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**EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY:
A Comparative Analysis of the Philosophical Contributions of
John Dewey and Paulo Freire**

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NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROJECT

We seek, through an interpretive study of the educational philosophies of John Dewey and Paulo Freire, to examine the linkages between education and democracy, with a special focus on the different needs of industrializing societies at the beginning of the twentieth century and "third world" societies at the conclusion of the century. We focus on these two philosophers because they have addressed the critical relationship between democratic education and democratic society, and because in different ways their writings capture much that is representative of educational theory during different historical periods.

This study is based on two concerns. The first is the need to clarify the particular ways in which educational philosophers, situated in different geographical locations at different historical periods, have addressed the relationship between education and democracy, and the extent to which they share the same problematic. We focus on these two philosophers, not only because of their contribution to educational and philosophical scholarship, but because each, in distinct ways, understood the importance of the pedagogical process as well as the importance of what is taught as crucial to the development of a democratic society. In other words, each recognized the significance of democratic culture as well as democratic politics. The second reason is a practical one. Given the increased mobility of the populations of the world and the social, economic and political pressures that are being exerted on democracies worldwide, we believe it is crucial to understand how culture is implicated in democratic practices.

John Dewey has been the most important philosopher of education in the first half of this century and his contributions to pedagogy and philosophy still reverberate in many disciplines and theories. He was not only a writer or scholar, but also a social activist. His activism led him to suggest several methodologies for social and educational reform, and to try out several experiments for reform. Indeed, his pragmatism has been consistently used as an example by progressive educators in the United States and internationally.

Paulo Freire, on the other hand, has been an important, if not the most important philosopher of education in the second half of this century. A man who has been defined by Swiss educator Pierre Furter as "a myth in his own lifetime," Freire is not only an outstanding figure in the academic world, but also one who has combined theory with practical experience in adult education in a very unique manner. The philosophical origins of Freire can be traced to the movement of *Escola Nova* in Brazil in the 1930s and 1940s, a movement promoted by several Brazilian disciples of John Dewey. Thus, as an extension and re-elaboration of Dewey's educational proposals, Freire's analyses are relevant to U.S. education.

Research questions:

Our study will be centered around the following questions:

1. Given that Dewey and Freire are both concerned with the relationship between democracy and education, how does their location (one in an advancing industrial society at the advent of the twentieth century, the other in a third world country at the century's end) influence their ideas about the

nature of education and democratic society? We are especially concerned with examining the ways in which their ideas about democracy and education were shaped within the context of changing economic factors. For example, the fact that Dewey writes in the context of a nationally-based and rapidly-growing economy is likely a significant factor in his emphasis on the progressive possibilities inherent in American society. Similarly, that Freire writes within the context of an increasingly global economy and with a much greater awareness of environmental limits is an equally important factor in his conception of the relationship between democracy and education.

Furthermore, Dewey's belief in the benign character of science and its usefulness for the formation of democratic consensus was characteristic of early twentieth-century American optimism about the role of intelligence and institutionalized educational systems in shaping social relations. Similarly, Freire's emphasis on the role of collective, democratically-formed consciousness in developing non-oppressive relationships is a feature of certain contemporary writers who have come to accept the view that domination is the characteristic feature of institutional life, including schools, in the late twentieth century. These different views of self, society and education greatly influenced the conception of education and democracy.

2. Both Freire and Dewey wrote at times when nationalism was a central issue in educational development and both faced significant challenges to their cosmopolitan worldviews. In Dewey's case, the first World War and the pressure to assimilate large numbers of immigrants into American society was a powerful force which influenced his writings. In Freire's case, his early works are situated within the context of intense political struggles in Latin America. Furthermore, changes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet

Union have influenced the semi-Marxist framework that has informed much of his writing in the past few years. We will explore this aspect of the two men's views in order to assess the ability of their different theoretical frameworks to respond to what we take to be the central philosophical justification of nationalism--the claim that people have the right to reproduce their society in their own image. We want to examine the ways in which Dewey and Freire have implicitly or explicitly addressed this claim.

3. Advocates of democratic education frequently confront an important conceptual problem; that of democracy and democratic values and cultures. Democracy implies a process of participation in which all participants are considered equal. However, in practice, education is not an egalitarian practice and it involves a system whereby the immature members (children) are taught to identify with the principles and forms of life of the mature members (adult). We will explore the writings of Dewey and Freire in order to understand the extent to which, either implicitly or explicitly, they recognized this problem and addressed it.

A short narrative of the contributions of each philosopher and their importance in philosophy of education and cultural studies follows.

John Dewey

John Dewey, the most significant educational philosopher in American history, is often associated with early postmodern tendencies in American thought because of his emphasis on pluralism, his rejection of metaphysical absolutes, his expressed belief that judgment is context specific, his rejection of "totalizing" explanatory schemes and his concern to root education within

the structure of communities. Education, for Dewey, is the means whereby society reproduces itself. It is the "means of social continuity".¹ A group maintains its continuity throughout the generations by means of the educational process. Furthermore, he considered education to be a social activity which only in more advanced, more specialized stages, requires specialized institutions such as schools. In the larger sense of the term, it is the means whereby the young are introduced into "the interests, purposes, information, skills and practices of the mature members."² As civilization becomes more complex, the gap between the immature and the mature members of the society widens, and what may have begun as an incidental, spontaneous aspect of child rearing, becomes more specialized and institutionalized. Hence, the increased importance of schools and schooling.

As previously mentioned, one of the essential features of education, according to Dewey, is the ability of the mature generation to communicate the common ends of the community to the immature generation. It is the grasping of common ends, through the process of communication, that provides the essential human quality to education. Dewey believed that modern society was at a serious disadvantage in regard to communication and the transmission of shared ends from one generation to the next. Communication is not simply a verbal activity. It is experiential and involves participating in the social and functional activities of the group. Earlier societies were able to do this because most of the adult behavior was visible to the children and hence it could serve as a model until the children

¹John Dewey, Democracy and Education. New York: Macmillan, 1916, p. 2.

²Ibid., p. 3

understood not only how to perform a task, but how that task fit into the larger, continuous goals of the group.

However, with the complexity of modern civilization, specialized agencies called schools have taken over much of the education of the young and therefore the visible connection between learning and communal continuity is diminished. The idea behind progressive education, in Dewey's scheme, was to recapture the experiential nature of learning so that it could be reconnected to the communal ends and eventually be linked to democracy through participation.

The goal of education with regard to any group was "making the individual a sharer or partner in the associated activity so that it feels its success as his success, its failure as his failure."³ Through this process the child would take on the emotional attitude of the group and eventually identify with its special interests. Yet the social group can be confining and the interests and opportunities it offers may be quite narrow. The school in a democratic society serves to both introduce the child into the complexities of modern life by simplifying the environment in ways that it can be grasped by a young and uninitiated mind and it serves to eliminate "the unworthy features of the existing environment from influence upon mental habitudes" establishing a "purified medium of action".⁴ In addition, the school serves to "balance the various elements in the social environment, and to see to it that each individual gets an opportunity to escape from the limitations of the

³Dewey, Democracy and Education, p. 14.

⁴Ibid., p. 20.

social group in which he was born, and to come into contact with a broader environment".⁵

Dewey placed a great deal of hope in public education, often writing as if the institution of the public schools could bring about the transformation that he desired. It is this belief that most obviously separates him from Freire, even though his faith in public education was a sign of a larger set of assumptions about human nature, science and social change that Freire both shares and modifies.

Paulo Freire

Paulo Freire, a Brazilian philosopher and educator, is perhaps the best-known educator of the Third World and his work has inspired a whole generation of progressive educators. He became famous in the early 1960s for his powerful method of literacy training and is a distinguished figure in critical pedagogy throughout the world. His well-known method of the generative word is based on the technique of eliciting discussion about an existential and crucial everyday life situation from members of a given "oppressed" community, such as affordable housing, health care, homelessness, unemployment, etc. While discussing the "existential situations" of the community, generative words are codified and presented graphically, and through dialogue between facilitators and students, they allow for quick literacy training. In the original experiences of Freire in Angicos, Rio Grande do Norte, in northeast Brazil, forty hours of instruction were sufficient for allowing people to begin reading and writing, thus achieving literacy proficiency.

⁵Ibid., p. 20.

What has made Freire's political philosophy of education so relevant and universal, placing him and some of the "generative themes" suggested by his method at the center of educational debates in critical pedagogy for the last three decades? Influenced by the work of psychotherapists such as Franz Fanon and Erich Fromm, In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, (1970, Seabury Press) Freire argues that few interpersonal human relations are exempt from oppression of one kind or another; by reason of race, class or gender, people tend to be perpetrators and/or victims of oppression. He points out that class exploitation, racism, and sexism are the most conspicuous forms of dominance and oppression, but he recognizes that oppression exists on other grounds, such as religious beliefs or political affiliation.

Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed has also been influenced by a myriad of philosophical currents, including Phenomenology, Existentialism, Christian Personalism, Humanist Marxism, and Hegelianism. Freire's new philosophical synthesis calls for dialogue and ultimately social awareness as a way to overcome human domination and oppression. A key influence in Freire's philosophy is that of the German philosopher, G. W. F. Hegel. John Dewey himself was influenced by Hegel in his early work, although he strongly argues against him in his later writings. Freire's paradoxical and novel combination of Hegel and Dewey makes his contribution to the philosophy of education even more valuable.

What are the implications of Pedagogy of the Oppressed, a book translated into eighteen languages, for contemporary education and critical pedagogy? Freire introduces an epistemological perspective to pedagogy and like Dewey, he believes that "knowing" emanates from lived experiences.

Problem-posing education, which is at odds with problem-solving educational models, starts by discovering the theory hidden in the practice of human agency and social movements. Freire's epistemological perspective seeks, in turn, to produce new knowledge that will guide, inspire, redefine and assist in the comprehension of praxis. However, this unknown theory has not yet been elaborated. It has to be discovered, invented, constructed or recreated in an intelligent dialogue between the logic of critical social theory and the demands of tension-ridden, complicated and contradictory practices. This epistemological stance has at least two major implications. On one hand, critical pedagogy emerging from Freire's contribution is concerned with how emancipatory education can validate learners' own cultures and discourses, while at the same time empowering them. On the other, Freire's recognition of the tensions between objectivity and subjectivity, between theory and practice--as autonomous and legitimate spheres of human endeavor--lead him (departing once again from Dewey) to recognize that these dichotomies and tensions cannot be overcome. Nor can they be captured in their entire complexity through mainstream methodologies.

HISTORY AND DURATION OF THE PROJECT

Although this project entails a new collaborative effort between the principle researchers, Professor Torres and Professor Feinberg, it reflects both researchers long-standing interests in education for democracy and in the works of Dewey and Freire. Professor Torres is a well-known expert on Freire and has published many articles in English, Spanish and Portuguese on several aspects of Freire's work. Professor Feinberg has worked extensively with the contributions of Dewey to the philosophy of education and he is

currently revisiting his earlier works and including an important cross-cultural component in the theoretical underpinnings of his research on cultural and pedagogical studies.

The research facilities of the University of California and the University of Illinois will be available to both researchers. The project will be an excellent opportunity for faculty members of the Schools of Education of these universities to work together, thus building the foundation for future collaborative activities.

RESEARCH METHODS

Our methodology includes a systematic comparison of Dewey's and Freire's theories, with emphasis on four areas: epistemology, ethics, politics and education, and educational reform for social change.

Epistemology

For Dewey, education requires "doing" because knowledge, as the grasping of essences, is rejected in favor of a view which ties knowing to manipulating. When we know something we have come to understand its connections to other experience and we are able to relate it to our own interests. Hence, education involves appealing to the students' interest not simply as a device to better recall knowledge, but as a means of intricately connecting knowing and interest.

For Freire, education is the act of knowing. Freire developed a method, based on dialogue and analysis of existential or problematic situations, that is similar to, but significantly more politically-informed, than the method proposed by Dewey. His method of the generative word and generative themes is related to new epistemological and methodological perspectives, including participatory action research.

Ethics

Dewey's major contribution to ethics was to connect ethical norms to the everyday desires and habits of people and hence to "naturalize" the process of ethical deliberation. In contrast to Kant, and consistent with Freire, the object of ethical judgment was not ultimately to be found independent of desire. Rather, it involved the reflective adjustment of habits and the reconstruction of desires to meet changing conditions. Moreover, unlike Kant who addresses ethical judgment on the individual plane, Dewey considered ethics to ultimately be a cooperative social activity.

Freire shares Dewey's view of ethics as social, but he also infuses it with the idea of a human vocation which serves to inform the development of an ethical consciousness. The central ethical commitment of Freire is a modernist notion of education for social justice and democracy. In contrast to Dewey, however, Freire's notion of ethics not just social. It is also informed by and infused with political struggle, and has as its ultimate aim the liberation of both the oppressor and the oppressed. His notion of democracy implies a radical ethics of dialogue in social struggles which are individual, as well as part of the struggles of social movements. The basic foundations of Freire's

ethics is its linkages with power and knowledge as indissoluble terms in education. There is no education without knowledge, and all knowledge entails a notion of power--a notion that is not simply the fragmentation of interest, authority and desire, as suggested in postmodernist perspectives. Power, like knowledge, is encapsulated in class, gender, race, and ethnic-specific terms and interests. These premises are very important for discussions on multiculturalism and the politics of identity and race in the United States.

Politics and Education

While Dewey emphasized the need for communication and cooperation among all segments of society, his view of politics leaned heavily upon the special understanding of the expert and placed considerable faith in the development of the social and policy sciences. His basic idea of political life involved a strong commitment to the idea of planned change directed by a social engineer who was aware of the needs of everyday people. One of the goals of education was the development of the socially-sensitive professional who could translate the needs of the people into planned change.

For Freire, education is neither neutral, nor apolitical. All educational practices, curriculum, and policies are part of a contested terrain of shifting coalitions of power. Education and power are part and parcel of social struggles and education is mediated through subjectivities and their actions. Thus the notion of "objectivity", like the notion of an empirical fact, is a social construction subject to alternate interpretations and it is an unattainable goal. In Freire's work, there is little, if any, distinction between

politics and education. What is clear, however, is that politics (as hegemony or persuasion) has an identifiable pedagogical component. For example, according to Freire's political pedagogy, revolutions are continuous pedagogical workshops for the masses. If every pedagogical relationship is also a hegemonic relationship, dialogue mediates between different but not necessarily contradictory social subjects. Again, implications for multiculturalism and the politics of identity surface.

Education for Social Change

For Dewey, much of the purpose of modern education was social change, and the development of more intelligent institutions and practices. Throughout his long career, he participated in a number of activities that connected education to the world outside it, and he viewed schools as the major instrument for bringing people from traditional backgrounds into the twentieth century. He was, until his disillusion in the 1930s, an early supporter of the Soviet Union, praising it for its effective use of education in directing social change.

Freire's experience in education for social change is primarily in adult and nonformal education. His work in Latin America and Africa in the 1960s and 1970s was closely linked to social struggles during important historical moments. More recently, he guided educational reform in the city of São Paulo, Brazil, in the context of a socialist democratic model of municipal governance (1989-1992). He has also published in the context of the politics of higher education--see his new book Paulo Freire on Higher Education (New York, SUNY, 1994). Finally, the most lasting implications of Freire's ideas

regarding education for social change can be found in religious educational experiences, and in mass national campaigns for literacy, including the experiences of Guinea-Bissau, in Africa, and Nicaragua, in Latin America.

Work Plan

This study is planned for 12 months, with three main stages. Both principal researchers will be involved in all stages. The first stage is the research and writing of a comprehensive, analytical and normative manuscript comparing the Dewey's and Freire's views on epistemology, ethics, education for social change and the relationships between politics and education. It will involve an extensive bibliographical review, analysis and criticism by the principal researchers, with the researchers spending several days of in-person consultation with each other. It will also involve a trip to São Paulo by the principal researchers after approximately three months of preliminary work in order to conduct extended, in-depth interviews with Paulo Freire. A first draft of the manuscript will then be completed.

The second stage is the organization of a major international conference at the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) in February 1996 on **Progressive Education for Democracy: The Contributions of John Dewey and Paulo Freire**. The 3-day conference will bring together national and international experts in the fields of Education and Philosophy to dialogue and share perspectives about Dewey and Freire and how their work contributes to the on-going philosophical and educational debates in academia today. It will also count on the participation of Paulo Freire and hopefully Jurgen Habermas to discuss with us the implications of the notion of communicative competence for education and social change in

contemporary industrial advanced societies. Professors and students from all disciplines will be encouraged to attend, as well as members of the community who have articulated interests in the practical implications of the works of Freire and Dewey.

The third stage will include firstly, the writing of a major research article comparing and contrasting Dewey's and Freire's political philosophies of education, and suggesting a reinterpretation of their contributions to notions of democracy and education and the implications of multiculturalism in pluralist, multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual societies. Secondly, a selection of the papers presented at the conference will be prepared for publication with an introduction by the two principal researchers, discussing the contributions of Dewey and Freire to contemporary education, and particularly to the philosophy of education. A particular emphasis of this publication will be to address the contribution of Dewey and Freire to practical experiences of social transformation and democratic practice via educational reform.

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