to even place them under the same umbrella of public and private virtues we dwell on as we reflect on the kind of impact they have had upon others ... even as they have said a firm No! to all the symbols of modern power? Particularly the power of the modern agent of secular salvation: education?

We cannot call them educators. Even less can we call them Freirean educators. Emancipators. Conscientizers. Empowerers. Liberators. Humanizers. Undeniably, each of them has put up the good fight for freedom from colonizers, from corporations, from the oppressive system of the State. Undeniably, their courage has infected others with the contagion needed to swim upstream against the global current. Each lives a life so compelling that it becomes their message — let me be the change I wish for the world. Each is literally an enfleshment of these words. Words made flesh. Each reveals in his own fashion what it means to buck the modern madness called Progress. Each has been cured of modern man's mad love for The Machine. Each goes against the grain of modernity not to be novel, not as a fashion, but because his wisdom suggests the significance of breaking free from the radical rupture imposed by modern man on tradition. And, each reveals the art of enriching, enlivening tradition; they possess the traditional knowledge for changing tradition from within, thus ensuring its historical continuity.

Each of them suffered a radical transformation, once they became aware of their condition as subjects. First, they became good subjects. Next, they became bad subjects in an oppressive system. In so doing, each was able to perceive and conceive a way out of such oppression. And each of them fell into the temptation to transform their awareness into the agency of change, leading others towards that way. But each recovered after that fall and transformed their culturally rooted awareness into the decision to incarnate, in their own lives, the way out of oppression, while embracing their own personal limits under pervading social constraints.

Finally, each of them became non-subjects and attributed the agency of change to the people themselves, rather than to any kind of mediator. They do not see others' awareness as something created or constructed by them: their intermediation, their leadership. They are only articulating peoples' experiences and traditions, through which people recognize the foundation for their own thinking and action. Instead of using such awareness to preach ideals of life, they transform it into living ideals which they attempt to incarnate and regenerate, in ashrams in India; in the jungle of Chiapas in Southern Mexico; or on a farm in rural Kentucky in North America.

These non-teacher, non-conscientizer teachers give us a glimpse of what it means to be non-subjects; what is involved in the recovery and the regeneration of vernacular worlds. They do not do it in any nostalgic, sentimental way. Their living, rather than a going

back, are worthy of emulation precisely because they live full of hope, in the present. Their lives are attempts to heal the brutal rupture caused by modernity while they break free from it in order to re-connect themselves to real people in their soil cultures.

## **VI. Reclaiming Awareness and Love**

As victims, we have been seduced into believing that schooling and education are prerequisites for living a good life. We have been deceived by the cult of experts to accept that living, learning, and growing require expert expertise. We have been schooled into accepting one kind of institutional arrangement (for example the school) — hierarchical, centralized, compartmentalized, and normalized — which provides programmed choice behind the guise (and using the language) of freedom. Through curricularized learning, we know how to measure, assess, and rank knowledge (as well as ourselves and others), increasingly devoid of real-life experience. And, we have resolved that schooling yields learning, that school-learning yields wisdom, and that school-wisdom ought to yield quantitatively improved living. Yet, most fail to consider the ill-effect that an over-emphasis on "quantity" or "quality" (education, not to mention career, income, "toys" and the like) must have on spirit, body, culture, and nature.

Having despaired over the deceit perpetrated by schooling and education, we are, we believe, ready to hope. The gods of schooling and education no longer hold possession of us. They no

longer bind us to expectations of a world or society made better as a result of their functioning — whether reformed, revolutionized, humanized, conscientized, multi-culturalized, democratized, or greened.

We prevent our hope from being transmogrified into a program or an expectation — the hubris of pretending to control the future. As Vaclav Havel affirms, "Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the conviction that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out" (1991).

Our hope is continually nourished by the Zapatistas, who have inspired thousands, millions of globaphobics all over the planet. The Zapatistas continue to offer a radical refutation to all modern fanatics, self-styled cosmopolitan individuals, still dismissing all vernacular initiatives and movements as parochial, fundamentalist, and as going-back-in-time. We find parochialism in all globaphilics, like international institutions or transnational corporations, and in their reductionist science. All of them are constrained by their lenses which reduce the richness of the world, in all its diversity and complexity, to the homogeneous, abstract quantities of their statistics, always associated with a very parochial, self-serving interest.

As defined by the deeds of the Zapatistas as well as by the words of Marcos, localization is the opposite to both localism and globalization. True, traditional resistance to all kinds of colonizers often implied forms of localism in which people were forced to

entrench themselves in their own places. Such entrenchment implied the danger of short-sighted and even fundamentalist localism. In the epoch of economic and technological globalization, people realize that all isolated localisms will be razed to the ground. But instead of abandoning their roots and places, as global forces push them to do — in order to better gut them in the shapeless space of the market and the State — they affirm themselves in them while at the same time opening their hearts and hands to others like themselves.

In our own struggles to become non-subjects, we find inspiration in the words of Paul Goodman:

*"Suppose you had had the revolution you are talking or dreaming about. Suppose your side had won, and you had the kind of society you wanted. How would you live, you personally, in that society? Start living that way now! Whatever you would do then, do it now. When you run up against obstacles, people, or things that won't let you live that way, then begin to think about how to get over or around or under that obstacle, or how to push it out of the way, and your politics will be concrete and practical"* (Quoted in Holt 1970).

## ENDNOTES

1 In using "conscience," we are guided by Illich who in a footnote in Gender (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 1982, pp.158-9), provides a lengthy elaboration on the history of the term as well as a critique of its contemporary derivative. We include an excerpt from the text. *"Conscience here means the human guide and umpire internalized.*

*As an ideal type, it is opposed to the gendered sense of vernacular probity (FN 82). What has been called the 'process of civilization' builds on a process that could be called 'conscientization.' The term has been coined in Brazil to label a kind of political self-help adult education organized mostly by clergymen popularizing Marxist categories to help the poor discover that they are 'humans' (FN 4). It could be used by the historian to describe an enterprise that was decisively shaped by the Church through the institutionalization of the sacrament of Penance in the twelfth century, an enterprise that since then has been followed by other techniques. I would call conscientization all professionally planned and administered rituals that have as their purpose the internalization of a religious or secular ideology. Conscientization consists of the colonization and standardization of vernacular probity and honor through some 'catholic' (that is universally human) set of institutional rules."*

2 A case in point is the Zapatista movement. For the government, the political parties, many analysts and even many of its followers or sympathizers, the Zapatistas are in fact reduced to the now famous subcomandante Marcos. They thus express their racist prejudice: the only educated white man of the movement, who has performed a brilliant role as speaker (a kind of cultural bridge between the indigenous peoples and the educated world), should be the one conceiving and leading the movement. Time and again, the Zapatistas have declared, or demonstrated with facts, that their uprising came from people's own initiative, from their communities, that have since then been in control of it. Marcos himself has explained how the communities cured him of the ideological burden he brought to the jungle. But the



Zapatistas are still seen, by the elite, as a group of manipulated Indians, under the control of a mestizo.

3 Krishna Kumar (1998) accurately writes that "it is hardly unfair to say that Freire belongs to that short historical period which lasted from the late 1960s to the middle of the 1980s ... Activism aimed at social change had become a fully magnetized service industry, copiously funded by international donors with a clear view that it would help contain within limits the feelings of the poor and the marginalized majority. This portrait of the past decade or so, though sketchy, should help us appreciate the incorporation of Freirean ideas and terminology into the industry of voluntarism."

4 In fact, the very idea of modern education emerged with the conviction, generalized in the XVII century, that men are born stupid. Stupidity became equivalent to original sin. Education became its cure, defined as the inverse of vital competence (Illich 1977).

5 The promise is of course another illusion, legitimizing the current campaign. Less than one percent of the people in Southeast Asia have access to Internet. Two thirds of the people on Earth have never made a phone call. So much for equality of access through the Internet.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dana L. Stuchul  
<dana\_stuchul@berea.edu> is Assistant Professor of Education Studies at Berea College in Berea, Kentucky. Her publications have included the following topics: education as a technology, friendship, and criticism of the sustainability paradigm. Her on-going research interests focus on the writings of Ivan Illich while attempting to formulate a philosophy of technology consistent with the Gandhian and Illich inspired idea of "modern subsistence." In this

endeavor, she also celebrates peoples living at the grassroots.

Gustavo Esteva  
<gustavoesteva@terra.com.mx> is a grassroots activist and deprofessionalized intellectual. For the last 25 years he has associated his life and work with indigenous peoples, particularly in the South of Mexico, where he lives in a small Indian village. The author, co-author or editor of more than 30 books and many essays and a columnist in Mexican newspapers, he is affiliated to *Centro de Encuentros y Diálogos Interculturales* and *Universidad de la Tierra*, two coalitions of grassroots organizations.

Madhu Suri Prakash <msp1@psu.edu> is Professor-in-Charge of the Education Theory and Policy Program at the Pennsylvania State University and is the recipient of the Eisenhower Award for Distinguished Teaching. Co-author with Gustavo Esteva of Grassroots Post-modernism: Remaking the Soil of Cultures (Zed, 1998) and Escaping Education: Living as Learning Among Grassroots Cultures (Lang, 1998), Dr. Prakash is currently co-editing a collection of essays and stories in a book titled, Ahimsa: Beyond War, Violence and Counterviolence. All of her work seeks to celebrate the diverse ways in which diverse peoples living at the grassroots thrive outside of the addictions of service institutions and mass technologies, professional services and corporate consumerism.

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