

Terms of engagement: Reframing Freirean-based assessment in institutional education

Sandro R. Barros

Department of Modern Languages, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN, 46135, USA
E-mail: sandrobarros@depauw.edu

Submitted 28 February 2011; accepted in final form 27 April 2011

Abstract

Since its publication in 1970, Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has generated significant discussions on the nature and purpose of schooling. Freire's theorization of the "banking system" of education, a symbolic relationship in which teachers and students reproduce and perpetuate homogenizing values sustaining antidemocratic initiatives, constitutes one of the major contributions to the field of Educational Studies. In spite of the many critical reformulations and adaptations of Freire's work beyond its original adult literacy context, those who remain favorable to Freire's vision of education still struggle to place in motion a pedagogical praxis that is akin to those models envisioned by the Brazilian educator. The understanding of assessment within dominant institutional frameworks favors a positivist and Cartesian logic that quantifies knowledge by devaluing individual variances in learning experiences. This paper analyzes the tensions that arise in the development and application of Freirean-based approaches to assessment within a test-driven educational culture that selectively values information. Accordingly, this paper will also discuss the compatibility of dialogical/constructivist frameworks of assessment within current models of institutionalized education.

Keywords: *assessment, critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire, neoliberalism*

Introduction

Neoliberal economic practices exert a considerable amount of influence on how education curriculum is administered. The question of how knowledge is measured in relation to student expectation, which ultimately translates into a type of "customer satisfaction" relationship of accountability between students and educators, constitutes a zone of contention with ethical ramifications that extend beyond applied methodologies of evaluation. One of the most debated questions facing institutional education today corresponds to the ambiguity of practices emphasizing standardized forms of assessment that are unable to formatively account for the levels of variance in student education outside attributive and deterministic rubrics.

Proponents of traditional forms of assessment assume that students can be tested fairly in uniform ways, thus disregarding issues of socioeconomic dominance and cultural subordination that are intrinsically tied to any process of learning. Methods of student evaluation that disregard the historical situation of knowledge contribute to what many scholars have argued as the perpetuation of schooling as a mechanism of social engineering, which ultimately sustains the validity of dominant ideologies. For instance, Apple (1995) argues that elites have been greatly invested in modernizing education to respond to market transformations, thus shaping curricular

policies to which students have had no choice but to accommodate. Taubman (2009) analyzes the testing frenzy and its industry present in the United State's educational context as a symptom of a long-established culture of auditing that has driven, in spite of several attempts at intervention, decisions on curriculum and instruction contrary to the interests of students and educators. Au (2009) builds a strong argument against the standardized testing industry by linking performance in high stakes testing to drop out rates in areas inhabited by low income students and students of color.

When confronting the corporate culture of normative accountability encroached in today's private and public educational domains, pedagogues departing from the Freirean tradition are left with significant questions regarding the imposition of high stakes testing and similar instruments of assessment. There is, indeed, an apparent silence regarding the subject of assessment and evaluation within the Freirean corpus, especially in early works. Nevertheless, Freire's tacit treatment of the subject is comprehensible. For if ethical dialogism is what Freirean pedagogy ultimately envisions, the process of dialogical inquiry already presupposes a form of assessment wherein any reductionist measures to temporally frame what is in constant development risks paralyzing the process of problematization and historical location of knowledge.

The situation of Freirean-based principles within today's established culture of accountability, a culture created in response to what many have perceived as a failure in the system of public education, generates important questions that those who depart from the Freirean tradition ought to address. For example, how can Freirean pedagogy critically engage with the restricted meanings assigned to assessment and accountability in today's educational settings? What specific contributions in matters of student assessment can Freirean pedagogy make in the face of the exigencies imposed by standardized models of assessment? Furthermore, within a continuous dialogical interaction between students and teachers, as advocated by Freire, to what extent are democratic and deliberative forms of assessment compatible with the system of accountability currently in place? In other words, how can a Freirean-based philosophy of assessment come into being within a system that increasingly renders meaningless the conceptualization of knowledge outside a numerical language? In what follows I will discuss these issues underscoring the tensions between assessment, as it is currently undertaken at the institutional level, and Freire's dialogical model of education.

Situating the Freirean tradition within contemporary educational praxis

As Freire insists throughout his corpus, the moral and ethical responsibilities of teachers correspond not only to the performance of the Gramscian role of the organic intellectual but also the awareness that truly liberating pedagogies provoke in students the desire to reflect and act upon their own position in the world. As a result of this learning proposition, students are armed with knowledge and critical capabilities that transform them into politically conscious individuals and organic intellectuals in their own right. Nevertheless, there is a caveat in Freire's theoretical framework that must be addressed by those individuals who, as Freire, interpret the pedagogical enterprise as inevitably political in nature.

Because Freirean education emphasizes the praxis of dismantling ideologies, including those in connection to the meaning of democracy and its contradictions, detractors often charge critical pedagogues departing from the Freirean tradition with radicalizing students in unethical ways, thus supporting biased "leftist" propaganda masked as knowledge. Stern (2010), for instance, argues that professors who reveal their counter-hegemonic convictions through their teaching

commit a "serious breach of professional ethics," for in their use of the classroom space Freirean educators "indoctrinate vulnerable students" (Stern, 2010, par. 6). Others like Youngman (1986) understand Freire's pedagogical model as erasing the authority of the teacher whose task is to support, due to his/her knowledge, the development of learners, therefore sacrificing practices that yield method and rigor within formal learning contexts. When situating Freirean pedagogy within feminism, Keesing-Styles (2003) warns her readers against the potential of the dialogical model advanced by Freire to mask practices that perpetuate sexism, racism, and homophobia. Educators, according to Keesing-Styles, may still direct the content of classroom dialogue in biased ways, in part because they still retain the authority invested in them by the institutional tradition.

Although it is important to recognize that well-intentioned educators may, in the name of Critical Pedagogy, put forth personal agendas that overcome students' own educational imperatives, therefore stressing personal initiatives versus the needs of the collective, one cannot help but question assertions that are based on a narrow reading of Freirean literature. As Roberts (1996; p. 336) notes, one must be careful to avoid excessive generalizations departing from Freire's corpus without considering the development of his framework over time and the context in which his praxis takes place. Freire's philosophy of education evolved from adult literacy work performed in impoverished areas of Latin America during the 1960s and 70s. To disregard the particularities of this socio-temporal mark, and its influence in the overall development of Freire's approach to education, is to restrict the openness and potential for continuity in his theoretical work.

The partial and decontextualized reception of Freire's works within academic circles often leads critics to charge the Brazilian pedagogue's work with yielding practices disconnected from traditional understandings of method and rigor in education. However, as Freire indicates in several occasions¹, teachers do have the responsibility to be rigorous and develop methodologies that depart from the seminal question of why students are brought together for communally engaging in the process of education. Certainly, if students were left with the entire authority over course matters, such as curriculum and assessment, professors would be shying away from the directive responsibilities that are inherent to the exercise of the teaching profession. Nevertheless, as Freire (1992, p. 66) remarks, the directivity involved in the pedagogical process

should not to be confounded with authoritarianism, for

The moment that an educator's "directivity" interferes with the creative, formulative, investigative capacity of the educand, then the necessary directivity is transformed into manipulation, into authoritarianism. Manipulation and authoritarianism are practiced by many educators who, as they style themselves progressives, are actually taken for such.

The role of Freirean educators is thus not one of merely "facilitating" education, as commonly thought by progressive educators, but rather one of seeking vicissitudes within the complexification of learning dispositions so that education may be viewed as a problem to be constantly solved. Educators who "pass" as facilitators risk distorting the reality of the relationship between the authority of the teacher and the experience of students. As Freire and Macedo (1995, p.378) observe,

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.

Hence, Freirean education is concerned with the interrogation of the nature of oppressive authority and the vulnerability of students and teachers to authority. In other words, Freirean pedagogy is fundamentally about the disclosure of the position of the educator as a representative of tradition, regardless of political orientation, albeit perennially conscious of it. Without question, critical pedagogies that depart from this tenet vary insofar as contexts present themselves differently. Yet, the conscious endeavor of the Critical Pedagogy tradition initiated by Freire is precisely to uncover the dynamic between facts and opinions and allow for contradictions to be played out in the public sphere of the classroom.

It is possible that political positions could ultimately curtail democratic engagement within classroom environments through recognized practices such as grade distribution, testing, behavioral reprimands, selection of material to be studied, etc. Notwithstanding this possibility, the issue that remains at the core of educational practices is always one pertaining to the realms of

ethics, of honestly verifying the intentionality of a particular pedagogical project, its scientific implementation, and posterior examination of ascribed meaningfulness of results. For it is the living of a pedagogy of ethics that Freire advances throughout his body of work. In other words, Freire stresses the responsibility of individuals to act upon knowledge by transforming it in praxes benefitting not only individuals themselves but also the communities to which they pertain. The role of assessment within this process is, therefore, of paramount importance. For the reading of the word departing from the reading of the world requires a constant critical reevaluation of one's self that must include difference and epistemologies of conflict to cognitively understand the construction of reality as a meaningful communal experience.

Assessment and Freirean tradition

The need to simplify and commodify information to meet certain institutional and market necessities, such as the often dubious promise that the school will teach and one will learn to be successful in today's global economy, has forced us to mechanize and simplify the process of assessment to the point that the numerical language owns us and not the other way around. The fatalist character of numerical data can inconspicuously reiterate the notion that not all individuals can learn, and that some are simply not prone to academic work due to their "intellectual limitations." Reliance on this Darwinian creed implements scholastic fatalism as a self-fulfilling prophecy, which ultimately tracks students according to test results and negatively emphasizes scholastic competition as "survival of the fittest" rather than competition as a means to self-improvement.

Instead of partaking in an educational journey that is individually meaningful, students' choices regarding their own education are systematically restricted because their experiences rely on the "quality" of assessment of their work based on a discriminate rubric of performance in complete disconnect with the phenomenological aspect of learning, or learning as an end in itself. This implicit ideological tenet, often hidden within the discourse of assessment, and which derives from its implementation, is a particularly dangerous one because it emphasizes, through a double-voicing effect, the superiority of certain individuals over others. As Au (2009) argues, the effects of a hidden curriculum that ideologically transfers values of dominance as subordination is intrinsically tied to socioeconomic, gendered, and

racial biases. Less “valued” students, feeling disenfranchised from the process of schooling, may come to realize that their difficulties in learning are analogous to the feeling of being in a “closed world from which there is no exit [rather than] a limiting situation which they can transform” (Freire, 2000, p. 49). Furthermore, the numeric data represented by grade distribution in high-stakes testing are often regarded as the sum of all parts in matters of assessment and not one indicator that suggests ways in which performance relates to learning. Regrettably, decisions made by administrators who are often disconnected from the daily practices of classrooms overtly rely on the partiality of numerical language, a decision that overlooks the vital importance of qualitative data to situate numbers within parameters for contextualization. This constitutes, indeed, a problem for the very process of democratic and civic engagement that institutional education seeks to sustain through common schools, a problem already identified as early as the beginning of the twentieth century by progressive educators such as John Dewey (1903).

It is significant to underscore that no matter what system of assessment is implemented within the educational context, if the approach to the significance of competence does not shift to a dialogical, engaged, and especially interventionist process, as shall be argued later in this essay, “good” or “bad” qualifiers will remain a deterrence to the educational process, since the emphasis will be constantly placed on performance rather than learning. Under the current paradigm, “good” and “bad” performances signify one’s ability to work within systems of predictability and control that do not mimic, necessarily, those challenges faced by students outside academic settings. The challenge for educators remains one of finding ways to assess student work that counter what Alfie Kohn (1999) has termed “the existential vertigo” concerning the relationship of students with the authority imposed by assessment as grading. In other words, educators must transcend the predictability and control of assessment as an institutionalized practice as a way to provoke in students the desire to not only understand standards but also challenge their contextual applications in unexpected ways.

In recent decades an increasing number of educators has been concerned with the theorization and application of methods of assessment that attempt to reach beyond normative questions regarding standards and efficiency (e.g.: Roberts, 1996; Keesing-Styles, 2003; Duncan-Andrade and Morell, 2008). Formative assessments, for

instance, have been the preferred method by many a critical pedagogue who interpret their application as being more in line with Freirean principles of open dialogue and problem-posing education. However, as Yorke (2003) asserts, even assessments that place a greater emphasis on feedback and are more open to dialogical interaction can still inhibit student learning as much as they can promote it. Indeed, formative assessments, in principle, are more adequate in clarifying instructors’ expectations on assignments and making more transparent educational directives such as the achievement of course goals represented by alphanumerical markers. On the other hand, formative assessments are also guided by complex decisions regarding the understanding of standards at both the individual and collective levels.

Notwithstanding the positive attributes that characterize formative assessments in matters of transparency, the real issues regarding their application, as Yorke (2003, p.489) argues, arise from a failure to take into account disciplinary epistemologies, intellectual and moral theories, and levels of variance in students’ cognitive development. Yorke maintains that both summative and formative assessment ultimately promote the loss of autonomy within learning experiences. Students are increasingly encouraged to depend on authority to give meaning to educational tasks through grading practices. The ability to transcend proposed tasks and use their phenomena as a point of departure to think about creative solutions to problems beyond those met in the classroom thus remains underdeveloped precisely because the function of assessment concerns itself with “subject discipline rather than student development” (Yorke, 2003, p. 491).

Recognizing the recent transformations in the field of Second Language Studies, which call for more autonomy and student-centered initiatives, Geeslin (2003) proposes a model of self-assessment as a means to empower students in the monitoring and evaluation of their output. Geeslin insists upon the implementation of self-assessment techniques as a tool to develop a framework wherein students are able to critically review their work based on concrete expectations outlined by the instructor. Departing from Blanche’s (1988) and Oscarson’s (1989) research, which find that there is a “general correspondence between students’ ratings of themselves and teacher evaluation of those students” (Geeslin, 2003, p. 858), Geeslin frames self-assessment within a scenario in which instructors retain the control of the learning experience and assign

meaning to it. Consequently, even though students appear to detain the control in matters of reflecting upon scholastic achievement, they operate within frameworks that do not problematize the very perceptions of acceptability and respectability of their works.

In principle the model suggested by Geeslin appears in line with the goals of implementing student-centered activities within learning dispositions. Geeslin's framework does recognize the need to release authority to promote students' own definition of language learning while maintaining the necessary specificity of goals in relation to students' second language needs. Yet, the problem remains one related to the application of standards to the institutionalized learning context. The instructor is still the one who sets particular goals and underscores the dominant rules for engaging with what is to be learned without problematizing the nature of knowledge itself, which ultimately incurs into the type of "banking model" education against which Freire (1970; 2000) warns. Under this paradigm, seldom are students given the opportunity to identify learning materials and outcomes and, what is more important in matters of assessment, rarely are they provided with opportunities to consciously develop a critical framework in which they confront the validity of their acquired evaluative system against other systems. Even in self-assessment models teachers risk promoting in students values that are incorporated as one's frame of reference to interpret learning experiences, hence risking the living out of those as if they were one's own. As Lian (2000) observes the shift in educational practices, of which assessments are a part, ought to be directed towards unspecificity, emphasizing the development of what Freire has called the "perpetual state of curiosity" in learning dispositions. In this scenario, educators give up the control of the meaning of a particular educational experience to stress the need for creativity, which naturally requires critical thinking as a means to concretize the various opportunities created for learning. As Lian (2000, p. 16) notes,

rather than to think of education as a means toward some proper ends, we may want to think about education as a place where educational goals (or ends) function as challenges against which learners negotiate their paths in ways that enable them to build further. We may want to think of education as a place which does not require learners to think in terms of approved categories but as a place which enables learners to surprise us in the kinds of outcomes that they accomplish

and the kinds of reference contexts on which they build their learning.

It is necessary to stress here that the stimulation of students' capacity to perform informed critical interventions, not only in the subject matter of study but also in the ways in which the dialogue of assessment takes place, constitutes a necessary measure to counter the "banking model" of education. Current models of assessment have not been completely successful in breaking down restrictions in the ways knowledge is constructed precisely because their applications are counterintuitive to the process of education as a continuum. As Aronowitz (1998, p. 15) argues, from a sociopolitical standpoint, assessments have become a code word for the implementation and sustenance of a reproductive mechanism of proliferating alienation and social injustice that students and their families acquiesce under the banner of technocratic scientificism. According to Aronowitz, knowledge, under global capitalism, requires a narrow definition to epistemologically justify the system's own functioning and uniform needs over "abstract" concepts such as social justice, democracy, morality, and ethics. Aronowitz's explication on the matter is lengthy but noteworthy,

As good jobs disappear and are replaced by temporary, contingent and part-time work, competition among prospective workers intensifies. The school responds by making testing the object of teaching, in the bargain, robs teachers of their intellectual autonomy, not to say intellectual function. As education is suppressed and replaced by training, students learn that critical consciousness is dangerous to the end of techno-scientific formation because it may jeopardize their chance for a job, let alone a career. Critical educators may be admired but dismissed as propagandists; fearing marginalization some teachers may try to reconcile their views with those of neoliberalism by arguing that Freire's "method" might produce more creative employees for entrepreneurial corporations or lift some poor and working class students from inexorable subordination to individual social mobility.

Conventional methods of assessment juxtapose and define students' knowledge in a situation of "here and now" against a "there and then" from which there can be no apparent transcendence. For both "here and now" and "there and then" are constrained by an epistemological barrier that predicates authority without freedom in matters of education. To put it differently, the

“here and now” against the “there and then” fails to critically disclose the historicity behind numerical results, the relevant racial, economic, and gendered circumstances that yield particular effects concerning how knowledge is measured, under which conditions it is measured, and for what real purpose it is measured (Au, 2009; Taubman, 2009). Traditional methodologies of assessment, even those that clearly operate under the banner of feedback, are limited and still fail to demonstrate the individual capacity of students to function in the real world outside the classroom.

Yet, all judgment of intellectual work has been conformed to a history deriving from an “invisible” force, one which originates in the establishment of standards that are taken for granted and that do not necessarily represent those experiences shared by individuals involved in the same educational task. This is not to say that contributions outside particular frames of time and space - what one would consider canonical knowledge - should not be taken into account. Such a statement constitutes an absurd fallacy contradictory to the very constructive nature of knowledge as a dialogical continuum. Nonetheless, finding a form of deliberative assessment that places in check the standards to which assessments themselves are subjected may ultimately signify a mode of counter-intervention in social relationships of schooling that have been argued as reproductive mechanisms of social inequity (Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 2007).

Moving beyond assessment

Thus, as one attempts to “defend” Freirean philosophy within standard educational settings, it becomes apparent that traditional assessment stands in opposition to the very objective of liberation from dominant ideas about which Freire constantly reminds his readers. The type of Critical Pedagogy that emerges from Freire’s body of works envisages, above all, the emphasis on creativity over paralyzed content, conscientização over inaction. In Freirean education, the politicized and activist role of students and teachers in the process of constructing knowledge requires that individuals recognize their responsibility upon the construction of knowledge. For without the political consciousness of one’s situation in the world there cannot be an exit from the automated and dehumanized state of modern society that allows for social inequality to be seen as a fatality and not as a human product. In other words, for Freire and critical pedagogues departing from his tradition, education is not only a matter of recognizing and testing information in students, or

even its skillful employment in controlled, expected, and repetitive circumstances. Rather, education is apprehended as a means to transform the world and, primarily, assume responsibility for history. To deny this counter-ideological measure in learning dispositions is to succumb to a type of defeatist creed that translates into individuals becoming “objects of history and culture, [wherein] their capacity to ... be self-defining subjects creating history and culture” is negated (Glass, 2001, p. 56). This principle is not to be confounded with or indicted as a type of propagandist ideology imbued within Critical Pedagogy’s propositions aiming for the critical awareness of systematic dysfunctions within the process of schooling. The self-reflective awareness sought within Critical Pedagogy frameworks seeks to expose, precisely, what detractors of Freirean education have denounced as a deviation from perfectly neutral and apolitical education.

Evaluative systems must, then, address ethical questions of the significance of assessment and the nature of their prescription. For, according to Sadler (2007, p. 338), we often use the term “assessment” without a proper definition; “the terms we use in discourse on assessment and grading are used loosely [...] we do not always clarify the several meanings a given term may take even in a given context, neither do we necessarily distinguish various terms from one another when they occur in different contexts”. The act of framing assessment as standardized evaluation, therefore, cannot escape its necessary historical situation, debate, and continuous reading in order to uncover those contradictions present in the justification for implementing evaluative methodologies concerning students’ work. After all, the testing of a problem may present varied solutions that are contingent upon ever-changing factors. No examination formulae can account for the passing of time and, what is more important, the unpredictability of life outside formal learning environments for which standardized assessments allegedly attempt to prepare students.

When the very notion of assessment as judgment is problematized within a Freirean dialogical model, its meaning is transformed and re-appropriated as possibility. Assessment loses its significance insofar as it corresponds to an anti-dialogical action, dispensable if authority and freedom are to be maintained harmoniously within educational relationships. As Freire (1998, p. 83) argues, “only in those practices where authority and freedom are found and preserved in their autonomy (that is, in a relationship of mutual respect) can we speak of a disciplined practice as

well as a practice favorable to the vocation ‘to be more’. Thus, instead of corresponding to a deterministic factual testimony to one’s limitations, the various forms of institutional assessment become powerful limiting situations that serve as a points of departure to disclose the location of that which is taken for granted as knowledge. In this process, assessment is revealed as a mechanism that binds subjectivity to a one-dimensional reality allowing therefore the necessary clarity for students and teachers to intervene and attribute meaning to standardized ways of demonstrating “competency.”

What I have argued thus far is not to be viewed as a stance against assessment or standards, even traditional methodologies per se. Assessment and standards are, indeed, demanded by communities. Certainly, the exploration of the extent to which standards are set by a particular community and under what or whose authorities they materialize ought to be an intrinsic part of any educational process that value reflection as praxis. Nonetheless, what concerns me here, precisely, is the approach to and the possibility of dialogue and hope within asymmetries of power that are characteristic in relationships between students and teachers, and that are developed through practices such as graded assessments. If assessments are to become a test on how fast one can perform particular tasks under the vigil of the hourglass of industrial-capitalist predications, they do nothing but measure the “necrophillic” knowledge of which Freire speaks in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In other words, the “transcendence of commonsense knowledge,” as Freire (2006, p. 127) maintains, “must be achieved only by way of that very knowledge”, that is, on the epistemological grounds of mutual understandings of frameworks that govern individuals’ world views.

The question as to how one assesses learning, above all, must be searched, researched, and re-researched as a means to “enhance the possibility for self and social empowerment” promoting “critical modes of inquiry and creativity” that stand in opposition to those types of assessment that “shut down self-respect and motivation by instilling a sense of failure or humiliation” (Giroux, 2003, p. 89). We would go further and insist upon the notion that assessment constitutes the problematization of its very nature, the very turning of its reason, function, and end-result into another point of departure leading to the “permanent curiosity” that Freire (1998, p. 89) considers essential to the educational process outside reproductive models.

If graded assessments are to correspond to assignments of value upon human psyche, the countering of such a dehumanizing measure must subvert the process of grading not by eliminating its presence altogether but rather by reframing it as an ontological problem. This *modus operandi* would transcend the value placed on assessments as a form of capital reward represented by the “earning” of grades, which could provoke a beneficial crisis in standardized ways of engaging with the intellectual work of students. Duncan-Andrade and Morell (2008, p. 168) make an excellent point when insisting that the intrinsic value of assessments lies within the possibility of constant revision. Any form of assessment that is articulated as a “final prognoses” counteracts the development of critical inquiry as the chief objective of the educational process.

Conclusion

As Freire insists throughout his body of works, the phenomenon of life cannot happen apart from one’s situated-ness within socio-historical contingencies. To abstract assessment, then, as an apolitical and fair measure to be applied equally to all individuals constitutes a problem rich in contradictions whose explorations present students and teachers alike with multiple possibilities for engagement. Historicizing the process of assessment, therefore, can serve as a point of departure to reveal the concrete within its institutional practices, to expose to students its very function as a limitation on one’s psyche that needs, to be meaningful, the transcendence of its idealization as the measurement of one’s intellect as a finished project. It no longer becomes, as McLaren (2007) has suggested, a matter of “redistributing value” conferred to assessments and the knowledge they purport, but rather recognizing the very transcendence of assessments’ purpose through the critical inquiry of their results.

There is, indeed, an ominous danger looming around any type of educational practice, such as assessment, that derives from the directive characteristic of teaching: the risk of leading students to conclude and see the world as we do rather than finding ways to allow for competing truths to emerge within learning experiences. This does not mean that the pedagogical exercise corresponds to praxes without direction. As Freire (1992, p. 66) has observed, educational practice “whether it be authoritarian or democratic, is always directive”. However, as the Brazilian pedagogue remarked in numerous occasions, life is impossible without risks, and the preparation for such risks is of ultimate importance in the quest of

living a pedagogical practice that liberates itself constantly from a single epistemological center dictating what is to be understood as good or bad intellectual performance. In this sense, assessment within a Freirean paradigm always constitutes a threat to any given “system.” For the only commitment of Freirean philosophy is to ethics, becoming, constantly striving for perfection in-between the ruptures and contradictions of expressions of ideological constraint that disavow the uniqueness of individual experiences contributing to more democratic forms of living.

In an era when educational institutions are motivated by the demands of fast and often misleading results, in which grading policies and numbers play an important role and students are perceived as economic markers, it is imperative and ethical to verify to what extent our current educational system is presenting itself less as a universal depository of moral and ethical values and more as a euphemism for neoliberal capitalism and its “pretense democracy” (Roy, 2004, p. 56). We may come to realize that the process of assessing the other cannot be dissociated from the process of assessing ourselves as educators, which consequentially underscores the need of finding ways to relinquish authority and destroy old forms of ideology to liberate ourselves from the position of slaves to our own ideas when assessing students as well as ourselves. Problematized within Freirean educational directives, methods for assessing educational outcomes will no longer become a zone of contention but rather a common ground stipulating the terms for engaging with long-established practices. In this sense, assessment can be re-conceptualized as a space of resistance against the imposition of counterproductive measures that qualify and quantify knowledge indiscriminately.

Notes

¹See, for instance, Freire (1987), p.127.

References

- Apple, M. (1995). Remembering capital: On the connection between french fries and education. In W. F. Pinar (Ed.), *Contemporary Curriculum Discourses* (pp. 312-324), New York: Peter Lang.
- Aronowitz, S. (1998). Introduction. In P. Freire (Ed.), *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage* (pp. 1-19), New York: Roman & Littlefield.
- Au, W. (2009). *Unequal by design: High-stakes testing and the standardization of inequality*. New York: Routledge.
- Blanche, P. (1988). Self assessment of foreign language skills: Implications for teachers and researchers. *RELC Journal* 19 (1), 75-96.
- Dewey, J. (1903). Democracy in education. *The Elementary School Teacher*, 4.4, pp. 193-204.
- Duncan-Andrade, J., & Morrell, E. (2008). *The art of critical pedagogy: The promises of moving from theory to practice in urban schools*, New York: Peter Lang.
- Foucault, M. (1980). Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings. Ed. C. Gordon. New York: Vintage.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. [New York]: Herder and Herder
- Freire, P. (1992). *Pedagogy of hope*, New York: Continuum. P. 66.
- Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage*, New York: Roman & Littlefield.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum. P. 49.
- Freire, P. (2006). *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare to teach*, 2nd ed., Boulder: Westview Press. P. 127.
- Freire, P., & Macedo, D.P. (1995). A Dialogue: Culture, language, and race. *Harvard Educational Review*, 65 (3), 377-402.
- Gatto, J.T. (2002). Dumbing us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling. Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers.
- Geeslin, K.L. (2003). Student self- assessment in the foreign language classroom: The place of authentic assessment instruments in the Spanish language classroom. *Hispania*, 86 (4), 857-868.
- Giroux, H.A. (1983). *Ideology, culture, and the process of schooling*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Giroux, H.A. (1988). Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning. Westport: Bergin and Garvey.
- Giroux, H.A. (2003). *The abandoned generation: Democracy beyond the culture of fear*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Glass, R.D. (2001). On Paulo Freire’s philosophy of praxis and the foundations of liberation education. *Educational Researcher*, 30 (2), 15-25.
- Keesing-Styles, L. (2003). The relationship between critical pedagogy and assessment in teacher education. In *Radical Pedagogy* 5 (1). Retrieved 2 November, 2010, from http://radicalpedagogy.icaap.org/content/issue5_1/03_keesing-styles.html

- Kohn, A. (1999, March). From degrading to degrading. In *High school magazine*. Retrieved March 10, 2011, from <http://www.alfiekohn.org/teaching/fdtd-g.htm>
- Lian, A.B. (2000). *Rationality in education: From a canon-based model toward a process model*. Lectures in Critical Pedagogy, Canberra: University of Canberra.
- McLaren, P. (2007). *Life in schools: An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education*, New York: Pearson.
- Oscarson, M. (1989). Self assessment of language proficiency: Rationale and applications. *Language Testing* 6, 1-13.
- Roy, A. (2004). *An ordinary person guide's to empire*, Cambridge: South End Press, 2004.
- Roberts, P. (1996). Direction and rigor in liberating education. *Oxford Review of Education* 22 (3), 295-316.
- Sadler, D.R. (2007). Perils in the meticulous specification of goals and assessment criteria. *Assessment in Education*, 14 (3), 387-392.
- Stern, S. 2010. "The propaganda in our ed schools. In *Minding the campus*. Retrieved December 15, 2010, from http://www.mindingthecampus.com/originals/2010/10/the_propaganda_in_our_ed_schoo.html#more.
- Taubman, P.M. (2009). *Teaching by numbers: Deconstructing the discourse of standards and accountability in education*, New York: Routledge.
- Yorke, M. (2003). Formative assessment in higher education: Moves towards theory and the enhancement of pedagogic practice. *Higher Education*, 45 (4), 477-501.
- Youngman, F. (1986). *Adult education and socialist pedagogy*. Beckenham: Croom Helm.