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## Structure, Direction and Rigour in Liberating Education

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**ABSTRACT** Paulo Freire's discussion of 'banking education' and 'problem-posing education' in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has exerted considerable influence among educators in both the Third World and the First World over the past two decades. This paper acknowledges the importance of this segment of Freire's work, but argues that it ought to be read alongside subsequent publications which flesh out many points of detail in the Freirean view of liberating education. The author focuses on Freire's emphasis, especially in later books, on structure, direction and rigour in liberating education. Freire's pedagogy, it is argued, can best be understood not as a 'method' but as a distinctive approach to the theory and practice of education. Thus conceived, Freirean liberating education stands opposed to the shift, in many countries of the Western world, toward technocratic and 'market-driven' systems of education and assessment. The development of a national qualifications framework in New Zealand provides one manifestation of this trend, to which a Freirean critique can usefully be applied.

### INTRODUCTION

The distinction between 'banking education' and 'problem-posing education' is one of the best-known aspects of Freire's work. The second chapter of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972a) has become a classic reference point for scholars and practitioners investigating the nature of liberating education. Given its extraordinary influence, this dimension of Freire's theory merits close attention. It is important, however, that this initial discussion of banking education and problem-posing education be studied alongside Freire's other writings—especially his more recent co-authored, dialogical texts. The wider corpus of Freire's published texts provides a rich elaboration of key principles in Freirean pedagogy, and furnishes a more complex picture of liberating education than *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (on its own) affords [1]. If the danger of domestication in interpreting and applying Freirean ideas is to be avoided, it is vital that Freire's work be read holistically. Drawing on Freirean material spanning the past two decades, but concentrating in particular on Freire's later books, the present paper focuses on the significance of structure, direction and rigour in liberating education. The propensity among some Western educators to reduce Freirean theory and practice to a 'method' or set of methods is criticised, and an alternative view of Freirean education as a distinctive approach to pedagogy is advanced. When understood in this manner, the Freirean ideal stands in tension with the commodification of education and the movement toward technocratic and 'market' models of the learning process. The shift from 'knowledge and understanding' to 'skills and information' in many countries

of the Western world is similarly worrying from a Freirean perspective. In the final part of the paper, one example of these trends—the development of a national framework for educational qualifications in New Zealand—is outlined and contrasted with the Freirean approach to liberating education.

#### BANKING EDUCATION AND PROBLEM-POSING EDUCATION: THE CLASSIC ACCOUNT

In Chapter 2 of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire argues that education is suffering from 'narration sickness' (1972a, p. 45). Whether inside or outside school settings, the relationship between teacher and students tends to be overwhelmingly monological: the teacher narrates the subject matter to students who are expected to receive passively, memorise and (if requested) repeat the content of the narration. This is the basis of the 'banking' model of education: teachers 'deposit' ideas into students, who become receptacles or 'depositories' waiting to be filled with the knowledge the teacher is assumed to possess. In the banking system, knowledge is perceived as a 'gift' to be bestowed by teachers upon voiceless, patient, ignorant students. Banking education is inherently oppressive: it regards students as 'adaptable, manageable beings', it is fundamentally anti-dialogical, and it systematically impedes the development of a critical orientation toward the world. Students are treated as acquiescent 'automatons' to be controlled in both thought and action. Knowledge becomes static and lifeless, the teacher assumes an authoritarian role, and social reality is trivialised or mythicised. Banking education reflects, reinforces and perpetuates wider inequalities and injustices, serving the interests of oppressors 'who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed'. A paternalistic process of domestication and assimilation is evident (p. 47). The banking approach stifles the creativity—the critical imagination—necessary to address oppressive structures, and poses explicit constraints to liberating praxis. The whole system is thus (from Freire's point of view) thoroughly dehumanising.

In opposition to banking education Freire advances a theory of 'problem-posing' ('authentic' or 'liberating') education. Problem-posing education begins with the resolution of the 'teacher-student contradiction'. Teachers become both teachers *and* students (and vice versa): the relationship is one of 'teacher-student' with 'students-teachers' (p. 53). Dialogue becomes the pivotal pedagogical process: instead of issuing communiqués, the teacher communicates *with* students, and in so doing learns (and re-learns) with them. The relationship between teacher and students, then, is 'horizontal' rather than hierarchical. Participants in the educative situation come to know through dialogue, with others, mediated by the object of study. Where under the banking system ideas are 'deposited' by teachers in a pre-packaged, inert form, in liberating education learning takes place through 'the posing of the problems of men in their relations with the world' (p. 52). Knowledge is constantly 'in the making': it is always in a process of being created as students and teachers seek to unveil—through critical reflection—successive layers of reality. The object of study is not 'owned' by anyone; rather, it becomes the focus around which all participants seeking to know gather to reflect and pose problems.

Problem-posing education is concerned with 'the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality' (p. 54). Through critical, dialogical investigation, participants begin to understand their world in a depth hitherto unknown to them: that which was once hidden, submerged or only superficially perceived begins to 'stand out' in

sharp relief from other elements of awareness. Students (and teachers) begin to think holistically and contextually. A new conception of the relationship between 'consciousness', 'action' and 'world' emerges through critical dialogue. Where under the banking system social reality is posited as a fixed inevitability, through problem-posing education students confront, explore and act purposefully upon a dynamic, ever-changing world. As participants enter into dialogical relations with others and discover the dialectical interaction between consciousness and the world, they begin to sense that dominant ideas can be challenged and oppressive social formations transformed. Problem-posing education, Freire suggests, is a 'revolutionary futurity': it 'affirms men as beings who transcend themselves, who move forward and look ahead, for whom looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future' (p. 57). A pedagogy built on authentic dialogue, conscientisation and revolutionary praxis can never serve the interests of oppressors; on the contrary, it is openly supportive of the struggle *against* oppression. Problem-posing education re-affirms human beings as subjects, furnishes hope that the world can change and, by its very nature, is necessarily directed toward the goal of humanisation.

#### LIBERATING EDUCATION: A BROADER VIEW

In hindsight, the popularity of this account of banking education and problem-posing education is hardly surprising. Apart from the fact that it is from Freire's most famous book, the attractiveness of its arguments for Western educators is readily apparent. The pedagogical core of problem-posing education—dialogue—carries strong positive connotations, and was seen by many in First World countries as complementary to, or compatible with, emerging 'child-centred', 'interactive', 'problem-solving', and other ostensibly progressive approaches to education during the 1970s and 1980s. In reality, the connections between these movements and Freire's educational ideal are, at times, highly dubious if not utterly misleading.

Child-centred education, while sometimes somewhat ill-defined, tends in many cases to be predominantly individualistic in orientation; Freire, on the other hand, explicitly promotes collective action and structural imagination. Supposedly 'new' interactive methods in science education (related in many instances to the move toward constructivist epistemologies in understanding scientific concepts) bear some resemblance to problem-posing education, but lack the overt Freirean imperative to relate classroom knowledge to wider political issues and the ontological vocation of humanisation. 'Problem-solving' approaches—whether in mathematics and science education, or 'consciousness-raising' groups—are in tension with the dynamism of *problem-posing* education (cf. Connolly, 1980, p. 73). Freire avoids talk of 'problem-solving', for this term suggests there is always a solution to every problem. From Freire's point of view, however, this is not always the case. In one sense this is a necessary consequence of the political nature of Freirean education: when confronting problems of homelessness, mass illiteracy, poverty, exploitation, and so on, clearly there are no simple solutions. At a deeper level, however, it is in the very act of posing problems that participants pursue their liberation: beginning to perceive contradictions in ideological positions, institutional structures, and everyday practices is one element in the process of revolutionary change. This critical activity is necessarily ongoing and incomplete: as the social world changes, new problems arise, requiring further reflection and action. One does not 'find' the solution, then move on to the next problem: rather, the next problem

is being created as the present one is being addressed. Often the original problem persists, though in a metamorphosed form.

For teachers and other practitioners searching for a fresh way of organising classroom life after the rigidity of traditional 'rote learning' methods of instruction had become intolerable Freire seemed to have the answer: dialogue was seen as the key to happier, more fulfilling, more effective learning. Freire's explicit situating of dialogue within the context of an overtly political process of conscientisation and a revolutionary mode of praxis was often forgotten in all of this. Dialogue came to be seen as a pedagogical *method*, to be juxtaposed against oppressive monological 'methods'. Yet when the links between dialogue and other key principles in Freire's pedagogy—conscientisation, praxis, oppression, liberation, etc.—are ignored or played down, the very meaning of problem-posing education is lost. The discussion of dialogue in the second chapter of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* needs to be read as one part of an integrated whole, and can only be thoroughly comprehended when accompanied by reference to Freire's other writings. The wider corpus of Freirean texts is also especially helpful in clarifying differences between problem-posing education and a *laissez-faire* approach to pedagogy. Similarly, Freire's position on 'authority' and 'authoritarianism', while implicit in Chapter 2 of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, emerges in greater detail elsewhere. In his later publications Freire explores the role of experience in learning, the teacher–student relationship, the question of what (and how) students ought to read, and issues relating to course planning in some depth. In the discussion that follows, three features of the Freirean educational ideal will be stressed: structure, direction and rigour.

#### *Education, Ethics and Politics*

Freire has repeatedly stated that education is never neutral (see Freire, 1971, pp. 1–2; 1972b, pp. 173–174; 1979, p. 28; 1987, pp. 211–212). Learning never takes place in a vacuum. Whether in formal or informal settings, learning always occurs within a social context, under particular political conditions. The socio-political context sets limits on what can be achieved by educators, but also leaves spaces for resistance. Individual teachers or coordinators cannot but bring certain attitudes, values, beliefs and predispositions to bear on the educative process. Whether recognised and acknowledged or not, the assumptions educators begin with structure and shape their pedagogical activities. Every decision, policy, or practice in an educational setting implies a particular conception of human beings and the world and a specific ethical position (compare, Freire, 1971, p. 2). Teachers do not need to have explicitly asked 'What ought I to do?', or 'What political views do I support?' for their educational activities to be non-neutral: a certain ethical stance is already assumed in any consciously directed, deliberate action in an educative setting. Declaring oneself 'neutral' is, Freire claims, a profoundly political statement: those who purport to be 'apolitical' often provide, either wittingly or unintentionally, support for the *status quo*. An educator, then, is always, in effect, 'taking a stand', whether openly or implicitly. Freire observes:

This is a great discovery, education is politics! After that, when a teacher discovers that he or she is a politician, too, the teacher has to ask, What kind of politics am I doing in the classroom? That is, in favor of whom am I being a teacher? By asking in favor of whom am I educating, the teacher must also ask against whom am I educating (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 46).

Shor notes that for Freire the entire fabric of educational activity is political. This is

revealed in myriad features of educational life, including the selection of subjects for a syllabus; the means employed in deciding upon course content; the form of communication between teachers and students; the type of tests and grading policies used; the physical structure of classrooms; the attitudes towards different kinds of speech; the equality or lack of it in funding levels; and the links between educational institutions and the business community (Shor, 1993, p. 27).

Freire is explicit in declaring his ethical and political position: his concern is to work toward the liberation of the oppressed. Of course, not all teachers, policy makers and politicians share this goal: Freire believes, however—given his conception of humanisation—that all teachers who are *against* the kind of dehumanisation fostered through banking education ought to ‘side with’ the oppressed in pursuit of a better social world. Teachers who do not themselves come from the ranks of the oppressed must be ‘reborn’ as educators and join with the oppressed in their struggle against dehumanisation. Freire speaks of this process as a form of ‘Easter experience’ (1985, p. 123), and adopts from Amílcar Cabral (1980, p. 136) the notion of teachers from bourgeois backgrounds committing ‘class suicide’: this implies *renouncing* the oppressive elements of one’s class of origin while simultaneously *announcing* one’s commitment to the liberation of the oppressed through dialogue, the problematisation of social reality, and political transformation. Regardless of the stance taken, education is (for Freire) an inescapably non-neutral enterprise. In formal educational institutions and programmes, this non-neutrality manifests itself in the interventionist role played by teachers or coordinators. Teaching, on the Freirean view, is a necessarily interventionist occupation (cf. Harris, 1990), implying a commitment to a given ethical and political position, from which pedagogical principles and practices derive.

### *Structure and Direction in the Pedagogical Process*

Freire does not, then, advocate an ‘anything goes’ style of pedagogy. Liberating education, contrary to popular misconception, is structured, purposeful and rigorous. In later works, Freire distinguishes between three approaches to education: the authoritarian (or manipulative, or domesticating), the *laissez-faire* (or spontaneous), and the liberating (or radical democratic). The first and third of these correspond, in general terms, to ‘banking education’ and ‘problem-posing education’ respectively. Freire argues that (liberating) teachers have a responsibility *as teachers* to be directive. The liberating teacher does not ‘wash his or her hands of the students’ (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 171), leaving them to structure and direct educative situations as they see fit. To hand all decisions regarding reading material, teaching style, and curriculum content over to students is not to promote freedom but to grant licence. While Freire retains the notion of all participants in a problem-posing dialogue being both teachers and students, this does not mean that teachers and students assume exactly the *same* role in the educative process. The liberating teacher gives structure and direction to learning, while encouraging and enhancing academic rigour. The teacher has a responsibility to provide constructive, critical feedback on written work, and should always have ‘a plan, a program, [and] a goal for the study’ (p. 172). His or her role is to ‘direct’ in the sense of *guiding* (but not forcing) students through a course of study.

The term ‘facilitator’ (rather than ‘teacher’) is often used by adult educators who espouse a commitment to Freirean principles. This notion seems to capture the directive essence of liberating education: the educator’s responsibility rests precisely in



his or her duty to furnish the conditions for effective (by which Freire means critical, dialogical and praxical) learning to take place. The term must be employed with care, however, if it is to convey Freire's intention accurately. In his book with Myles Horton, Freire states that the educator 'cannot be a mere facilitator' (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 180). This point is given more extended and explicit attention in Freire's subsequent publications. For example, in a recent dialogue with Donaldo Macedo, Freire notes:

When teachers call themselves facilitators and not teachers, they become involved in a distortion of reality. To begin with, in de-emphasizing the teacher's power by claiming to be a facilitator, one is being less than truthful to the extent that the teacher turned facilitator maintains the power institutionally created in the position. That is, while facilitators may veil their power, at any moment they can exercise power as they wish (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 378).

Freire is adamant: 'I consider myself a teacher and always a teacher. I have never pretended to be a facilitator. What I want to make clear also is in being a teacher, I always teach to facilitate. I cannot accept the notion of a facilitator who facilitates so as not to teach' (p. 378). Clearly, then, if being a 'facilitator' means minimising the educator's involvement to the point where he or she is no longer an essential participant in the dialogical process, but merely a bystander, Freire would oppose the term (and its embodiment in practice). The educator's active involvement in dialogical investigation with students is essential: the teacher's role, as noted earlier, is defined by its interventionist character. If the term is used in the stronger sense—that is, to indicate a move away from the traditional, 'banking' idea of teaching—Freire might have no objection to it. As the passages quoted above indicate, however, a preferable stance would be to retain the term 'teacher' while at the same time rendering problematic certain practices which parade (falsely, in Freire's opinion) under the banner of 'teaching'.

Freire insists that teachers not only *cannot* avoid, but *ought not* to avoid, bringing their own political beliefs to bear on their educational practice. Teachers have a duty to disclose their intentions and discuss their 'dreams' (of how the world ought to be) with students. This implies being open about what one regards as ethically desirable and ethically undesirable. It also suggests that teachers have not only a right but a responsibility to respond honestly when confronted with student views they disagree with:

My role is not to be silent. I have to convince students of my dreams but not conquer them for my own plans. Even if students have the right to bad dreams, I have the right to say their dreams are bad, reactionary or capitalist or authoritarian (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 157).

This does not mean, however, that one should impose one's views on students. Students should never be compelled or coerced to accept the teacher's political position; to the contrary, the teacher's ideas should always be open to question. This principle applies to all participants in the educative situation.

Freire's discussion of the differences between authoritative and authoritarian approaches to education in later works is instructive here. A democratic teacher, he argues, 'can never stop being an authority or having authority' (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 91). This authority derives from the educator's knowledge of his or her subject, and from the responsibility he or she has for coordinating, structuring and facilitating the educative process. The teacher's authority is necessary for freedom to develop. This, for Freire, is only an apparent paradox. Where teachers renounce or deny their authority,

freedom becomes licence; where they forget the freedom of students altogether, authority becomes authoritarianism (see Freire, 1987, p. 212). The differentiation between 'freedom' and 'licence' here is not a conceptual distinction but a substantive (normative) one. The key to understanding Freire's position lies in the *purpose* of exercising authority, namely to promote the appropriate conditions for allowing others to liberate themselves. If authority is completely relinquished, the structure, direction and focus necessary for rigorous dialogical reflection upon a common object of study is missing. Without purposeful dialogue, liberation is impossible. The pursuit of liberation is similarly compromised if opportunities for any form of dialogue and critical reflection are deliberately suppressed.

For Freire there is a close connection between authoritarianism and manipulation. A manipulative approach to pedagogy is one in which the educator says (directly or implicitly) to students, 'you *must* believe this because I say it' (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 172). This is a form of domination where students are expected to believe X or Y irrespective of the evidence in favour of X or Y. That is, students are required to accept the teacher's view *without question*. Indeed, one dimension of manipulation is the systematic impeding of a curious, interested, creative, questioning orientation toward the world. For Freire, asking questions is an essential part of the learning process. The liberating educator welcomes questions as a sign of the student's critical engagement with the object of study; the authoritarian teacher tends to regard questions as an attack on his or her professional authority (Freire & Faundez, 1989, p. 35). The defensiveness of the authoritarian teacher when faced with challenging questions springs from a fear of the answers such questions might give rise to (p. 36). The manipulative teacher has no intention of unveiling reality, or of penetrating surface appearances. Manipulation denies, distorts and mythicises reality: it represents an attempt to turn the world into something it is not and to enforce compliance with this falsification. This process can be deceptively subtle: 'We can be authoritarian in sweet, manipulating and even sentimental ways, cajoling students with walks through flowery roads, and already you know what points you picked for the students to know' (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 91).

Freire speaks of an 'inductive moment' in the educative process. This is the moment, he says, 'where the educator cannot wait for the students to initiate their own forward progress into an idea or an understanding, and the teacher must do it' (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 157). Should students spontaneously 'put all the knowing together' (p. 158), so much the better, but where this does not occur the educator ought to intervene and assist in moving critical discussion forward. An authoritarian teacher attempts to retain total control over the student's learning by 'monopolising' the inductive process, while a liberating teacher *starts* the process when necessary but always with a view to transcending the inductive moment to allow students to continue critical investigation themselves (pp. 157–158). The teacher's role, thus, is to step in—to initiate, redirect, or give a focus to, dialogue and study—with the express purpose of creating the possibility for others to give direction to the educative process. Paradoxically, then, deliberate assistance (in keeping dialogue moving in a critical direction) at certain points is necessary if these intervening moments are to be minimised. As Freire puts it: 'It's impossible for me to help someone without teaching him or her something with which they can start to do by themselves' (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 193).

If educational dialogue is to be liberating it requires a clear, though not rigid, structure. Freire does not advise teachers to adhere to a programme of study dogmatically, or simply for the sake of following a prescribed syllabus. The purpose of structure—the provision of a framework within which meaningful, directed dialogue



can occur—should always be kept in mind. Slavish devotion to a set plan or course outline can be counter-productive: important opportunities for deeper interrogation of the object of study can be missed, and student enthusiasm can be dampened. Without some form of structure, however, the goal of liberating education can be similarly compromised: dialogue needs a definite focus, and the learning process needs to cohere around a common objective.

### *Dialogue with a Purpose*

The wider purpose of liberating education is, as the name suggests, *liberation*, through the posing (and addressing) of problems. It is liberation *from oppression* with which Freire is primarily concerned. This point cannot be over-emphasised: it is not dialogue around just any themes which lies at the heart of Freire's pedagogy, but rather dialogue which directly addresses particular forms of oppression. Of course, each educational programme has, or ought to have, more specific purposes: for example, learning to read and write, acquiring knowledge in a given subject, discovering how to perform particular tasks, and so on. Moreover, in any liberating educative effort, the concern is to address *this* oppressive situation, or *that* one, not some abstract notion of 'oppression in general'. (While all of the programmes with which Freire has been involved had different problems to be confronted, thematised and acted upon, Freire tends to be abstract and universalist in his theorising about 'oppression' and 'liberation'. This propensity has drawn sharp criticism in recent years: compare, Weiler, 1991; Freire & Macedo, 1993.) The purposeful character of liberating education also relates to the Freirean concept of an ontological vocation: the 'purpose' of all human beings, simply through being human, is humanisation, and all liberating educative efforts are ultimately directed towards this end.

Freire argues that if dialogue is to be politically transformative, it 'implies responsibility, directiveness, determination, discipline, [and] objectives' (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 102). Dialogue does *not* signify the necessary abandonment of existing knowledge. Ideas are constantly re-examined in a dialogical setting, but this does not mean there is no stability or continuity in what participants know over time. Freire notes:

[B]y discussing dialogue every day with students, I am not changing every day my understanding of dialogue. We arrive at the level of some certainty, some scientific certainty of some objects, which we can count on. What dialogue-educators know, nevertheless, is that science has historicity. This means that all new knowledge comes up when other knowledge becomes old, and no longer answers the needs of the new moment, no longer answers the new questions being asked. Because of that, all new knowledge when it appears waits for its own overcoming by the next new knowledge which is inevitable (pp. 101–102).

Teachers, Freire stresses, should not withhold what they already know of their subject area from students; indeed, they have a duty to share this knowledge, just as students have a responsibility to *engage* the ideas presented by the teacher. Students should not be compelled to 'speak up' in problem-posing education, but nor should they be permitted to subvert the dialogical process for other students who wish to make a verbal contribution (pp. 102–103). All contributions to an educative dialogue should be treated with respect. This principle springs from Freire's conviction that no one is ignorant of everything, just as no one knows everything: all participants are capable of

contributing helpfully to the educative engagement. At a deeper level, respect for others—in the sense of listening to, and reflecting upon, what they have to say—follows simply from the fact that they are fellow human beings. All human beings have the same ontological vocation, an essential dimension of which is the formation of dialogical relationships with others. All human beings, then, have a ‘calling’ to engage in dialogue: dialogue is a fundamental part of being human. From Freire’s point of view, there are no ‘stupid’ questions or final answers, though some questions and answers may be more naive than others. The educator’s role is not to squash the inquisitiveness of students, nor to impede the ‘inner movement of the act of discovery’. Instead, even when a question seems to be poorly articulated or ‘wrongly formulated’, the teacher should not ridicule the student but assist him or her to ‘rephrase the question so that he or she can thereby learn to ask better questions’ (Freire & Faundez, 1989, p. 37).

This does not mean that all contributions—whether in the form of questions, comments, or responses—should be accepted uncritically. All views—whether embedded in texts, advanced by the teacher, or developed by students—ought to be open to question in a liberating educative situation. The teacher plays an important role in structuring the critical process here. He or she must strive to foster ‘respectful’ rather than ‘destructive’ criticism. For Freire, a critical attitude is necessarily respectful: to engage critically the ideas of another implies the existence of something worthy of engagement. Destructive criticism reflects, or is compatible with, an authoritarian attitude where the object is to crush the creative process. In a liberating educational environment, criticism is coupled with listening and reflection; in an authoritarian situation, teachers and students merely *react* to the views of others. The liberating teacher has a responsibility to ensure dialogue does not lapse into either an arena for abusive attacks or an artificially tolerant atmosphere where all views are accepted unconditionally. Freire believes that in examining any object of study some ideas are better than others, but he is always open to the possibility that his conception of what is or ought to be the case might be wrong.

#### *Liberating Education: a Serious Endeavour*

Liberating education demands—of both teachers and students—the highest standards of academic rigour. Freire is concerned to counter the myth that authoritarian education is somehow more rigorous than liberating education (Freire & Faundez, 1989, p. 33). From his point of view, the tables should be turned here: intellectual rigour, as Freire conceives of it, is absolutely fundamental—indeed, indispensable—to problem-posing education, while banking education systematically impedes rigour. Teachers, Freire repeatedly states, must be thoroughly conversant with the literature pertinent to their domain of study, and must seek to ‘relearn’ their subject continuously. ‘Reading’ for Freire implies the fullest possible engagement with texts, not simply a skimming of content matter (see Roberts, 1993, 1996a). Studying for Freire is an inherently difficult and demanding process. In his view, it is not meant to be easy (compare Freire, 1987, p. 213), nor could it be—at least not on the conception of ‘knowledge’ implicit in problem-posing education. This does not mean that the act of study should be unenjoyable; quite to the contrary in fact. Reading and studying are potentially joyous processes: this joy, as Freire depicts it, arises precisely from the attempt to apprehend the object of study critically. Study requires discipline, though this does not imply a *disciplinarian* stance on the part of the teacher: it is the self and collective discipline of teachers and students investigating the object of study through purposeful, directive,

structured, *critical* dialogue to which Freire refers. Study, in short, is work: it demands great effort and a mustering of intellectual energies such that learners transcend mere awareness and penetrate beneath the surface of the subject or object under investigation. In this sense, studying represents an extraordinary or exceptional state: a mode of being beyond (or at least in contradistinction to) that which typifies everyday conscious activity.

Liberating education is thus a profoundly serious endeavour: this is in keeping with the seriousness of the situation the oppressed find themselves in. This does not mean that the liberating classroom should be sombre or devoid of humour. In *A Pedagogy for Liberation*, Freire draws a distinction between 'humour' and 'just laughing':

A humorist is not just a smile-maker, someone who makes people laugh. No! Even sometimes, good humor leads you *not* to smile or laugh. But, on the contrary, good humor does not make you laugh as much as it makes you seriously think about the material. Humor is Chaplin. He unveiled all the issues he tried to describe, to live with in the cinema. In the shows, he revealed what was behind the situations (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 162).

Problem-posing education is not a theatre for superficiality, nor does it represent a mode of entertainment (Freire, 1987, p. 214). Nonetheless, where opportunities exist to incorporate humour into dialogue as a means for enhancing serious engagement with the subject at hand rather than trivialising it, educationists should make the most of these. As Shor notes: 'Humor is not a mechanical skill you add to dialogical methods like icing on a cake. It has to be part of our character and the learning process' (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 162).

Freire is careful to point out that his criticism of authoritarian education is not directed at individual teachers; rather, his concern is with the *system* of banking education, the attitudes which underpin it, and the wider social relations in which it is enmeshed. In his discussion of banking education and problem-posing education in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire raises the possibility of teachers adopting a banking approach unknowingly: there are, he says, 'innumerable well-intentioned bank-clerk teachers who do not realize that they are serving only to dehumanize' (1972a, p. 48). Indeed, one of his most important messages is that we need to break away from individualistic thinking and begin to consider reality in holistic, structural terms (see Roberts, 1996b). He advocates *collective* action against oppressive social formations (of which banking education is one example). Freire speaks of the oppressive effects of 'divide and rule' policies, and highlights the dangers associated with splintered, disconnected struggles (see Freire, 1972a, 1994). If teachers act as Freire believes they should, they are, he would argue, worthy of our deepest respect. The teacher in Freirean education is invested with awesome responsibilities, and must be supremely committed to dialogue, the act of knowing, and social transformation.

#### AN APPROACH, NOT A METHOD

I want to suggest in this section that Freire's pedagogy cannot be reduced to a set of methods, techniques or skills (cf. Aronowitz, 1993; Macedo, 1994; Roberts, 1996c; Brady, 1994). Liberating education, I shall argue, represents a particular *approach* to processes of teaching and learning (and a specific orientation to the social world). Understanding the pivotal dimensions of this approach demands a holistic reading of Freire, and an anti-technocratic stance on complex educational issues and problems. In

adopting this view, I take as my starting point Donaldo Macedo's appraisal of the US education scene in a recent publication (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Macedo observes:

Part of the reason why many teachers who claim to be Freire-inspired end up promoting a laissez-faire, feel-good pedagogy is because many are only exposed to, or interpret, your leading ideas at the level of cliché. By this I mean that many professors who claim to be Freire-inspired present to their students a watered-down translation of your philosophical positions in the form of a lock-step methodology. Seldom do these professors require their students to read your work as a primary source and, in cases where they do read, let's say, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, they often have very little knowledge of other books that you have published (p. 380).

Noting the puzzlement among students who are frequently told about Freire but never required to engage his work, Macedo cites the case of a teacher who began a workshop by proclaiming, 'My project is Freirean inspired. I'll be talking about Freire even though I haven't read his books yet' (p. 381). While this represents, on one level, a bizarre confession, and a worrying state of affairs from an educational point of view, it is less than surprising when understood as one manifestation of a form of reductionism that appears to be rampant not only in the US but also many other parts of the Western world in contemporary times. The collapsing of sophisticated philosophical positions—not just Freire's, but other thinkers' as well—into clichéd, and often demonstrably misguided, methodological 'packages' has been joined in recent years by wider shifts in educational policy-making toward technocratic systems of setting, 'managing' and assessing student work. I (briefly) address one example of this broader trend later in the paper; here, I shall concentrate on elucidating some of the differences between a 'method' of education and an 'approach' to education.

Freire does not deny the necessity of learning how to perform certain tasks, or of developing the requisite skills, in given fields of study. Doctors obviously need to learn surgical techniques; pilots must learn how to operate complicated instrument panels; logicians cannot analyse arguments without knowing the fundamentals of syllogistic and other forms of reasoning. Freire would also be quite happy to admit that in *teaching* students in these and other subject areas, educators must employ particular methods and draw upon certain skills. If the approach to teaching and learning about a subject is to be liberating, though, it is not the methods, skills and techniques which define it as such; rather, these things flow from a specific ethical and political stance. The essence of banking education is not monological teaching methods but a distinct orientation toward human beings and the world: people under the banking system are regarded as adaptable, manageable objects to be manipulated into the existing (oppressive) social order. Monological and authoritarian methods reflect, reinforce and help perpetuate this view of the world. Problem-posing education begins from different assumptions: humans, for the liberating educator, are praxical beings—subjects who, as Freire would put it, 'make' history and culture—to transform the world through reflective action. Methods such as encouraging students to ask questions in class, setting problems to be pursued rather than simply giving answers, allowing time for discussion and promoting reflection on personal experiences are what might reasonably be expected from a teacher committed to the Freirean view of humanisation through praxis: these techniques do not themselves demonstrate the character of liberating education.

If it is an approach or an orientation towards human beings and the world with which

we are dealing, then specific 'how to' questions can only be addressed in context. That is to say, the best methods in one situation may not be the best methods in another. Teachers must take into account not only the social and political context within which learning occurs but also the experiences and existing forms of knowledge among participants. To reduce liberating education to a methodology, or a set of classroom techniques, is to *decontextualise* it. Methods ostensibly transcend culture and history. Surgical procedures are the same irrespective of the hospital or country they are performed in; certain methods of mathematical proof remain consistent over time; various quantitative systems of research can be duplicated in any number of different studies; syllogistic logic is the same for contemporary analytic philosophers as it was for Aristotle; and so on. In some spheres of human activity, it is assumed that methods not only can but *must* be duplicated in the same way regardless of the context: any deviation from the precise techniques or practices associated with a particular method will reduce its effectiveness. Certain methods of sports coaching, giving birth, and teaching skills to youngsters fall into this category.

If Freire's work is conceived purely or primarily in methodological terms, one implication is that his approach to literacy education in the Third World should be readily 'transportable' to the First World as a 'prepackaged' set of clearly defined techniques. An avowedly Freirean educator might concede that specific details of 'the method' would have to be changed (e.g. aspects of the syllabic recombination process, in light of the differences between Portuguese and English), but believe that apart from features clearly ruled out in particular contexts Freire's techniques should be adopted 'to the letter'.

Freire would be vigorously opposed to this line of thinking. Every educational situation presents a distinct challenge to be addressed. The first question an educator ought to ask is not 'What methods should I use?' but 'What human ideals do I (or we) wish to promote?'. From this starting point, more specific questions follow: 'What are the limits and possibilities in seeking these ideals within this situation (at this time, in this place, subject to these political constraints, given these social relations, within this structural framework, etc.)?' and 'What overall goals and strategies are appropriate in light of the ideal and the situation?'. Only after these concerns have been addressed (i.e. theorised—critically and dialogically) can the question 'What methods would be best?' be authentically answered. Of course, this is not meant to imply some sort of lock-step, rigid, sequential procedure: the whole process of deciding what ought to be done in any educational setting should, Freire would say, be thoroughly dialectical. But Freire is adamant that the first priority for an educator is to confront questions about human beings and the world, after which methodological problems can be addressed.

This suggests an important distinction for those commenting on or attempting to apply Freirean ideas. In his literacy education work in Brazil, Chile and other Third World countries Freire adopted certain procedures: he encouraged discussion and active participation rather than silent compliance and the mechanical repetition of words from the teacher; he used pictures depicting aspects of everyday life as a focus for dialogue and critical engagement; he produced discovery cards with words broken down into syllabic families; and so on (see Freire, 1972c, pp. 29–47; 1976, pp. 41–81; Brown, 1974; Roberts, 1994). It seems perfectly consistent with Freire's philosophy to talk of these as 'methods'—used in specific programmes, at particular times, within several different social contexts, and developed in accordance with a substantive ethical and political stance.

It is quite another matter, however, to speak of Freire's whole approach to pedagogy



as 'a method'. This is blatantly distortive. Freire has pedagogical *principles* but these, at most, suggest parameters within which methodological decisions can be made. Principles are not equivalent to or synonymous with methods; nor does a *set* of principles amount, in total, to a method. If this distinction is legitimate, the dangers of referring to 'the Freirean method', 'Freirean methodology', or even 'Freirean *methods*' (if such a phrase is employed in a decontextualised way) should be readily apparent. This sort of language directs attention away from the very dimensions Freire regards as most significant in any pedagogy: a conception of human beings and the nature of reality, an epistemological theory, an ethical position, and a political stance—from which broad (but not fixed) underlying principles are derived.

#### A NOTE OF CAUTION

In opposing the domestication of Freirean pedagogy, a note of caution must be added. Care must be taken if excessive generalisations about educational movements in the Western world are to be avoided, and acknowledgment must be made of the considerable gains made by those who have successfully adapted Freirean (and other) ideas to suit different educative situations. Let me return to the example of child-centred education in elaborating this point. My comments earlier in the paper were not meant to suggest that Freire's work has been misappropriated by *all* supporters of 'child-centred' education (or by all devotees of 'interactive' science education). Assessing the extent to which Freirean ideas have been distorted in practice demands a form of empirical investigation which is beyond the scope of this discussion. To judge by Freire's comments in recent books and articles, however, such distortions are not uncommon (compare, Freire, 1994; Freire & Macedo, 1995). Freire's observations and first-hand experiences have been reinforced by leading commentators on his work (e.g. Aronowitz, 1993; Macedo, 1994). Irrespective of what an empirical study might show, my major aim in this paper has simply been to elucidate some important features of the Freirean view of liberating education. I hoped to show, more specifically, that Freire's later writings, while sometimes neglected by theorists and practitioners, offer an especially rich picture of what liberating education might entail. If these later works are ignored, or given insufficient attention, the risk of misrepresenting Freire increases. My point, then, is that *if* certain ideas, systems, policies or practices are to be accurately described as examples of Freirean liberating education, they ought to conform to certain criteria.

It could be argued, of course, that advocates of child-centred methods of teaching and learning *should*, if they are to adhere to Freire's own advice, re-fashion Freirean ideas, appropriating those elements which prove helpful for their own context(s) [2]. It might be suggested that child-centred learning, under the influence of Freire and other progressive thinkers, has provided a highly effective vehicle for moving away from an oppressive banking system toward a more liberating approach to education for young people; one which was expedient and appropriate for the situations in which it was developed. Something of the utopian vision in Freire's writings may have been lost in this process of adapting his ideas to suit different circumstances, but significant pedagogical improvements have nevertheless been made, and debate about substantive educational issues has been enhanced. Child-centred learning arguably addresses the oppression of children by attempting to move away from an education system that destructively labels some children as 'failures' (and others as 'successes') from an early age to one where children are valued for their particular skills and abilities. Moreover,



while the focus in child-centred education may be on the individual, in encouraging children to maximise their potential as learners, there are clear gains for society as a whole. Child-centred education, in short, values children for their own worth as human beings—a stance fully commensurate with Freire's ethical position—and stresses horizontal, rather than hierarchical, relationships between participants in the educative process. Accordingly, child-centred systems often emphasise project-based learning, where the teacher does, in an important way, act as a 'facilitator' of the child's learning. Such an approach is certainly 'political', as all systems of education are, and, while perhaps less 'radical' than Freire's work with Brazilian and Chilean adults, is clearly worthwhile. (For an in-depth discussion of arguments for and against child-centred education, see Darling, 1994.)

This line of argument turns on two related issues: one relates to the process of applying Freirean ideas; the other deals with what has been achieved by educators other than Freire. With regard to the first issue, in applying any theorist's ideas a complex process of interpretation and negotiation is always involved. When we come across a thinker for the first time, we must, as Freire himself constantly reminds us, always relate the new ideas we encounter to something within the realm of our existing knowledge or previous experience. This, for Freire, is an epistemological necessity in the learning process. We cannot make sense of anything outside some sort of cognitive framework, which presupposes the existence of certain attitudes, beliefs, values, practices and so on, formed within particular contexts and discursive arenas. If we see some merit in that thinker's theory, a certain form of adaptation is necessarily required from the moment we first confront the author's text(s). The ideas we encounter are always 'filtered' through the process of reading (or listening, or first-hand observation) and interpretation. In this sense, then, our application of a theorist's ideas is always partial and incomplete: there is no 'pure', complete reading of Freire's work. This does not mean, however, that some readings, interpretive positions and modes of understanding may not be better than others. Elsewhere (Roberts, 1996c), I have argued that if we are to be true to the ideals Freire himself espouses, a holistic, contextualised, anti-reductionist and critical approach to his work is clearly superior to a fragmented, decontextualised, technocratic or passive reading. The objective, in Freirean terms, is to come closer to the '*raison d'être*' or 'essence' which explains the object of study, while nonetheless being aware that one can never know the object of one's investigation absolutely or completely (cf. Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 82).

At stake here is the question of what we hope to achieve or do, and how we 'name' what we have achieved or done, in reading Freire. As educationists, we consult the work of numerous theorists in forming and applying our ideas in various professional and personal domains (in classrooms, homes, factories, prisons, etc.). Obviously, few people have time to read all the published writings of every major theorist encountered in the course of their studies. Reading is typically a selective process, demanding considerable sifting and sorting through voluminous collections of theoretical material. It is impossible, moreover, to assess definitively the precise extent to which, and ways in which, one has been influenced by particular thinkers. But to say that Freire has been 'an influence' over child-centred education is not equivalent to declaring that the child-centred education movement, or even specific child-centred classrooms, are Freirean in their approach to learning. The latter involves a form of *naming* of one's ethical, epistemological and educational position which, if it is to be authentic (in the Freirean sense), ought to involve rigorous scholarly engagement with a wide range of Freirean texts. Freire may have been an influence in the development of many

worthwhile educational programmes, but it does not follow from this that all of these initiatives are examples of Freirean liberating education. The distinctive strengths of many such programmes might be more accurately attributed to the influence of other thinkers, or to an original synthesis of many theories. Child-centred educators have arguably been successful, at least in part, because they have managed to integrate a diverse range of educational ideas into a coherent, but not rigid, philosophy of the learning and teaching process.

#### OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS: FREIRE AND THE NEW ZEALAND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

While an extensive consideration of policy issues is not possible in this paper, I want to comment briefly on the contrasts between Freirean liberating education and the recent move to a national qualifications framework for assessing educational standards in New Zealand. The development of 'unit standards' as a measure of educational achievement by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) is compatible with the shift from 'knowledge and understanding' to 'skills and information' in a number of Western countries. The New Zealand Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, 1993), for example, discusses 'essential skills' in some detail while making only fleeting references to the forms of *knowledge* students ought to pursue in schools. The most significant modes of learning appear to be subsumed under the 'skills' banner. Thus, among the eight groupings of essential skills are 'self-management and competitive skills' and 'social and co-operative skills'. The eight essential categories are deemed to encompass other important groups of skills such as 'creative skills, valuing skills, and practical life skills' (p. 17). This shift in emphasis follows calls by politicians and corporate élites (e.g. the Business Roundtable in New Zealand) for educational institutions to show a more direct economic return for the investment of taxpayer funds. Education, it has frequently been asserted—in Britain, Australia and New Zealand, among other countries—should better serve the needs of industry, employers and the economy. Talk of 'transferable skills' has emerged [3] complementing political rhetoric on 'enterprise culture' and the need for 'smart societies' at the end of the 20th century (cf. Gee & Lankshear, 1995). Some excellent critical work on these developments and related changes in educational policy has already been conducted (compare, for instance, Barnett, 1994; Bridges, 1993; Marginson, 1993; Fitzsimons & Peters, 1994). There is space here for only a few comments on the tensions between NZQA and Freirean approaches to the assessment of educational standards, particularly within universities.

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) was established in 1990. Under the Education Amendment Act of that year, the authority was charged with 'developing a framework for national qualifications in secondary schools and post-school education and training' (NZQA, 1991, p. 6). The Act stipulated that all qualifications should have 'a purpose and a relationship to each other that students and the public can understand' (p. 7); there should also be 'a flexible system for the gaining of qualifications, with recognition of competency already achieved' (p. 7). These objectives, the NZQA proposed, could best be met through the conversion of existing and future qualifications into 'units of learning' (later to become known as 'unit standards'), each with clearly specified 'outcomes'. These units of learning were regarded by the NZQA as the 'building blocks' of the framework (NZQA, 1991, p. 36). Educational institutions were to become 'providers', while students in the new system would be designated

'consumers' or 'users'. The Authority aimed to set up a national catalogue of units, the advantages of which were described as follows:

A catalogue of units will benefit students, industry and providers. Students will have increased choice. Industry and providers will be able to avoid duplication of effort in course development. Providers will be able to achieve economies of provision (NZQA, 1991, p. 50).

The NZQA drew a distinction between 'norm-referenced achievement' and 'standards-based achievement', the former assessing performance through comparison with other students, the latter measuring student outcomes against (pre-specified) standards of achievement or competence. The Authority opted for standards-based achievement, and undertook a comprehensive process of reforming the entire nexus of certificates, diplomas, degrees and other qualifications in the New Zealand education system. A series of publications set out the path to be followed (examples include: NZQA, 1992a, 1992b, 1993a, 1993b, 1993c; Education and Training Support Agency, 1993). All qualifications, if they were to be officially recognised, would fall under the NZQA framework. Units of learning would be transferable, such that qualifications gained at one time and place could be 'stacked' (as building blocks) in moving to higher levels on the framework at later stages. Eight levels, each indexed against pre-defined outcomes statements, were proposed.

The framework has attracted extensive comment and criticism from the educational community in New Zealand (see, for example, Peddie & Tuck, 1995; Benton & Benton, 1995; Codd, 1994, 1995; Fitzsimons, 1995). It should be readily apparent that the logic of the NZQA reform process must, given the earlier discussion in this paper, be seen as at odds with Freire's ideal. There is a certain similarity between the expressed commitment to maintaining standards of education by the NZQA and Freire's heavy emphasis on academic rigour, but the substantive principles upon which the two positions turn differ markedly. At the most fundamental level, there is a deep division between the two approaches over the nature of education. For the NZQA, education is a commodity to be sold by provider institutions (and other organisations) and purchased by consumers. For Freire, education is a holistic, humanising process through which people learn to reflect and act upon the world in a critical and dialogical manner. The two accounts begin from quite distinct ethical and political positions. The NZQA approach is premised on a business model of the social world, in which private utility-maximising individuals compete for goods and services against others in an ostensibly open marketplace. Freire, on the other hand, builds his pedagogy on a radical democratic ideal, in which people collectively struggle for a more equitable distribution of wealth, while dialogically seeking to understand themselves and their world more deeply.

The language used by the NZQA (and other New Zealand bodies, such as the Treasury and the Business Roundtable) is, from a Freirean point of view, not only inappropriate for discussing educational phenomena but also ethically indefensible. For Freire, students do not 'consume' education or educational courses; they *participate* (with their teachers and their peers) in the learning process. Universities and other institutions are not 'providers' of education, but sites where education might reasonably be expected to take place. For Freire, the teacher-student relationship is a pedagogical one; under the market model of education promoted by the NZQA, where institutions such as universities are expected to operate on the principle of 'user pays', teachers and students exist in a contractual relationship to one another (see Codd, 1995, p. 8). This

commodification of education is not merely linguistically bizarre (imagine, for example, a university teacher speaking of students 'consuming' a philosophy course); it is also utterly dehumanising for both teachers and students. The complexities of the act of knowing are reduced, under the NZQA system, to a series of finite competencies (unit standards), to be stacked one on top of the other as a series of building blocks and traded in an educational marketplace. Knowledge, if it can be said to remain in any meaningful way at all under the NZQA framework, comes closed between fixed covers: it is necessarily limited to that which can be specified in advance in outcomes statements. The notion of education involving the open-ended pursuit—in Freire's case, a dialogical and critical pursuit—of knowledge, the results of which cannot be known until the journey is undertaken, disappears here.

The NZQA framework certainly gives structure to the process through which students gain educational qualifications, but it frames the learning process in a way Freire would find totally objectionable. The framework wraps learning within overly restrictive boundaries: all qualifications—if they are to 'count' within the New Zealand education system—must fall within the logic of unit standards. This has placed the universities, in particular, in an extremely difficult position. Concerns have been raised by the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (1994, p. 6) about the behaviourist and reductionist assumptions underpinning NZQA documents. The vice-chancellors point to the disintegrative impact of a unit standards methodology upon the coherence of degrees, and reinforce the importance of qualities such as intellectual independence and critical thought—neither of which can be adequately understood as measurable skills (p. 14). These sentiments are extended by Codd:

The assessment of competencies is generally carried out in relation to *minimum* standards of attainment. Standards of competence set 'floors' rather than 'ceilings'. University courses aspire to standards of criticism and judgement leading to excellence rather than competency. A set of competencies can never equate with the manifold range of personal attributes which define the scholar, the scientist, the artist or the educated professional (1994, p. 5).

The NZQA system can be seen as a methodology for (supposedly) assessing standards in any contextual settings. Given that quality is assessed on the basis of *pre-determined* statements about learning, the framework can theoretically be applied in any geographical location at any institution in any historical period. Freirean liberating education, on the other hand, is, as I stressed earlier in the paper, always context-dependent (cf. Codd, 1994, p. 9). The quality of learning in an educative setting can, for Freire, only be assessed when the particulars of that setting have been taken into account. The logic of predefined unit standards, however, allows for a clean separation between the assessment of standards and the development (and teaching) of curricula. Codd (1995, p. 3) argues that this separation of means from ends reflects the instrumental reasoning behind outcomes models of teaching and learning. He continues:

Essentially, this is a technocratic model of the educative process founded upon a positivist epistemology that asserts a rigid dichotomy between facts and values, implying that measurement and observation can avoid the problems of value justification (p. 4).

Measurable people are, potentially at least, manageable people (cf. Roberts, 1995, p. 416). The NZQA framework, in placing *all* qualifications on a single scale, is without

doubt one of the most elaborate measuring mechanisms in New Zealand educational history. The NZQA, while ostensibly democratic in its consultation with the various groups affected by the qualifications reforms, occupies a unique and powerful position in the formation and evaluation of New Zealand education policy. The Authority sets the parameters within which questions about quality are expected to be addressed, effectively silencing those who approach matters relating to educational standards from opposing points of view (cf. Fitzsimons, 1995, p. 177). This policy process is not, however, free of contradictions. The NZQA framework purports to give overall coherence to assessments about the nature and worth of disparate qualifications. Yet this goal stands in tension with the very ideology of 'choice' underpinning the development of the new framework. On the one hand, the NZQA exists as a kind of 'watchdog' over standards—as 'judge and jury' over all qualifications—yet, on the other hand, students are encouraged, as in any market system, to 'shop around' if they are not satisfied with one institutional provider, setting their own standards of education in the process. Student choices about which institution to attend are thus considered at once both significant and meaningless in determining educational quality. 'Providers' are expected to compete with one another to gain student enrolments, potentially undermining the goal of upholding standards (where the *number* of students becomes everything): 'quality' here becomes synonymous with 'whatever students prefer'—for whatever reasons. The NZQA simultaneously supports this equating of quality with 'student choice' and some notion of externally determined standards (their own framework) which will, at times, discredit students' judgements about educational quality.

In Freirean education, teachers are invested with the responsibility of ensuring the highest standards of intellectual rigour. Their role in upholding standards of learning and investigation—which is part of the directiveness of education—only becomes authentic through genuine dialogue with students, in which their ideas are constantly tested and, where necessary, modified. On the NZQA view of education, the connection between standards and commitment to educational excellence through the process of teaching is severed. Students, as consumers of education, choose the institution that best suits their needs, and, if they are not happy, look elsewhere. Teachers become invisible and powerless in the process. They are held responsible for their failure to hold on to students, and yet are also divested of any effective responsibility for determining the standards against which student choices quality might be assessed.

If there is any notion of liberation implicit in the NZQA model, it is one tied to an intolerably narrow view of the social world, and of human value and potential. There is, as Codd (1995, p. 14) notes, 'very little recognition given to the fundamental question that should guide the whole educational enterprise: what kind of human beings do we want our students to become?'. Freire would express reservations about not only the NZQA framework, but the general direction of educational policy in many countries of the First World in recent years. The extension of economic rationalism into almost all spheres of human life has become so pervasive that other philosophical and political positions seem to disappear. The Freirean approach to liberating education, while highly influential among educational theorists and practitioners, appears to be utterly invisible for those who wield the greatest power over educational decision-making processes. The battle to give recognition to conceptions of education other than those which fall within a narrow 'market' model of society will be a difficult one indeed. Struggling against demonstrably oppressive policies and practices is, however, a vital element of the Freirean ethical ideal.



## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Freire's focus in Chapter 2 of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is on two pedagogical approaches: 'banking education' and 'problem-posing education'. The distinction between two clearly opposing forms of education has an immediate appeal: it permits definite lines to be drawn between that which is liberating and that which is oppressive, and allows educators to declare their own intentions and allegiances with unwavering conviction. A teacher is *either* humanising or dehumanising in his or her pedagogical stance. Binary oppositions of this kind have been problematised in recent times by postmodernists, and Freire's proclivity to using them as a major theoretical device leaves him especially vulnerable to criticism (see Giroux, 1993). While Freire's written works are replete with dichotomous theoretical constructs ('active' versus 'passive'; 'integrated' versus 'adapted'; 'liberation' versus 'oppression'; 'humanisation' versus 'dehumanisation', etc.), his later writings suggest there is no single antithesis to 'liberating education'. For Freire, liberating education stands opposed to *two* pedagogical approaches, one authoritarian, the other *laissez-faire*. At one end of the scale, the teacher is granted total authority and exercises this in a disciplinarian and oppressive manner; at the other pole, the teacher relinquishes (or is stripped of) *any* authority, and students do as they please. Both are in tension with the ideal of humanisation. Authoritarian education is blatantly anti-dialogical, while *laissez-faire* approaches diminish the purposeful character of education and human struggle.

There can be little doubt that Freire's account of banking education and problem-posing education in the second chapter of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* represents one of the best, and certainly one of the most influential, concise statements of liberating education from the past three decades. While Freire has not subsequently contradicted or renounced any of the major principles discussed in this chapter, he has extended and clarified many points from this classic early piece in later publications. In particular, he has, partly in response to repeated misreadings of his works, stressed the importance of structure, direction and rigour in his educational ideal. To be a liberating educator implies a certain clarity and conviction in one's ethical and political position, coupled with a willingness to participate in the multifaceted process of struggle against oppression. Freire makes it plain that students in the liberating classroom should expect neither 'spoon feeding' by the teacher nor a completely 'free rein' to do as they wish: dialogical education requires participation, commitment and effort from all participants. Liberating teachers, Freire argues, ought to work *with* students in a joint struggle to transform unjust systems and social structures. This challenge must be continuously confronted afresh as the world—in its myriad social, cultural and political dimensions—ever evolves. The current dominance of market models of education in a number of countries in the Western world represents an especially difficult obstacle for Freireans, among other progressive educators, to address. Highlighting the inadequacies of the New Zealand Qualifications framework—as one example of the commodification of education—is a small, but necessary, step in resisting oppressive educational policies and practices.

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## NOTES

- [1] Discussion of Freire's educational theory in this paper will be largely confined to issues of pedagogy. Freire tends to use the terms 'education' and 'pedagogy' synonymously, though in almost all cases his references to the latter have or imply some connection with the theory and practice of teaching and learning. Even if 'teaching' and 'learning' are employed in the widest sense here (i.e. not restricted to schooling or institutional settings), there is arguably more to 'education' than this. It will be assumed throughout that it is *adults* with whom we are dealing when references are made to 'students'. The terms 'educator' and 'teacher' will be used interchangeably.
- [2] I am indebted to an anonymous referee for raising some of the points discussed in this paragraph.
- [3] For one example of a popular, 'self-help' text on this currently fashionable notion, see Dekker (1994).

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