

# Teaching as an Act of Love: Reflections on Paulo Freire and His Contributions to Our Lives and Our Work

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*As individuals or as peoples, by fighting for the restoration of [our] humanity [we] will be attempting the restoration of true generosity. And this fight, because of the purpose given it, will actually constitute an act of love.*

—Paulo Freire  
*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970)

For days, I have reflected on the writings of Paulo Freire; and with every turn of ideas, I've been brought back to the notion of love and its manifestation in our work and our lives. Here, let me say quickly that I am neither speaking of a liberal, romanticized, or merely feel-good notion of love that so often is mistakenly attributed to this term nor the long-suffering and self-effacing variety associated with traditional religious formation. Nothing could be further from the truth. If there was anything that Freire consistently sought to defend, it was the freshness, spontaneity, and presence embodied in what he called an "armed love—the fighting love of those convinced of the right and the duty to fight, to denounce, and to announce" (Freire, 1998, p. 42). A love that could be lively, forceful, and inspiring, while at the same time, critical, challenging, and insistent. As such, Freire's brand of love stood in direct opposition to the insipid "generosity" of teachers or administrators who would blindly adhere to a system of schooling that fundamentally transgresses every principle of cultural and economic democracy.

Rather, I want to speak to the experience of love as I came to understand it through my work and friendship with Freire. I want to write about a political and radicalized form of love that is never about absolute consensus, or unconditional acceptance, or unceasing words of sweetness, or endless streams

of hugs and kisses. Instead, it is a love that I experienced as unconstricted, rooted in a committed willingness to struggle persistently with purpose in our life and to intimately connect that purpose with what he called our "true vocation"—to be human.

#### **A COMMITMENT TO OUR HUMANITY**

*A humanizing education is the path through which men and women can become conscious about their presence in the world. The way they act and think when they develop all of their capacities, taking into consideration their needs, but also the needs and aspirations of others. (Freire & Betto, 1985, p. 14–15)*

For Freire, a liberatory education could never be conceived without a profound commitment to our humanity. Once again, I must point out that his notion of humanity was not merely some simplistic or psychologized notion of "having positive self-esteem," but rather a deeply reflective interpretation of the dialectical relationship between our cultural existence as individuals and our political and economic existence as social beings. From Freire's perspective, if we were to solve the educational difficulties of students from oppressed communities, then educators had to look beyond the personal. We had to look for answers within the historical realm of economic, social, and political forms, so that we might better understand those forces that give rise to our humanity as it currently exists. In so many ways, his work pointed to how economic inequality and social injustice dehumanize us, distorting our capacity to love ourselves, each other, and the world. In the tradition of Antonio Gramsci before him, Freire exposed how even well-meaning teachers, through their lack of critical moral leadership, actually participate in disabling the heart, minds, and bodies of their students—an act that disconnects these students from the personal and social motivation required to transform their world and themselves.

There is no question that Freire's greatest contribution to the world was his capacity to be a loving human being. His regard for children, his concern for teachers, his work among the poor, his willingness to share openly his moments of grief, disappointment, frustration, and new love, all stand out in my mind as examples of his courage and unrelenting pursuit of a coherent and honest life. I recall our meeting in 1987, six months after the death of his first wife, Elza. Freire was in deep grief. During one of his presentations, he literally had to stop so that he could weep the tears that he had been trying to hold back all morning. For a moment, all of us present were enveloped by his grief and probably experienced one of the greatest pedagogical lessons of our life. I don't believe anyone left the conference hall that day as they had arrived. Through the courageous vulnerability of his humanity—with all its complexities and contradictions—Freire illuminated our understanding of not only what it means to be a critical educator, but what it means to live a critical life.

In the following year, I experienced another aspect of Freire's living praxis. To everyone's surprise, Freire remarried a few months later. Many were

stunned by the news and it was interesting to listen to and observe the responses of his followers in the States. Some of the same radical educators who had embraced him in his grief now questioned his personal decision to remarry so quickly after the death of Elza. Much to my surprise, the news of his marriage and his public gestures of affection and celebration of his new wife, Nita were met with a strange sort of suspicion and fear. Despite these reverberations, Freire spoke freely of his new love and the sensations that now stirred in him. He shared his struggle with loneliness and grief and challenged us to *live and love* in the present—as much personally as politically.

#### FEAR AND REVOLUTIONARY DREAMS

*The more you recognize your fear as a consequence of your attempt to practice your dream, the more you learn how to put into practice your dream! I never had interviews with the great revolutionaries of this century about their fears! But all of them felt fear, to the extent that all of them were very faithful to their dreams. (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 57)*

Challenging the conditioned fears with which our dreams of freedom are controlled and the "false consciousness" that diminishes our social agency are common themes in Freire's work. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), he wrote of *the fear of freedom* that afflicts us, a fear predicated on prescriptive relationships between those who rule and those who are expected to follow. As critical educators, he urged us to question carefully our ideological beliefs and pedagogical intentions and to take note of our own adherence to the status quo. He wanted us to recognize that every *prescribed behavior* represents the imposition of one human being upon another—an imposition that moves our consciousness away from what we experience in the flesh to an abstracted reality and false understanding of our ourselves and our world. If we were to embrace a pedagogy of liberation, we had to prepare ourselves to replace this conditioned fear of freedom with sufficient autonomy and responsibility to struggle for an educational praxis and a way of life that could support democratic forms of economic and cultural existence.

Freire often addressed the notion of fear in his speeches and in his writings. In his eyes, fear and revolutionary dreams were unquestionably linked. The more that we were willing to struggle for an emancipatory dream, the more apt we were to know intimately the experience of fear, how to control and educate our fear, and finally, how to transform that fear into courage. Moreover, we could come to recognize our fear as a signal that we are engaged in critical opposition to the status quo and in transformative work toward the manifestation of our revolutionary dreams.

In many ways, Freire attempted to show us through his own life that facing our fears and contending with our suffering are inevitable and necessary human dimensions of our quest to make and remake history, of our quest to make a new world from our dreams. Often, he likened our movement toward

greater humanity as a form of *childbirth, and a painful one*. This *labor of love* constitutes a critical process in our struggle to break the *oppressor-oppressed* contradiction and the conflicting beliefs that incarcerate our humanity. Freire's description of this duality is both forthright and sobering.

The oppressed suffer from the duality which has established itself in their innermost being. They discover that without freedom they cannot exist authentically. Yet, although they desire authentic existence, they fear it. They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized. The conflict lies in the choice between wholly themselves or being divided; between ejecting the oppressor within or not ejecting him; between human solidarity or alienation; between following prescriptions or having choices; between being spectators or actors, between acting or having the illusion of acting through the action of the oppressors; between speaking out or being silent, castrated in their power to create and re-create, in their power to transform the world. (1970, p. 33)

Freire firmly believed that if we were to embrace a pedagogy of freedom, we had to break out of this duality. We had to come to see how the domesticating power of the dominant ideology causes teachers to become ambiguous and indecisive, even in the face of blatant injustice. Critical educators had to struggle together against a variety of punitive and threatening methods used by many administrators to instill a fear of freedom. Because if this domesticating role were not rejected, even progressive teachers could fall prey to *fatalism*—a condition that negates passion and destroys the capacity to dream—making them each day more politically vulnerable and less able to face the challenges before them.

Fatalism is a notion that Freire, until the end, refused to accept. At every turn, he emphatically rejected the idea that nothing could be done about the educational consequences of economic inequalities and social injustice. If the economic and political power of the ruling class denied subordinate populations the space to survive, it was not because "it should be that way" (Freire, 1997, p. 41). Instead, the asymmetrical relations of power that perpetuate fatalism among those with little power had to be challenged. This required teachers to problematize the conditions of schooling with their colleagues, students, and parents, and through a critical praxis of reflection, dialogue, and action, become capable of *announcing justice*. But such an announcement required a total *denouncement of fatalism*, which would unleash our power to push against the limits, create new spaces, and begin redefining our vision of education and society.

#### **CAPITALISM AS THE ROOT OF DOMINATION**

*Brutalizing the work force by subjecting them to routine procedures is part of the nature of the capitalist mode of production. And what is taking place in the reproduction of knowledge in the schools is in large part a reproduction of that mechanism. (Freire & Faundez, 1989, p. 42)*

The question of power is ever present in Freire's work, as is his intimacy with the struggle for democracy. At this juncture, it is vitally important that we turn to Freire's ideological beginnings—a dimension of his work that often has been negated or simply ignored by many liberals and progressives who embraced his pedagogical ideas. A quick scan of the writings cited in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* clearly illustrates that Freire's work was unabashedly grounded in Marxist-Socialist thought. Without question, when Freire spoke of the *ruling class* or the *oppressors*, he was referring to historical class distinctions and class conflict within the structure of capitalist society—capitalism was the root of domination. As such, his theoretical analysis was fundamentally rooted in notions of class formation, particularly with respect to how the national political economy relegated the greater majority of its workers to an exploited and marginalized class. However, for Freire, the struggle against economic domination could not be waged effectively without a humanizing praxis that could both engage the complex phenomenon of class struggle and effectively foster the conditions for critical social agency among the masses.

Although heavily criticized on the left for his failure to provide a more systematic theoretical argument against capitalism, Freire's work never retreated from a critique of capitalism and a recognition of capitalist logic as the primary totalizing force in the world. This is to say that he firmly believed that the phenomenon of cultural invasion worldwide was fundamentally driven by the profit motives of capitalists. During my early years as a critical educator, I, like so many, failed to adequately comprehend and incorporate this essential dimension of Freire's work. For critical educators of color in the United States, we saw racism as the major culprit of our oppression and insisted that Freire engage this issue more substantively. Although he openly acknowledged the existence of racism, he was reticent to abandon the notion of class struggle and often warned us against losing sight of the manner in "which the class factor is hidden within both sexual and racial discrimination" (Freire, 1997, p. 86). Our dialogues with him on this issue often were lively and intense because in many ways, Freire questioned the limits of cultural nationalism and our blind faith in a politics of identity. At several different conferences, where educators of color called for separate dialogues with him, he told us that he could not understand why we insisted in dividing ourselves. With true angst, Freire explained to us: "I cannot perceive in my mind how Blacks in America can be liberated without Chicanos being liberated, or how Chicanos can be liberated without Native Americans being liberated, or Native Americans liberated without Whites being liberated" (Freire, 1987). He insisted that the struggle against oppression was a human struggle in which we had to build solidarity across our differences, if we were to change a world engulfed by capitalism. "The lack of unity among the reconcilable 'different' helps the hegemony of the antagonistic 'different'. The most important fight is against the main enemy" (Freire, 1997, p. 85). As might be expected, many

of us walked away frustrated. Only recently have I come to understand the political limits of our parochial discourse.

The world economy has changed profoundly since the release of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, yet Freire's message remains more relevant than ever. As capital, labor, and knowledge increasingly are conceived of in global terms, the influential role of capital is expanded exponentially, and the globalization of national and local economies is changing the underlying basis of the nation-state (Carnoy, 1997), these structural changes are reflected in the theories and practices of public schooling. As a consequence, "there is now a radical separation in the curriculum between the programs that do the most concrete training for jobs and the programs that do the most critical reflection. Such job separation reduces the capacity of workers to challenge the system" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 47).

Moreover, as Ladislau Dowbor (1997) eloquently argues in his preface to *Pedagogy of the Heart*, we must remove the blinders and see capitalism as the generator of scarcity. We cannot afford to ignore the growing gap between the rich and the poor caused by an increasing economic polarization that belies neoliberal theories of the trickle-down effect. And despite an abundance of technological devices flooding the market place, clean rivers, clean air, clean drinking water, chemical-free food, free time, and the space for adults and children to socialize freely has diminished. "Capitalism requires that free-of-charge happiness be substituted for what can be bought and sold" (p. 26). Yet, seldom do we find with the resounding praises paid to technology a discussion of how technological revolutions have exposed the wretchedness of capitalism—millions of people dying from starvation alongside unprecedented wealth. And even more disconcerting is the deleterious impact of globalized capitalism upon the social and environmental interests of humanity—interests that seem to receive little concern next to the profit motives of transnational corporations.

#### CHALLENGING OUR LIMITATIONS

*In order to achieve humanization, which presupposes the elimination of dehumanizing oppression, it is absolutely necessary to surmount the limit-situations in which men [and women] are reduced to things. (Freire, 1970, p. 93)*

Although Freire's historical, regional, and class experiences were different from many of ours, his political purpose was clear and consistent. To achieve a liberatory practice, we had to challenge those conditions that limit our social agency and our capacity to intervene and transform our world. In light of this, Freire's frequent response to questions about issues that perpetuate educational injustice was to challenge us to consider the nature of the limits we were confronting and how we might transcend these limitations in order to discover that beyond these situations, and in contradiction to them, lie *untested feasibilities* for personal, institutional, and socioeconomic restructuring. For example, in thinking back to how many educators of color responded to Freire's insistence

that we create alliances to struggle against capitalism, many of us could not break loose from our deep-rooted (and objectified) distrust of "Whites," nor could we move beyond our self-righteous justification of our sectarianism. These represented two of the limit situations that prevented us from establishing the kind of democratic solidarity or *unity within diversity* that potentially could generate profound shifts in the political and economic systems that intensify racism. Freire knew this and yet listened attentively to our concerns and frustrations within the context of our dialogues, always with respect and a deep faith in the power of our political commitment and perseverance.

Freire deeply believed that the rebuilding of solidarity among educators was a vital and necessary radical objective because solidarity moved against the grain of "capitalism's intrinsic perversity, its anti-solidarity nature" (Freire, 1998, p. 88). Throughout his writings, Freire warned us repeatedly against sectarianism. "Sectarianism in any quarter is an obstacle to the emancipation of [human] kind" (Freire, 1970, p. 22). "While fighting for my dream, I must not become passionately closed within myself" (Freire, 1998, p. 88). In many instances, he linked our ability to create solidarity with our capacity for *tolerance*.

At a critical scholars' conference in Boston during the summer of 1991, I came face to face with Freire's notion of tolerance. The meetings had been quite intense, particularly with respect to the concerns of feminist scholars within the field. Rather than exemplifying dialogue, I felt the exchanges began to take on a rather virulent tone. In my frustration, I stood up and fired away at one of the presenters. Freire seemed upset with my response. The following day during my presentation, I again proceeded to critique passionately the lack of substantive commitment to the principles of dialogue and solidarity among the group, focusing my critique on issues of cultural and class differences among many of us. Freire's response to my comments that afternoon remain with me to this day. He was particularly concerned with what he judged as my lack of tolerance and besieged me to behave with greater tolerance in the future, if I was to continue this work effectively. With great political fervor, I rejected Freire's position making the case that what we needed was to be more *intolerant*—of oppression and social injustice! For years, I licked my wounds over being *scolded* in public by Freire. But eight years later, I must confess that I recognize great wisdom in Freire's advice. Despite my undeniable political commitment, I was lacking tolerance as "revolutionary virtue—the wisdom of being able to live with what is different, so as to be able to fight the common enemy" (Freire & Faundez, 1989, p. 18).

Let us stop for a moment and recognize that just as we all face limit situations in our world and within ourselves, Freire, too, faced such issues in his private and public life. In 1964, after launching the most successful national literacy campaign Brazil had ever known, he was imprisoned and exiled by the right-wing military dictatorship that had overthrown the democratically elected government of Joao Goulart. Freire remained in exile for almost

16 years. But despite the pain and hardships he and his family experienced, Freire's work as an educator and cultural worker continued unabated. In reminiscences of those years, I recall most the sense that Freire clearly understood domination and exploitation as a worldwide phenomenon. As such, he recognized that within the political struggle for a socialist democracy, a myriad of legitimate political projects existed that, regardless of location, were unequivocally linked by their purpose and commitment to economic and cultural democracy. On a more personal level, he spoke of enduring the pain and suffering of exile, while at the same time not reducing his life to grieving alone. "I do not live only in the past. Rather, I exist in the present, where I prepare myself for the possible" (Freire, 1998, p. 67). Hence, Freire's experience of exile was as much a time of facing a multitude of fears, sorrows, and doubts within unfamiliar contexts as it was a time for remaking himself anew and restoring the dreams that had been shattered.

As Freire's work became more prominent within the United States, he also grappled with a variety of issues that both challenged and concerned him. For almost three decades, feminists across the country fiercely critiqued the sexism of his language. In some arenas, Marxist scholars criticized him brutally for his failure to provide a systematic analysis of class, capitalism, and schooling. To the dismay of many scholars, educators, and organizers of color, Freire seemed at times unwilling (or unable) to engage, with greater depth and specificity, the perverse nature of racism and its particular historical formations within the United States. Neither could he easily accept, from a historical materialist perspective, the legitimacy of the Chicano movement and its emphasis on a mythological homeland, Atzlan. Along the same lines, Freire also questioned the uncompromising resistance or refusal of many radical educators of color to assume the national identity of "American"—an act that he believed fundamentally weakened our position and limited our material struggle for social and economic justice. Beyond these issues, he also harbored serious concerns over what he perceived as the splintered nature of the critical pedagogy movement in the United States. Yet, most of these issues were seldom engaged substantively in public, but rather were the fodder of private dialogues and solitary reflections.

Given this history, it is a real tribute to Freire, that in *Pedagogy of the Heart* (or *Under the Shade of the Mango Tree*—its original title), written shortly before his death, Freire demonstrated signs of change and deepening in his thinking about many of these issues. For example, the language in the book finally reflected an inclusiveness of women when making general references, which had been missing in his earlier writings. He spoke to the issue of capitalism more boldly than ever before and considered the nature of globalization and its meaning for radical educators. He also addressed issues of diversity and racism, acknowledging openly that, "[w]e cannot reduce all prejudice to a classist explanation, but we may not overlook it in understanding the different

kinds of discrimination" (p. 86). And more forcefully than ever, he spoke to the necessity of moving beyond our reconcilable differences so that we might forge an effective attack against the wiles of advanced capitalism in the world.

#### THE CAPACITY TO ALWAYS BEGIN ANEW

*This capacity to always begin anew, to make, to reconstruct, and to not spoil, to refuse to bureaucratize the mind, to understand and to live as a process—live to become—is something that always accompanied me throughout life. This is an indispensable quality of a good teacher. (Freire, 1993, p. 98)*

The examples above are shared not to diminish, in any way, Freire's contribution or the memory of his work, but rather to remember him within his totality as a human being, with many of the conflicts and contradictions that confront us all, and yet with an expansive ability for sustained reflection, inquiry, and dialogue. But most important, he had an incredible capacity to reconstruct and *begin always anew*. For Freire, there was no question that he, others, and the world were always in a state of becoming, of transforming, and reinventing ourselves as part of our human historical process. This belief served as the foundation for his unrelenting search for freedom and his unwavering hope in the future. In the tradition of Marx, he believed that we both make and are made by our world. And as such, all human beings are the makers of history. In Freire's view, knowledge could not be divorced from historical continuity. Like us, "history is a process of being limited and conditioned by the knowledge that we produce. Nothing that we engender, live, think, and make explicit takes place outside of time and history" (Freire, 1998, p. 32). And more important, educators had to recognize that "it was when the majorities are denied their right to participate in history as subjects that they become dominated and alienated" (Freire, 1970, p. 125).

In light of this, Freire was convinced that this historical process needed to take place within schools and communities, anchored in relationships of solidarity. Freire urged critical educators to build communities of solidarity as a form of *networking*, to help us in problematizing the debilitating conditions of globalized economic inequality and in confronting the devastating impact of neoliberal economic and social policies on the world's population. Freire believed that teachers, students, parents, and others could reproduce skills and knowledge through networks formed around schools and adult education, youth organizations, and religious organizations that have a common democratic interest to enhance individual and collective life. More important, through *praxis*—the authentic union of action and reflection—these education networks could enter into the re-making of a new culture of capital, both as sites for the integration of disassociated workers and for the development of critical consciousness (or *conscientizacao*), ultimately shaping the future of local and national politics, and hence, altering the nature of the global economy. Freire's notion of establishing critical networks is a particularly compelling

thought considering the current political struggles in California for the protection of immigrant rights, affirmative action, and bilingual education.

In many ways, the idea of critical networks is linked directly with the struggle for democracy and an expanded notion of citizenship. Freire urged us to strive for *intimacy with democracy*, living actively with democratic principles and deepening them so that they could come to have real meaning in our everyday life. Inherent in this relationship with democracy was a form of citizenship that could not be obtained by chance. It represented a construction that was always in a state of becoming and required that we fight to obtain it. Further, it demanded *commitment, political clarity, coherence, and decision* on our part. Moreover, Freire insisted that:

No one constructs a serious democracy, which implies radically changing the societal structures, reorienting the politics of production and development, reinventing power, doing justice to everyone, and abolishing the unjust and immoral gains of the all-powerful, without previously and simultaneously working for these democratic preferences and these ethical demands. (Freire, 1989, p. 67)

Freire also repeatedly associated the work of educators with an unwavering faith in the oppressed, who, too, were always in a state of becoming anew. "Never has there been a deeper need for progressive men and women—serious, radical, engaged in the struggle for transforming society, to give testimony of their respect for the people" (Freire, 1997, p. 84). Freire consistently identified this respect for and commitment to marginalized people as an integral ingredient to the cultivation of dialogue in the classroom. "Dialogue requires an intense faith in [others], faith in their power to make and remake, to create and re-create, faith in [their] vocation to be more fully human (which is not the privilege of an elite but the birthright of all)" (Freire, 1970, p. 79). Moreover, he insisted that true dialogue could not exist in the absence of love and humility. But for Freire, dialogue also implied a critical posture as well as a preoccupation with the meanings that students used to mediate their world. He believed it was impossible to teach without educators knowing what took place in their students' world. "They need to know the universe of their dreams, the language with which they skillfully defend themselves from the aggressiveness of their world, what they know independently of the school, and how they know it" (Freire, 1998, p. 73). Through such knowledge, teachers could support students in reflecting on their lives and making individual and collective decisions for transforming their world. As such, dialogue, through reflection and action, could never be reduced to blind action, deprived of intention and purpose.

#### **INDISPENSABLE QUALITIES OF PROGRESSIVE TEACHERS**

*It is impossible to teach without the courage to try a thousand times before giving up. In short, it is impossible to teach without a forged, invented, and well-thought-out capacity to love. (Freire, 1998, p. 3)*

In *Teachers as Cultural Workers*, Freire (1998) wrote *Letters to Those Who Dare to Teach*. Again, he brings us back to an ethics of love and challenges us to reconsider our practice in new ways and to rethink our pedagogical commitment. Freire argued that the task of a teacher, who is always learning, must be both joyful and rigorous. He firmly believed that teaching for liberation required seriousness and discipline as well as scientific, physical, and emotional preparation. Freire stressed often that teaching was a task that required a love for the very act of teaching. For only through such love could the political project of teaching possibly become transformative and liberating. For Freire, it could never be enough to teach only with critical reason. He fervently argued that we must dare to do all things with feeling, dreams, wishes, fear, doubts, and passion.

We must dare so as never to dichotomize cognition and emotion. We must dare so that we can continue to teach for a long time under conditions that we know well: low salaries, lack of respect, and the ever-present risk of becoming prey to cynicism. We must dare to learn how to dare in order to say no to the bureaucratization of the mind to which we are exposed every day. We must dare so that we can continue to do so even when it is so much more materially advantageous to stop daring. (Freire, 1998, p. 3)

To be a progressive teacher who dares to teach requires, in Freire's *eyes*, a set of very particular and indispensable qualities. He believed these qualities could protect radical teachers from falling into the trappings of *avant-gardism*, by helping them become more conscious of their language, their use of authority in the classroom, and their teaching strategies. Through striving to develop these qualities, teachers could also come to understand that they cannot liberate anyone, but rather that they were in a strategic position to invite their students to liberate themselves, as they learned to read their world and transform their present realities.

Unlike the traditional pedagogical emphasis on specific teaching methodologies, particular classroom curricula, and the use of standardized texts and materials, Freire's *indispensable qualities* focus on those human values that expand a teacher's critical and emotional capacity to enter into effective learning-teaching relationships with their students. Freire begins with a *humility* grounded in courage, self-confidence, self-respect, and respect for others. In many ways, he believed that humility is the quality that allows us to listen beyond our differences, and as such represents a cornerstone in developing our intimacy with democracy. Freire associated humility with the *dialectical* ability to live an *insecure security*, which means a human existence that did not require absolute answers or solutions to a problem but rather that, even in the certainty of the moment, could remain open to new ways, new ideas, and new dreams. This anti-authoritarian position also works to prevent teachers from squelching expressions of resistance in their students—resistance that, in fact,

is not only meaningful, but necessary to their process of empowerment. Inherent in this quality of humility also is the ability of teachers to build their capacity to express a *lovingness* rooted in their commitment to consistently reflect on their practice and to consider the consequences of their thoughts, words, and actions within the classroom and beyond.

In keeping with his consistent emphasis on the necessity of confronting our fears, Freire identified courage as another indispensable quality of educators. Courage here implies a virtue that is born and nourished by our consistent willingness to challenge and overcome our fears in the interest of democratic action—an action that holds both personal and social consequences. Freire believed that as teachers become clearer about their choices and political dreams, courage sustains our struggle to confront those myths, fueled by the dominant ideology, that fragment and distort our practice. Key to this process is our critical ability to both accept and control our fear.

When we are faced with concrete fears, such as that of losing our jobs or of not being promoted, we feel the need to set certain limits to our fear, before anything else, we begin to recognize that fear is a manifestation of our being alive. I do not hide my fears. But I must not allow my fears to immobilize me. Instead, I must control them, for it is in the very exercise of this control that my necessary courage is shared. (Freire; 1998, p. 41)

*Tolerance* is another of the indispensable qualities on Freire's list. Without this virtue, he contends, no authentic democratic experience can be actualized in the classroom or our own lives. But it is important to note that tolerance "does not mean acquiescing to the intolerable; it does not mean covering up disrespect; it does not mean coddling the aggressor or disguising aggression" (Freire, 1998, p. 43). Freire adamantly stressed that tolerance is neither about *playing the game*, nor a civilized gesture of hypocrisy, nor a coexistence with the unbearable. Instead, the critical expression of tolerance is founded on the basic human principles of respect, discipline, dignity, and ethical responsibility.

Finally, Freire assigned *decisiveness*, *security*, the *tension between patience and impatience*, and *the joy of living* to the set of indispensable qualities. He wholeheartedly believed that the ability to make decisions, despite the possibility of rupture, is an essential strength of our work as progressive educators. He argued that teachers who lack this quality often resort to irresponsible practices of permissiveness in their teaching, a condition that is as damaging to students as the abuse of teacher authority. Further, a lack of confidence was often linked to indecision, although security (or confidence), on the other hand, stems from a sense of competence, political clarity, and ethical integrity.

The ability of teachers to practice their pedagogy within the *dialectical tension of patience and impatience* represented for Freire a significant leap in an educator's development. This virtue allows teachers to both feel the urgency of the difficult conditions they are facing within schools and at the same time

respond with thoughtful and reflective tactics and strategies, rather than *blind activism*. Key to understanding this concept is recognizing the problematics of those who espouse an ethic of *absolute patience* on one hand, and those who manifest an *uncontainable impatience* on the other. Both can impair our ability to participate pedagogically in effective ways.

At no time is the ability to cultivate a *dialectical* understanding of the world more necessary than when we as educators are asked to live within the tension of two seemingly contradictory concepts of responses. This is to say, living an *impatient patience* or *insecure security* is predicated on our willingness and ability to grapple with the complexity and ambiguity of the present, despite a heightened level of tension we may experience. And, as such, to respond in coherence with our democratic dream, rather than to seek prescribed formulas or quick-fix recipes to alleviate the tension, potentially is a creative and liberating force in our lives. This dialectical competence also implies a *verbal parsimony*, which helps us to rarely lose control over our words or exceed the limits of considered, yet energetic, discourse—a quality that Freire consistently demonstrated over the years during his participation in difficult dialogues.

Freire placed great significance on our ability to live joyfully despite the multitude of external forces that constantly challenge our humanity. The indispensable quality of *teaching with a joy of living* personifies most the ultimate purpose in both Freire's work and life. In retrospect, I am filled with wonderful memories of Freire—the beauty of his language, the twinkle in his *eyes*, his thoughtful and respectful manner, the movement of his hands when he spoke, his lively enthusiasm when contemplating new ideas, and his candid expressions of love and gratitude. In his words and his deed, Freire persistently invited teachers to fully embrace life, rather than to surrender our existence to the stifling forces of economic and social injustice.

By completely giving myself to life rather than to death—without meaning either to deny death or to mythicize life—I can free myself to surrender to the joy of living, without having to hide the reasons for sadness in life, which prepares me to stimulate and champion joy in the school. (Freire, 1998, p. 45)

Although Freire does not explicitly speak of activism in his *Letters to Those Who Dare to Teach* (1998), his theoretical work was never disassociated from his activism. Moreover, he argued tirelessly for the inseparability of political consciousness and political action in our teaching and in our lives. Hence, teachers as intellectuals, cultural workers, and community activists must "aspire to become an association of truly serious and coherent people, those who work to shorten more and more the distance between what they say and what they do" (Freire, 1997, p. 83). The transformation of schools can only take place when teachers, working in solidarity, take ownership and struggle to radically change the political and economic structures of power that defile our revolutionary dreams.

Thus I can see no alternative for educators to unity within the diversity of their interests in defending their rights. Such rights include the right to freedom in teaching, the right to speak, the right to better conditions for pedagogical work, the right to paid sabbaticals for continuing education, the right to be coherent, the right to criticize the authorities without fear of retaliation . . . and to not have to lie to survive. (Freire, 1998, p. 46)

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