

Paulo Freire

AND THE STREET EDUCATORS

An Analytical Approach



Care Alternatives for Street Children

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United Nations Children's Fund

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EDUCATORS

An Analytical Approach

Care Alternatives for
Street Children

Methodological Series

Regional Programme

"Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances"

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PRESENTATION

The coordinators of the Care Alternatives of the Street Children Project decided to publish this pamphlet in view of the importance of the considerations and the level of the discussions held at the "Encounter of Professor Paulo Freire with Street Educators" which took place in Sao Paulo in October 1985.

Since it is a matter which is closely linked to the children who live and work in the street, and a subject that has been studied and discussed at national and Latin American Seminars, we consider it convenient to use the texts from our files to divulge what appears to be a consensus concerning the role, aspirations and goals of these children and of the Street Educators.

Lastly, we thank Professor Paulo Freire for supporting and motivating the Street Educators' task, as well as the educators themselves, whose participation in the development of this study was invaluable.

The obstacles to overcome are significant. However, having gained an ally with the qualities of Paulo Freire brought faith, courage, and assurance to the group.

INTRODUCTION

Despite its expanse and geographic variety, overall, the region, which geographical extends from Mexico to Patagonia including the Caribbean countries, faces a severe social and economic crisis that effects the population most vulnerable strata.

During the past few years the rural-urban migration has increased, dramatically affecting the excessive growth of the marginal areas in large cities, and in particular in the capital of each country, where human groups settle in search of betterment and basic services that were already overflowing and insufficient before their arrival.

This situation is aggravated, on the one hand, by the considerable increase in the cost of food, while purchasing power experiences a rapid and gradual decrease; and on the other hand, by the threatening shadow of high unemployment rates and the number of concealed jobless or the growing insertion into the informal economy.

Although the problem attains different degrees in the various countries or regions, this almost generalized situation, severely affects the traditionally critical conditions of abandoned children, of those in high risk situation, as well as of children *of the street*, children *on the street*, or of children in conditions corresponding to any other designation used.

In view of these facts, since 1983 UNICEF has been undertaking a series of actions to support governments, the church, private institutions, and the community, in an effort to find and strengthen alternatives to rescue and foster these children. With its Regional Programme for Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances, UNICEF is promoting and developing actions aimed at increasing people's awareness of this situation.

Time is of the essence in finding a solution to these problems and four countries, Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, and Ecuador have initiated a pioneer effort and are carrying out experimental care projects for children. These projects are consolidating and, at present, constitute models that are applicable in other countries of the region.

Thanks to the constant promotion carried out by the UNICEF offices in various countries *vis-à-vis* the governments and private institutions of the entire region, in 1987 other countries are joining the Regional Programme for Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances.

Besides resorting to their own initiatives, potentialities, and idiosyncrasy, the countries joining this year, as well as those that do so in the near future, will benefit from the results of four years of experience and project evaluation. For the countries about to initiate this process the success, retrocession, obstacles and consolidation of achievements experienced during the past years constitute an invaluable contribution.

One of the objectives aimed at for 1987 by the Regional Program for "Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances" is to diffuse information and divulge these non-conventional care models. The Regional Office is responsible for the production, reproduction, and distribution of written and audiovisual material concerning methodologies and care models for children in high risk situation or in state of abandonment.

This divulgation material aims at revealing especially the positive and successful experiences adjusted to the principles proposed by UNICEF, which are: low cost, wide coverage, non-institutionalization of minors, community participation and easy access to urban basic services.

It is necessary to make an effort to divulge the written and audiovisual material related to projects such as the Coatzacoalcos Project in Mexico; the results of the care model: "Republic of the Small Vendor" in Belém do Para or in Jaboatao (Recife), Brazil; the model implemented to generate income in the *Salon do Encontro* (Reunion Center) located in Betim, in the State of Minas Gerais, Brazil; the *Acción Guambra*s Project in Ecuador, as well as those implemented and under evaluation in Colombia. Among the latter, the most outstanding ones are those in Bucaramanga and Bogota which were carried out by public and private sector institutions closely linked to UNICEF.

The new projects that have been implemented, as well as those about to be outlined, require economic resources that must be contributed by the governments, by national private organizations, and through international cooperation between organizations such as UNICEF. Likewise, significant efforts must be made to select and train the human resources in order to enable them to successfully carry out the proposed care models which have already been tried out and evaluated in the pioneer countries. In the framework of the training required, the preparation of the Street Educators is especially important, for it is the key to success in the execution of every care

projects for street children, without taking them out of their environment, respecting their freedom, if possible, strengthening their family ties and their relationship with the community, and seeking to satisfy their basic needs.

It is for these reasons that, besides having an academic education, the Street Educator must learn a methodology to approach, understand, respect, and help the street child as a participating and active subject and not as the object of an innovative process that can ensure his or her future as an integrating member of society.

A first step toward achieving this object is materialized in the publication of "Paulo Freire and the Street Educators".

Paulo Freire needs no introduction. Many years ago he became internationally renowned, and it is with one of his works that a methodological, didactic and informative series of publications makes its appearance. The series will feature models of care for abandoned and street children, as well as for children on the street or in high risk situation.

It is hoped that this first issue will be followed by a series of publications aimed at informing, clarifying and enabling the unification of methodological criteria, and that these works stimulate an exchange of experience obtained in dealing with a problem that affects millions of children in the region.

STREET CHILDREN

Most of these creatures are boys and girls between seven and seventeen years of age who live in the street and work to provide for themselves and help support their families which are usually too poor to tend to their children's basic needs. In the street, these children no longer rely on the protection of their family and community. Consequently, they become vulnerable to exploitation by others and to a variety of physical and moral dangers. Some spend all *working* hours in the street, and some even the nights. Thus, they have little or no access to basic services such as health and education. As a result, their perspectives of developing and securing a better future are meager. These creatures, therefore, represent an enormous waste of human potential, both for themselves and for society.

The members of the groups participating in the First Latin American Seminar on Community Alternatives for Street Children (Brasilia, 1984) pointed out the following general characteristics, as being the most common to these children:

- They are premature adults seeking a means of survival in the street as a consequence of a social system that ostracizes them from society;
- They permanently adopt a defensive attitude toward people in response to the physical abuse they are subjected to by the social environment that surrounds them;
- They satisfy their real and basic needs in the street, where the sleep, eat, and work;
- They face growing difficulties at school which result in the need to repeat school years or even to abandon their education;
- They develop special abilities that enable them to survive;
- They are a product of the lack of social and family affection, which adversely affects their normal development;
- The street children are strong and shrewd within their own environment;

However, there is a clear distinction between the street boys and the girls, although they are both victims and product of one and the same situation, they live two different realities.

The predicament of the street girl is far more intricate due to her condition of abandonment and to her nature as a woman. In the street she is more exposed to the consequences brought about by the role of women in society. She is rejected within the family, and domestic chores are not acknowledged as work. Furthermore, she is subject to the consequences of premature maternity, of abandonment and prostitution.



THE STREET EDUCATOR'S WORK

— How should the child be approached?

In approaching the child, the educator must be an active agent, he must respect the creature's nature as an individual with his own values and expectations, but with authenticity, truthfulness, and coherence. It is important to know who we are for: the oppressed and not the oppressor. We are on the child's side, on that of the exploited, the oppressed. We identify with the interests of the lower classes. We must be cautious about invading the minor's world in case he does not wish to be approached; about only trespassing the child's vital space, which is real, if he wants us to, if he allows it. We must wait for the "magic moment" when the child's hostility has been overcome. Be patient and wait for the pleasure of that moment when the child discloses the mystery of his existence.

In living with children of the street, of the fairs, of the market places and town squares, the educator will be able to propitiate the conditions to create authentic group situations in order to apprehend expectations, life stories, ideal, etc., through the child's actual participation.

It is necessary to listen to the youngster, to his feelings, to perceive the look in his eyes, his gestures, appearance, and emotions.

In order to entirely accept the child, the educator must be free of prejudice and taboos imposed by the classist society.

The educator must identify with the creature without losing his individuality, and, together with the child, seek a response to his uneasiness about "existing-in-the-world" by making up a story with him. This presumes a democratization of power; in other words, to share in the decision-making during the entire educational process.

**THE STREET EDUCATOR:
ENDLESS "EDUCATIONAL ASTONISHMENT"**
(The Perplexity of Not Having an Answer)

- What must be done?
- How to do it?

This important and creative action of the street educator with the participation of the needy youth generates an adverse reaction on the part of the community, which either demands responses and immediate results, frees itself from its responsibility concerning the problem, or looks down on the action denouncing it as inconsistent.

This reaction is sometimes violent and makes the social street educator vulnerable; it makes him question and ponder his integrity and safety, both as a person and as a member of groups in the street.

Starting from our experience we have found some alternatives, such as:

- legal identification,
- alliance with groups, and
- strong community movements.

Another important element in the educator's new attitude is his respect toward the child's changes and growth rhythm, toward that of his colleagues on the team, of the community, and of society itself.

This transforming education leads to a liberation process that originates in multipliers of this philosophy, which are caught in the struggle against social injustice, the generator of the marginal child.

The street educator must be aware of his own limitations as well as of the risks and challenges out in the street and within society. What is important, however, is that he perceive and recognize the forces in conflict. Waiting does not mean not intervening, but rather awaiting the moment to be able to conquer the child's own space. This process is inherent to the entire educational task we propose.



The social educator of the street is not intended as one more of the team. His activity arises from the proven repressive institutional inefficiency and the need to provide care for that spoliated contingent made up of street children, who are the offspring of those whom the production means have been expropriated from.

The friendly image of the street educator emerges in this framework; a person who is solidary and commits himself to be with the children in their environment, who works toward humanizing them, rescuing them from their status as exploited creatures in marginal conditions.

The educator's struggle consists in transforming the child into an efficient person of integrity by living and sharing with him and helping him find a response to his queries.

The educator's job demands that he constantly review the concepts, values, and ideologies, in order to help the child gain freedom and awareness.

The constant questioning process is inherent to the educator's work, and must be oriented toward the children without subtracting importance from the efficient, but usually complex, community participation.

In order that the educator's work be legitimate and have continuity it requires follow up activities. Solving the marginal child's problem should not be restricted to the educator. It demands not only the creation of new alternatives, but also a response from public and private institutions.

QUALITIES OF THE EDUCATOR

Based on the conclusions reached at the "First Latin American Seminar on Community Alternatives for Street Children" the street educator must:

- Be perceptive *vis-à-vis* the causes of the generating conditions.
- Respect and not repress. He establishes a relationship of mutual help and stimulates the exchange of experiences with the youngster; he recognizes and discovers new values. Likewise, he is a receptive person, a true friend.
- He is flexible, capable of revaluing his concepts and limitations, and of discovering new life perspectives in living and sharing with the child.
- He stimulates community participation so that the street child is seen as the effect of an unjust situation, and helps find ways to overcome this situation.
- Contrary to our society's expectations, his objective is not to "domesticate" the youngster.
- He works in the group and with the group, always visualizing a more open society.
- He does not prevent or suffocate the children's claims and demands.
- He takes time to create a new situation that brings about new relationships.
- He tries to offer concrete solutions so that the children overcome their needs. He does not set "a term" for the "change" in behavior to occur.
- The street educator maintains a reciprocity relationship with the child during the educational process.

PROFESSOR PAULO FREIRE
AND THE STREET EDUCATORS

Topics discussed at the meeting held in October 1985.

In some situations street children who work behave exactly like certain segments of the bourgeoisie with respect to those who do not work. For, children who do not work are considered hooligans. Thus, the working children reproduce the bourgeois ideology *vis-à-vis* their peers.

There is no substantial difference between them. However, it is dramatic to perceive how the oppressed introjects the oppressor within him. On occasions, what actually occurs is that the oppressed subject attacks the oppressor in the body of the oppressed. Therefore, the task is a political, ideological, and educational one.

Possibly, one of the best ways to carry out a job of this nature is to have the children exercise "thinking the praxis" (to ponder their reality). In the end, this enables the analytical comprehension of their actions, the perception of the fact that there are obvious and concealed reasons which explain our society.

Therefore, to "think the praxis" is the best way to think successfully. This way of thinking also teaches us that the specific manner in which we perform, understand, and do things is inserted in the more ample context of social practice. The more we exercise this way of thinking, the more we begin to understand the mechanisms through which society functions; how it produces, how wealth is distributed, and how ideas are an expression of the dominant social groups and classes.

In the end, thinking the praxis and the reality in which it takes place, as the object of our analytical reflections, reveals obvious facts that we, nevertheless, did not suspect. Therefore, when we "discover" the obvious fact, when we rediscover and investigate it, we realize that it is not as obvious as it seemed in the beginning.

The street educators' arguments are very important and offer a clear picture of how these children live. Undoubtedly, they survive instead of simply living, and that survival is occurring in too concrete a context. The street is a very evident and objective part of this framework. Howe-

ver, there is a world behind that one, which generates certain values, beliefs, certain "doings", as well as the way to survive them.

Of course, we know that the clash between the world of the street children and that of society will continue to exist; that it not only exists because "people" want it to: the social world lives and expresses a specific social status into which we are born. It therefore also explains our values. It occurs that the other world first thinks (because the society of classes generates this way of thinking) of transforming the world of the street children, and not society. When we intend to change only the street children's situation, it is because we start from the following assumption: we are better off, "the people" are better, otherwise there would be no need to transform the world of the street children.

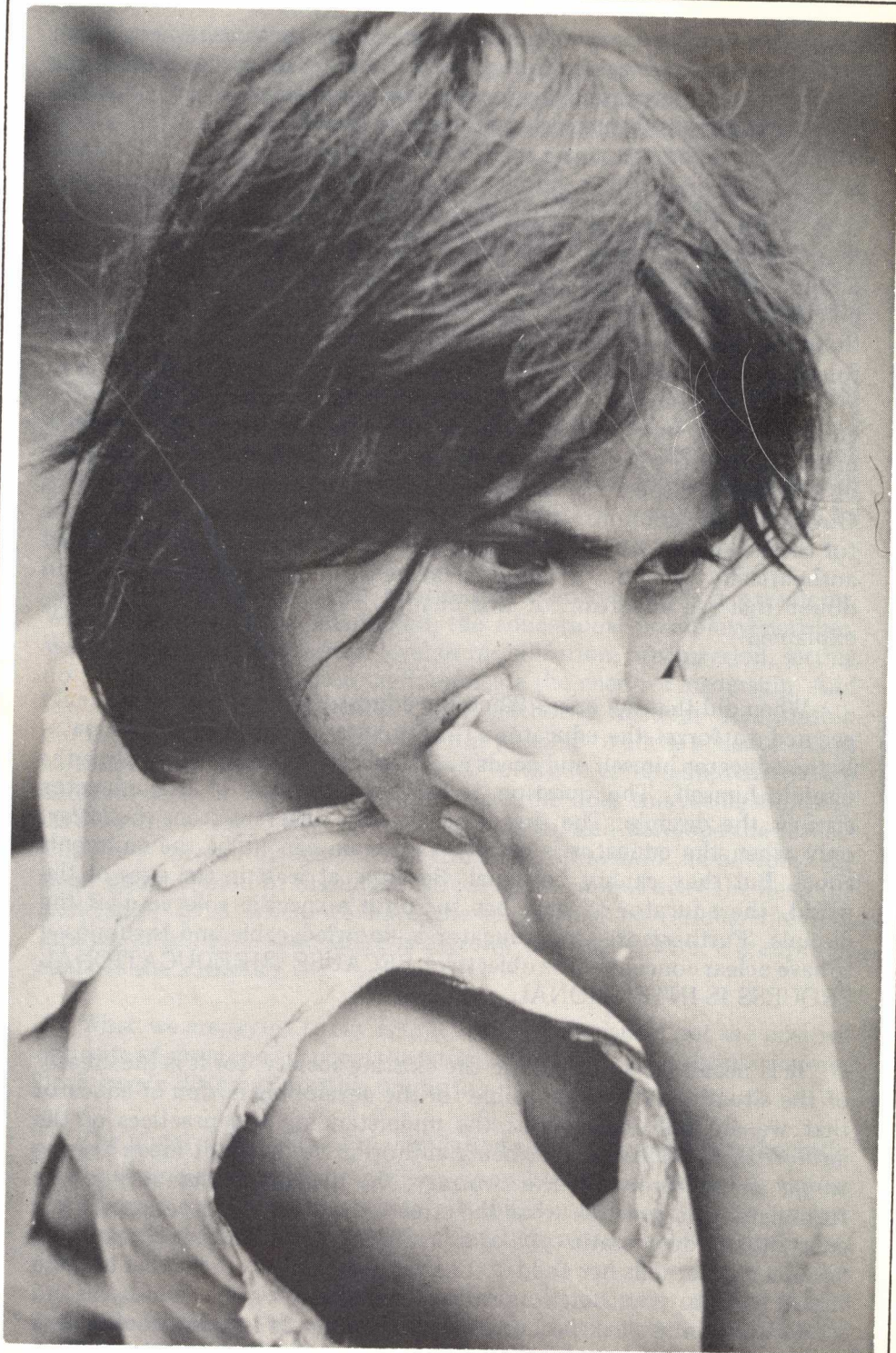
A tough question we must pose is the following:

How possible will it be —or is it, starting from that concrete reality which you are beginning to understand clearly— to develop a teaching method that does not intend to transform in the above mentioned sense, but rather leads to growth without transforming this concrete reality that is generating injustice? In other words, what are we going to do in the political dimension itself, but not at the service of the dominating class, rather in favor of a radical change in society? Thus, if we consider a teaching method that helps preserve society as it is, the radical difference between these two worlds will continue to exist.

It must be understood that this task, in my opinion, is only valid insofar as it serves as a substitution mechanism and challenges the groups, impelling them to implement a process to transform reality. Consequently, it must lead to a change in the people and not to the purification of souls. Deep down, children are premature men and women, a result of their hard struggle. They need to understand their deambulating and wandering about the street; to comprehend their own game as the expression of their lives. They can only change when they accept the life, that is, they do not change decisively, but rather prepare themselves to change.

On the basis of the scientific analysis we must undertake, there is no doubt that we will continuously change our provisional and naive visions regarding the street children phenomenon.

No one should think that it will be easy. What we see is an enormous task that demand historic and social sensitivity on our part, besides the scientifically rigorous comprehension of reality, which teaches us certain behaviors, of contumacy or pure fatalism. With this sensitivity and



comprehension we must then seek to overcome these behaviors, which implies understanding the future as a time to be made, created, or produced by transforming the present. There is no hope for social justice. Therefore, only in the struggle can hope be found.

In listening to the street educators speak, discuss, and inquire about their work, we have an observation to make. We agree with 95% of their conception; it is interesting and fascinating. However, we have our doubts regarding the remaining 5%. It is our impression that the latter percentage is real in the formulation, but not in practice. We must therefore cast aside that almost 5%. An example of the statements found in the formulation is the educators' poetic, beautiful, and even affectionate reference to their work with ten children here, and ten children there, but it does not seem to be clear that the final commitment has to do with transforming the world. With the transformation of the world through the suffering and exploitation of these children. Obviously, the commitment is one of love, yet not of mercy. Our love for these children who have been denied the right to be is only expressed authentically when our dream is to create a different world. We have no doubt that we all dream of this change. However, it must be better explained.

When did that 5% arise? When the educators, in seeking authenticity seemed to forget the educator's fundamental dimension: the educator is the educator himself and needs not be ashamed of it. The disciple is the disciple himself. The question is to know the role of this educator *vis-à-vis* the disciple. The first is necessarily different from the latter; only when the educator is merely a disciple can he be the children's equal. But they cannot be equal. Because, at least in the eyes of the world, the educator as such has to fulfill a specific role *vis-à-vis* the disciple. Furthermore, the educator is knowledgeable and is supposed to have a clear concept of the objectives, BECAUSE THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS IS INTENTIONAL.

It is necessary to dismantle the existing society, for it is the creator of the situation. It is responsible for the developing notion of educator that we are fighting against: the understanding and practices of the authoritarian educator. Not being authoritative does not mean ceasing to be an educator. On the contrary, the divergence lies only in the formulation; in practice what the street educators are experiencing is a substantially democratic type of educator. You can imagine the reaction when a mother tells her child: "it's over, I am only your mother because I gave birth to you, but the rest is meaningless, it's the same: you and I". It would not work because her child would be lost, he would lose a parameter. And in the absence of a parameter, freedom is lost. Thus,

there is no doubt that you are educators and, as such, must relate to the children. It is a matter of knowing what kind of educator you are, whose side you are on, what methods you use and which is the coherence between the educator's political dream and his utopia, and the working methods he employs. The question is then: is that essentially democratic educator also a disciple? And here is a point of the theoretic aspect that some educators do not understand. When we say that the educator is also a disciple, we are not annulling the basic differences between them. It is necessary to be able to reach a "compromise" regarding this difference. The authoritative educator never admits that he too is educated by the disciple in the process they both take part in.

In the educator's formulation we even perceived that, at the theoretic level, in rightfully rejecting a prejudiced authoritarian attitude they risk becoming the kind that "leaves things as they are, to see how they turn out". And that is not what we are doing. In other words, the educator is an educator, period; he appears as his own disciple. That is what we are to assume.

In the educator-disciple relationship freedom needs a parameter. When the parameter is eliminated, the educational possibility vanishes. We know, in fact, that a high level of mobilization, organization, setting up the programs, all require and implicate the need for leadership. And leadership implies authority. That authority-freedom relationship requires considerable thought. It is not possible to allow a "leave things as they are to see how they turn out" attitude to be adopted. We are confronted with several questions: what role does this leadership play *vis-à-vis* the masses? Who determines, creates, and develops the leadership? Is it created by decree? Is it from the top toward the bottom? All these issues should be discussed. However, we cannot deny the need for leadership. Even when we have the experience of various directing groups, of self-direction, there is a group that leads them, a group that assumes the authority.

What we are trying to say is that authoritarianism is not the positive opposite of spontaneity; nor is the latter the opposite of authoritarianism. Both have a different positive opposite.

The positive opposite of manipulation and spontaneity is democratic substantiveness. This is the positive opposite of both. In other words, "neither am I too permissive with the children because I am not authoritarian, nor do I suffocate them because I am against spontaneity".

We should never forget that the educator's attitude must be firmer each day because he experiences the relationship between the authority he stands for and the disciples: freedom in a harmonious manner. His

firm attitude is therefore a peaceful one. He should not fear risks, nor should he be frightened by the risk the disciple has to run. On the other hand, the authoritarian educator does not accept the possibility of the disciple running a risk, but rather imposes a solution. The educator in favor of spontaneity, instead of running a risk, becomes irresponsible. The democratic educator accepts the risk while taking the initiative, and sometimes guides the process, or even induces it.

We could then ask: ¿What is the difference between the authoritarian and the democratic educator?

In the educational process, the democratic educator substitutes induction with the disciple's analytical and conscious cooperation. That is the difference. The authoritarian educator devotes his time to induction, he constantly manipulates the process, the orders go from the top the bottom, often for convenience reasons.

In my opinion, however, that does not contribute to fulfilling the educator's dream. I am convinced that if there is an attitude that does not differentiate the bourgeoisie from the proletariat, that is spontaneusness, for it is of no help from the political standpoint. It does not help those who have the power, nor those who are subject to it.

As educators you must at least distinguish that 5% of the formulation in order to challenge it. Because your work will also depend upon the acceptance or rejection of those concepts. You could, at a certain point and time in practice, become conditioned by the formulation, which in my eyes would be a mistake.

If you ask me: Paulo, how does one achieve that authority-freedom relationship? I find that you are more capable than I to discover it, but if I got involved in your work, I might end up asking this question myself.

I confess that there have been moments in which I was confused. I see only one advantage, and that is that I am 64 years old but can remember the time when I was 10. I would not allow the child I was to be killed. I was a demanding person and I constantly live the role of the child I could not be. Today, at 64, I still feel demaged as a child. During a visit to the Home of the Youth in Sao Paulo, I admit, I was confused when I watched a child refuse every limitation imposed upon him by an educator. I kept asking myself: How is the relationship between freedom and authority achieved?

If the young educator accepts that the only educator is the child, he will be the child's disciple. And the educator in the above mentioned

instance was merely what the child wanted him to be. His argument was that he had been there for six months and that he was learning, only learning.

This may have been a reason for not having criticized the child's insistence on imposing his will. My impression was that, deep down, he feared saying "no" to the child, who consequently insisted on imposing his way. The young educator lacked the conviction that education is not made up of only "no", but cannot exist without it. Not only saying "no", but never without saying "no".



Sometimes it is very difficult to say "no"; one must know when to say it. In the actual educational process the educator cannot elude the problem of freedom, permissiveness and authoritarianism.

Precisely therefore he must adopt the proper attitude to confront these situations. Let's go back to an issue discussed earlier when we rejected authoritarian practices as well as licentious ones. Authority yes, but never authoritarianism. The temptation of libertinism cannot be accepted, for it destroys both freedom and authority. This means that neither authoritarianism, nor libertinism are acceptable. We must live with authority and freedom.

This is not easy, and we must find ways to achieve it. First of all it appears relevant to emphasize the importance of doing something. A doer, in doing, creates a certain type of knowledge. First, because he does something and secondly, because he knows how to go on doing it. In other words, someone who works in street education knows many things he discovered, things the street taught him.

In doing something we learn how to do it better each time, we learn what we could call the essential by-products, among which is the practice of doing. If this were not so, what we would have would be specialists in programming actions they do not carry out, and specialists in evaluating actions they never performed. Unfortunately, this is the result of a dichotomy, a dissociation of practice from its programming and evaluation. All three elements, however, are one and the same. They make up a single process, but constitute different moments within it.

Thus, evaluation is part of practice. It must therefore take place on a daily basis. Beyond this evaluation that nourishes practice, there are special moments in which the person practicing, moves away from his actions and stops to question them from a global perspective. Theorists consider this moment to be only that of evaluation. But, that moment allows even greater links to be made, precisely because the evaluation is within practice. It would be good if the street educators made this discovery in their own practice, for they would learn how to improve their practice; they would find a better way to do things and acquire additional knowledge derived from doing.

Practice is not its own theory. In other words, it generates different types of knowledge, but is not the theory of practice itself. Theoretically, Tuesday's practice should prepare a better practice for Wednesday when certain possible deficiencies are to be overcome which result from insecurity and uncertainty regarding knowledge.

Starting from this consideration we want to establish the educator's ever increasing dimension of knowledge, gained day by day in his work,

through his direct experience in the street. However, he lacks a certain type of knowledge, maybe even concerning the correct manner to adequately perform his task in the street.

Parallel to this knowledge there is another kind of experience derived from other activities. This experience propitiates understanding a particular activity, as well as the knowledge it brings with it. This other type of experience is precisely the technical, theoretic, or methodic weapon that people create jointly in life.

It is easy to rapidly understand the analysis made by the street educators. That is, there is no need to insist in order to convince me of something, because I understand it quickly due to the experience acquired in another world of knowledge, a more exact type of knowledge.

It also means that I am going to deal with the issues that already constitute the knowledge of street educators, but which must be dealt with in-depth by the educators themselves, possibly with my assistance, and not only mine, but also that of others.

Some of the aspects I am going to stress now are already quite well known, however, it is necessary to distinguish them even more. They are obvious facts; obvious in the sense I mentioned earlier: when we discover what is obvious, but perceive that it is not as obvious as it seemed to be. As an example of something obvious that is not so obvious, I would like to remind you of an instrument that may help understand certain processes you and the children undergo. I find I must speak in abstractions in order for you to comprehend the concrete ideas contained in the abstraction I am going to refer to. It concerns precisely everyday life. As street educators your everyday life takes place in the street. For me everyday life and its comprehension are of great importance to the educator, because it is within this context that the resistance of the oppressed arises.

Let us follow Kosik's¹ advice and think about how we behave, or how we move in everyday life. I wake up, I shower, have breakfast, chat with Elsa, talk to the working youngster, speak to our son, greet the employees who are downstairs cleaning the floor, I cross the street, meet people, walk among the cars, stop at the signal light. I do all that, but do not question what is happening around me unless, suddenly, there is a rupture in my routine that makes me question myself about it. Apart from that I simply go by what is happening. I mean, I walk by things, persons, objects and merely realize they are there. Of course, if I did not perceive their existence, I would not be living everyday life.

1. Karel Kosik, *Dialéctica do concreto*. Paz e Terra Publishers.

I dare say that one of the basic conditions for survival in the existential everyday life is to perceive things, persons, and facts. Even dogs and cats do that. If they did not, they would not survive. To realize things are there does not mean we know them; it is in no way a fundamental or important part of knowledge. To know means to realize and move toward knowledge. These comments are important, because they sooner or later explain events.

Precisely for this reason there is a fundamental difference between perceiving and trying to know things or facts. In trying to get to know a fact, one moves away from it, creates a distance and questions it. In a more technical language it is called objectifying the object. In other words, the person stops in front of the object and asks, what is the penholder? At that point and time the mind's attitude and position toward the abnormal and unusual behavior of the mind changes. That is to say, the mind assumes the position of wanting to get to know something. The entire mind prepares itself in the "curiosity" *vis-a-vis* the object. It becomes "possessed", "moved" by the object. It questions, investigates. This is not a normal mental attitude of everyday life. If it were, no-one could stand it. Imagine what would happen if a person spent the whole day in that mental attitude. He could not bear it.

Now, let us go out in the street as educators.

The first thing that one discovers is that the children seem to have been there for a long time.

What I intend to say is that the children walked by the street educators, but the minds of both groups was working on the basis of everyday life.

It is thus necessary that the street children emerge from the disciple's everyday life. On the one hand our living and sharing their reality is indispensable, but on the other it is also necessary to turn their everyday life into the object of theoretic pondering. Thus, although we must start from the street child's everyday life, we will never be able to subsist in that context. This theoretic requirement establishes one of the basic differences between the educator and the disciple. Therefore, one of the educator's tasks is to help the child develop in practicing reality and not merely perceiving it. If you consider and see the disciple in the same manner as usual, you are not fulfilling this duty.

When the street educator begins to improve himself or to realize that facts must be apprehended, and that apprehension means an analytical development of curiosity, he will perceive the need to pose exact questions. It is not possible to work in the field of education



without knowing what questions to ask². It is not only a matter of asking the child; we must question ourselves. When we are going to work in the street, it is obvious that we go as someone emerging from everyday life. In other words, the educator had been submerged in everyday life, and he must emerge in order to understand it, to question it, comprehend it, and pose himself questions about it.

This also leads to the comprehension of jobs that constitute cultural invasions. That is, the invasion of another person's everyday life. In this case the educator does not take into account the child's everyday life, but rather imposes his values. That is an authoritarian and reactionary attitude.

On the other hand, in order to work with that child, first of all, you must comprehend his own everyday life from the perspective of the

2. Paulo Freire and Antonio Foundez, *Por una Pedagogia da Pergunta*, Paz e Terra Publishers, Rio de Janeiro, 1985.

social class he belongs to, his values, ambitions, the means available to him, etc.

You must "impregnate" yourself with the children's everyday life, but you cannot stay immersed in it. It is worthy of repetition: you may not remain in the children's everyday life. In other words, you must use it as a starting point, but not a goal. The child's everyday life is not a stop along the process; it is not a moment to rejoice.

You must submerge in the child's everyday life in order to come out of it as a child. Thus, understanding the child's everyday life is absolutely indispensable. For example, it is important to comprehend what is happening in it, because it is profoundly dramatic, profoundly painful, as is the fact that these children even negotiate their own pain. To what point must one lose his sensitivity in order to do such a thing? It is not that they lose or have lost their character, but rather that living in a general state of aggression, in an environment like theirs, one either devises defense techniques, such as insensitivity, or one cannot survive. In order to survive, the child must create a protective shield, strengthen his mind and his emotions.

It is thus necessary to understand the game of basic techniques which are the expression of the resistance created by the youngsters in order to survive in our world. These techniques are related to the child's intelligence, personality and affection. In my opinion, certain attitudes which are related to their rules of the game are a means of satisfying the need to create the proper techniques for the arduous task of surviving. So the educator must be aware of the child's everyday life. A life that remains unobserved if the educator simply goes to the periphery, walks in the street, but does not become aware and curious about the existence of the street.

Another issue the educator encounters is that although he is as much of an educator as his colleague who works within the school institutional *milieu*, his educational activity is neither superior nor inferior to the latter's, but necessarily different. Different in the sense that the school educator works within the institution, follows a set schedule, established programs and assigned study material, while the street educator cannot think in terms of strict schedules, or programmed learning material, and performs his educational activities with suffering, abused children who are not allowed to be. Both kinds of educator must therefore deal with their disciples' everyday reality.

One might say it is paternalism or spontaneity to state that the educator who works within the institutional *milieu* should have some experience regarding the student's social context in order to use it as a

starting point and leap from there with the child toward his development. But it is not.

The educator who works in the institutional background also needs to know how the children he works with operate in their everyday life.

I would like to establish an obvious differential framework between the street educator's and the institutional educator's *milieu*. Because they belong to the lower classes, the children in the institutional environment come from families that are subject to police violence and to the consequences of social differences; they are confronted with serious difficulties in their daily routine. In the case of street children, however, the consequences of this situation are twice, three times, or even more serious.

Among others, a central problem, both for the institutional educator working with children from any social class, and for the street educator, is the tense relationship between authority and freedom. The changes available to the institutional educator in his way of experiencing authority *vis-à-vis* freedom are not the same as those the street educator has to create and establish.

In the case of the street educator, this problem is intensified in the same manner as when the school educator works in a poverty stricken area. But still, he is working in a poor area with children who live at home and not in the street.

The relationship between authority and freedom reveals itself differently to the street educator and to the street children. At this point it seems important to deal with the matter of the limitations that every activity is subject to, and to stress the street educator's need to challenge the children to comprehend the limitations of their activities in an analytical manner. This comprehension goes beyond the level of understanding they are able to attain through sheer sensitivity *vis-à-vis* the results of their actions. One must keep in mind that practice is subject to limitations, and that each person learns from his or her own experience. We often do what we can and not what we would like to do. There are economic, ideological, social, historical and knowledge limitations. No practice is free of limitations; every practice is restricted in some way.

It is a question of knowing how to cope with these limitations; to know how to face the role of the person setting them, how to occupy the environments. I do not and cannot say that historical limitations end up giving history a role it does not have, which would be to address from the top toward the bottom, turning us into executors of that which history establishes. History is not capable of this. It is not

almighty. However, it is in making history and in being made by it that the limitations are set.

It would be either great, or a total disaster, if there were no restrictions. However, the issue of limitations establishes power. It is impossible to discuss on issue without dealing with the other. As it is not possible to discuss limitations and power, without asking oneself in whose favor? for what? against who? against what? In other words the answer "I am in favor of the street children" does not suffice. It is not enough for me. I am solidary with the street children so that, together, we can transform this world.

We must discover through experience and not in books that in our society it is no use to throw in the towel, to give up. I choose to throw



in the towel because history has imposed limitations upon me and I cannot transform everything now. If it were up to me, I would have changed everything a long time ago. Since this is not possible, even when I accept a reform process, I must not assume a reformist attitude. There is a difference between accepting a reform and being a reformist. A reformist is a person who changes his way of being in order to avoid causing a rupture. However, it happens that, in practically every case, the reform allowed ends up directing the historical process which, in turn, goes beyond the control of the person who originally used it as a tactic to protect his own interests.

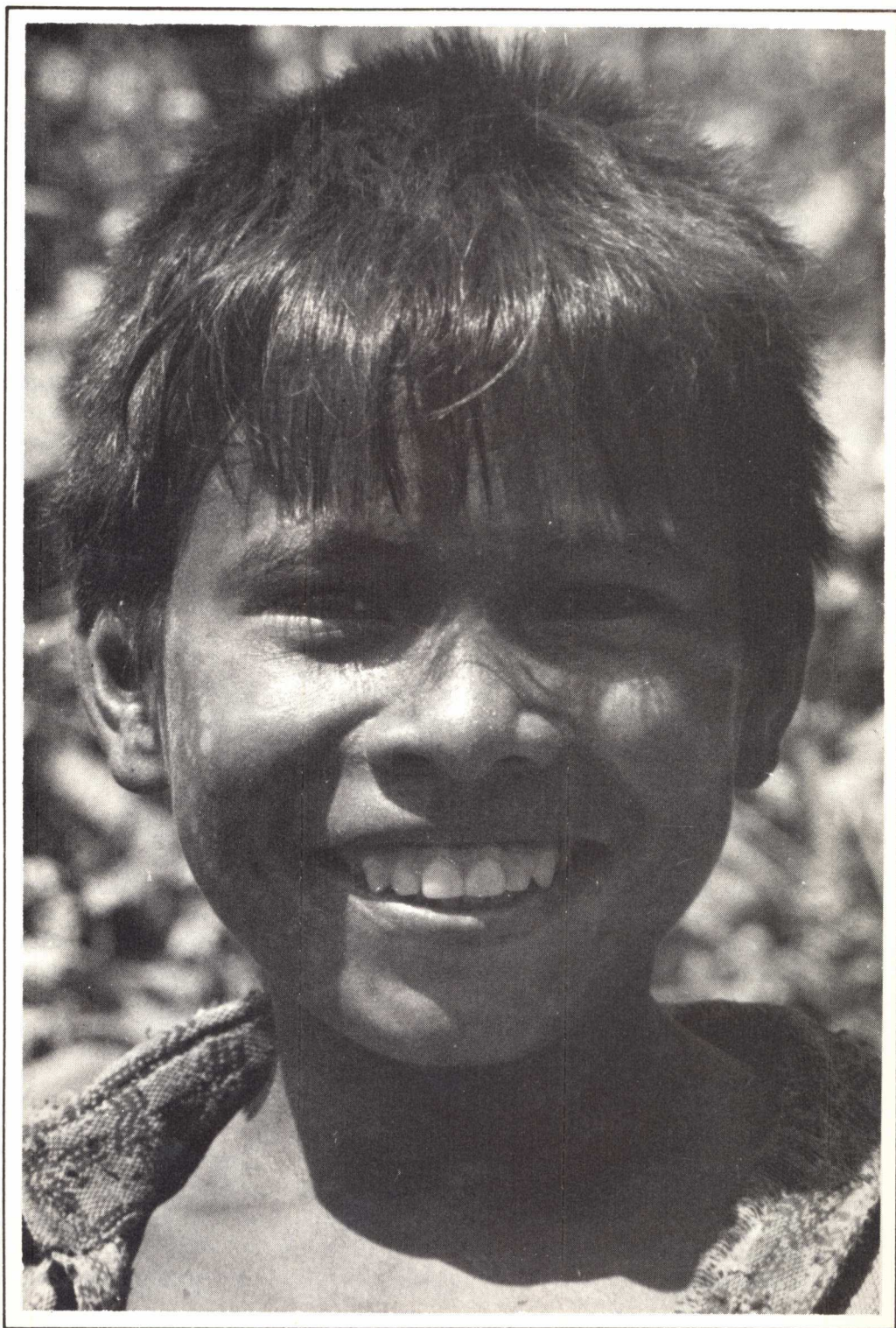
Aware of the facts, and in a Machiavellian way, I carry out reforms without being a reformist. From this perspective, going out in the street is not the result of a purely humanitarian attitude. It is a political action. A virtually political decision that is related to love, but not to humanitarianism. I believe that in this way a difference may be established between humanism and humanitarianism.

A humanitarian is a person who contributes a considerable sum of money in order to write off the amount and lower his income taxes, and then turns around and phones the police to have them pick up the child.

A humanist fights to change the world and hands out no checks. If he gives, it is with a different intention. There is a basic difference. I do not wish to sound like a preacher, but I would like to give an example of how Christ rejected a humanitarian.

When that handsome, well-dressed, very clean young man—one of the “ten best-dressed”—approach Christ and asked “Master, what must I do to follow you?”, Christ responded “Divest yourself of everything and come”. The young man said “The Lord is very demanding”, and went away. Nowhere in the gospel do we read that Christ went after him to propose that they make a compromise. He made no concession. He did not follow him and the young man could have even offered a check for the parish, but Christ did not want to go after him. The difference I am trying to make clear is expressed in Christ’s rejection toward humanitarians.

Lastly, I would like to stress the fact that it is impossible to avoid restrictions and limitations. What should we do then? You will find out in experiencing this impossibility in practice. You will develop a discipline that, without ever being authoritarian, will not become permissive either. You will create an educational method that rejects not only a suffocating authoritarianism, but also a licentious lack of responsibility.



Other publications of this series:

1. PAULO FREIRE AND THE STREET EDUCATORS
2. ACCION GUAMBRAS Non-conventional Care Programme for
Street Children Ecuador.
3. COATZACOALCOS New Alternatives of Care for Children
in and on the Street of México.