

EDUCATING FOR THE FUTURE: A FREIREAN RESPONSE TO
ACCOUNTABILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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The system of higher education in the United States suffers from deficits in several generally agreed-upon categories, including affordability, access, effectiveness of teaching and learning, and usefulness of degrees awarded. Many recommended reforms, particularly those from mainstream sources, are problematic, however. Paulo Freire's philosophy of liberatory education is a valuable source for addressing this issue. His discussion of the banking system of education provides a useful lens through which to analyze some of the problems with the current system as well as many recommended reforms, particularly calls for greater accountability for student learning. The problem-posing method of education that Freire advocates as a solution to the banking system, in turn, offers a valuable model to draw upon in the attempt to propose an effective solution to problems in higher education in the US. I apply Freire's philosophy to the 2006 report by the Commission on the Future of Higher Education.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Calls for accountability have dominated many recent discussions of potential reforms to the system of higher education in the United States. These calls for accountability in higher education are not a new or unique phenomenon, but they are enjoying somewhat of a resurgence recently and, according to Shavelson and Huang, “are not going away anytime soon.”¹ Steven Brint suggests that the current push for accountability arose from public unease. He explains that “Americans are very concerned about escalating tuition costs and want to be assured that they are spending their money on something of value.”² They want proof, in the form of measurable outcomes, that college students are learning something and that what they are learning is of value to them. This proof is hard to come by, however. For example, when attempting to compare the quality of learning at the level of higher education across all 50 states, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (NCPPE) had to give the grade of “Incomplete” across the board in both 2000 and 2002 “because comparable data were not available to make meaningful state-to-state comparisons.”³ By 2006, 41 states still received an “Incomplete”⁴ because the NCPPE still lacked data on student learning. In hopes of filling this void and appeasing public concern, many states began looking into implementing accountability measures in higher education.

As more states began discussing higher education accountability, the issue became more and more prominent, both within the university system and outside of it. The issue was so prominent by 2003 that Shavelson and Huang refer to it as “the frenzy to assess learning in higher education.”⁵ In early 2004, the State Higher Education

Executive Officers—a nonprofit association of chief executive officers from governing and coordinating boards of higher education—sponsored a year-long investigation on accountability in higher education, with the hopes of coordinating states’ individual concerns and initiatives. It was called the National Commission on Accountability in Higher Education (NCAHE). In 2006, Margaret Spellings—the Secretary of Education under President George W. Bush and the architect of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)—convened the Commission on the Future of Higher Education (CFHE). It investigated issues beyond just accountability—including access, affordability, and quality—but found higher accountability standards to be a “vital” element to its proposed reforms.⁶ Although the NCAHE had already brought the issue of accountability to national attention, the added weight of a government-sponsored panel at the federal level “pushed accountability closer to the top of [the higher education policy agenda of many states] and made it a national issue.”⁷ Furthermore, in the years since the 2006 report, “[it] has not faded away” and “learning outcomes are [now] on the agenda of virtually every public educational system and nearly every institution of higher education in the country.”⁸

Given the potential impact of initiatives and reforms sponsored by the federal government, the response to the CFHE is understandable, and because of its close connection to federal policymakers, we should take its discussions seriously. While some discussions of issues in higher education may hold powerful theoretical or philosophical significance, they rarely, if ever, come coupled with the same implications for educational policy as discussions by government agencies. It would be very difficult for a single academic or a group of academics to impose his, her, or their recommendations

on an entire university, let alone the entire education system as a whole. Government agencies have this power, however. While they may have less direct control over policy in higher education than they do in primary and secondary education, government agencies still hold significant influence over higher education. In her article on the CFHE appearing in the *New York Times*, Karen Arenson paraphrases the president of the Commission, Charles Miller, who points out that “although public universities seem most vulnerable to regulatory oversight because they are subsidized by state taxpayers... private colleges are subject to regulation, too. They are accredited by groups authorized by the federal government. And they must meet certain standards to qualify for federal grants and financial aid.”⁹ As Miller’s language makes clear, while government agencies may not have direct control over policy within individual institutions, they do have the ability to withhold funds and even accreditation from both public and private institutions that do not comply with particular guidelines set by the agency in question. Because they have broad-spectrum influence over higher education through control of funding and accreditation, government agencies clearly have the authority to set educational policy that colleges and universities would have to follow in order to maintain their status as recognized institutions of higher learning. It is also clear from Miller’s statements that, as president of the CFHE, its members have “regulatory oversight” in mind when they make their recommendations. Perhaps it is in part to head off “regulatory oversight” from outside that accountability has become such a prominent issue for “virtually every public educational system and... institution of higher education in the country.”

In addition to seriously considering the CFHE because of its potential for broad-spectrum influence over higher education policy in the United States due to its

government backing, we should pay attention to its recommendations because they represent a characteristically mainstream response to problems with the educational system in the US. While the CFHE occurred under President George W. Bush, and so may seem to represent a characteristically conservative response to problems in higher education, President Barack Obama has largely adopted a similar educational policy to that of his predecessor. Although Obama has not yet addressed higher education as extensively as the CFHE, other than to suggest expanding Pell Grants and other programs to foster access, his educational policy for primary and secondary education closely follows that of the Bush era No Child Left Behind Act. Although Obama advocates some fundamental changes to NCLB, “Obama said the law’s goal was ‘the right one.’”¹⁰ In fact, although some reforms to NCLB suggested by Obama allow for greater flexibility in how states allocate federal dollars and shift the focus from punishing underperforming schools to rewarding successful ones, Obama’s reforms maintain many of the policies of the original Act.¹¹ Given the similarities in the educational policies of the Bush Administration and the Obama Administration, it seems likely that Obama’s support for many of the principles and basic approach of NCLB would extend to higher education, just as the CFHE essentially represents an extension of the policies and approach of NCLB into higher education. The similarities and the apparent continuity between Bush’s policies and those of Obama back up Brint’s claim that “the Spellings Commission’s report has not faded away.”¹² The influence the CFHE has had, and continues to have, in the administrative offices of colleges and universities, combined with its persistence in the discussions of federal education policy officials, suggests that we take its analysis, findings, and recommendations seriously, even if they do not

represent the most compelling recommendations from a theoretical or philosophical perspective. It is in the interest of carrying out this endeavor that I undertake this project. In order better to understand the findings and recommendations of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education, however, let us take a step back and look at the broader context of discussions about problems in higher education.

While disagreement abounds between different parties about the specifics of problems in higher education, few disagree that problems exist, and in fact, most agree on the general areas that are problematic. The list of most commonly noticed complaints includes: the exorbitant and often prohibitive costs of attending a four-year university; limited access to higher education for significant sections of the population, particularly traditionally underprivileged groups, even when individuals from these groups are as equally prepared as individuals from privileged groups; concerns for the effectiveness of teaching and learning going on in colleges and universities; and even ambiguity regarding the usefulness of a degree. These common complaints come from a variety of individuals and groups, many of whom starkly disagree on the specifics of their complaints in each of these areas as well as in their broader philosophical and/or political commitments. For example, organizations like the NCPPHE, NCAHE, and CFHE are concerned with the effectiveness of teaching and learning in colleges and universities because they believe students are not graduating with adequate knowledge and practical skills in specific fields.¹³ Conversely, others find this limited, outcomes-based approach to be precisely part of the problem.¹⁴ Just as these common complaints arise from a variety of perspectives, they also arise in different contexts: among academics interested in education, within college and university governing boards, in federal and state sponsored

commissions, and in the popular press. In order to get a general picture of the state of higher education in the United States and the concerns about it, let us look more closely at each of these areas of common complaint and elaborate on some of the problems found in each area.

Perhaps the most heavily contested area of common complaint is the concerns regarding the effectiveness of teaching and the kind and quality of learning occurring in colleges and universities. This area is so heavily contested because the problems one perceives depend significantly on one's point of view and implicit or explicit philosophical and/or political commitments. While there is a broad continuum of philosophical and/or political commitments that inform one's perspective on education, for the purpose of this project, I have divided these perspectives into two camps: the mainstream perspective, and the critical and/or radical perspective. While such a dichotomy is problematic at best, and disingenuous at worst, it fits the context of my project because I compare representative sources from each of these two perspectives. Additionally, this dichotomy follows a similar distinction made by Max Horkheimer between traditional theory and critical theory. For Horkheimer, the perspectives of philosophers and social scientists can be divided into traditional theory and critical theory. Traditional theorists tend to see the general structures of society as unproblematic and frame their discussions in a way that fit into, make use of, and reinforce the dominant paradigm. Critical theorists, on the other hand, question structures of society and challenge the dominant paradigm by looking for inconsistencies and contradictions. Particularly, critical theorists tend to question the role dominant structures of society and the paradigms that enforce them play in creating social inequalities.¹⁵

In the current social and political context, those falling into what Horkheimer would call traditional theory, and what I term the ‘mainstream’ perspective, tend to frame their discussions of education and other policies within the paradigm of the free-market. According to this paradigm, competition makes for greatness, and this competition takes place in the context of consumption. As such, entities—whether companies, institutions, or individuals—are envisioned in terms of production and consumption, producers and consumers. The realities of the free-market supposedly force these entities to compete for their existence. In order to draw consumers to their product, each entity will want to offer the best, most desirable product as inexpensively as possible. As such, competition between entities will drive down prices because consumers will buy the most inexpensive version of an entity’s product available, so long as its quality is deemed equivalent to the other options. This, then, will supposedly force these entities to become as streamlined and as efficient as possible, so as to create the best product with the least expense.¹⁶ Adhesion to this model represents what I have termed the ‘mainstream’ perspective because faith in the market pervades both “neo-liberal and neo-conservative discourses and practices.”¹⁷ Both major governing parties exhibit a clear commitment to the values of the marketplace in almost all of their social, economic, and political policies. As such, much of our social, economic, and political landscape follows the market model; it is the dominant paradigm for all of these structures, and reference and deference to market values and principles pervade much of the dominant discourse about social, economic, and political issues.

Furthermore, when it comes specifically to educational policies, the dominant educational policy since the mid-80s has accepted and been refashioned according to

market values. Radical educators Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux begin their 1993 work *Education Still under Siege* by discussing some of the educational reforms of the Reagan and George H.W. Bush Administrations. The result of these reforms was that “the meaning and purpose of schooling at all levels of education were refashioned around the principles of the marketplace and the logic of rampant individualism.”¹⁸ By and large, these reforms have held up in the years since then and, more recently, have been reinforced. The George W. Bush Administration’s No Child Left Behind Act, for example, creates measures for using the rescinding of state funds as a punitive measure for schools whose scores on standardized tests are deemed unsatisfactory, thus envisioning students’ ‘education’ as a product purchased from schools by federal and state governments (read: taxpayers). Faith in market values in educational policy is not merely a conservative policy. The Obama Administration’s general endorsement of these measures¹⁹ suggest the bipartisan nature of the mainstream market model. As further evidence of this, National Education Association President Dennis Van Roekel criticizes Obama’s reforms to NCLB because the plan does not markedly depart from NCLB and still “requires states to compete for critical resources, setting up another winners-and-losers scenario.”²⁰ In other words, the schools must compete for funding and so attempt to ‘produce’ the best ‘education’ for students using the limited resources they already possess, thus forcing them to become streamlined and efficient. Because of the widespread, bipartisan acceptance and reinforcement of the market model in education and other social policies, I call voices supporting and apologizing for this dominant paradigm ‘mainstream’ sources.

The commitments that informs a source's perspective, whether from the mainstream side or the critical side, tempers how that source conceives of concerns about the effectiveness of teaching and the kind and quality of learning occurring in higher education in the United States. Mainstream thinkers primarily find the faults in higher education due to the fact that teaching and learning do not adequately fit the goals of the market model, in which education is envisioned as a commodity to be bought and sold. The problem with teaching and learning in higher education, from this perspective, is that it does not adequately prepare graduates to work and contribute to the economic strength and global competitiveness of the US, its goals are not sufficiently laid out, and whatever 'learning' it does impart is not measurable—or at least not easily measurable—so it is difficult to judge its value as a commodity. On the other end of the spectrum, critical and radical thinkers—who, as opposed to mainstream sources that apologize for and reinforce the dominant market model, question the validity of the market model as a functioning paradigm upon which to base social, economic, and political policies—find this limited, market-based approach to be precisely the problem. Learning is suffering in the current climate of higher education, in this view, because it is stifled by an almost exclusive focus on predetermined, measurable outcomes—too often measured through standardized tests. As Michael Apple points out, this “has threatened some of the most creative and critical practices” that higher education has to offer.²¹

Concerns about the quality of education in colleges in the United States has sparked questions about the usefulness of a degree. Although we could probably question the usefulness of a college degree garnered from the current system from a critical perspective, the concerns expressed by radical educators about the kind of

learning privileged by the current mainstream system do not seem to frame the issue in terms of ‘usefulness’ employed by mainstream sources. Rather, such questions arise mostly from mainstream sources themselves who focus their discussions around the marketability and economic importance of a college degree. For example, William Zumeta and Daniel Evans address this issue in their white paper “Does the US Need More College Graduates to Remain a World Class Economic Power?” They evaluate both the affirmative and negative response to this question but, as the parameters of their question suggest, remain strictly within the mainstream perspective. Those who argue that more college graduates would boost the United States economy point to trends suggesting that “the economy has shifted in recent decades so as to require higher-level skills from a larger slice of the workforce” and believe that increasing the number of college graduates would fill this demand, thus providing for a more robust economy.²² Those who argue in the negative acknowledge the same trends but argue that providing state funding for college is a poor use of resources, and so we should focus, instead, on increasing individuals skilled in trades.²³ This argument in the negative seems to make some of the same basic assumptions as the affirmative argument, namely, that higher skills are required and that college is one way to achieve these. Where these arguments differ, however, is that the negative camp focuses on the cost of college versus education in the trades, making college an unsound investment, particularly in light of current failures within the system. In other words, it is not the principle of achieving an education itself but the high cost and low quality of education that influence arguments in the negative. Clearly, then, part of the concerns about the usefulness of a college degree arise from the cost of a college education versus the benefits it can bestow.

As suggested by unease regarding the cost/benefit ratio of a college education, another major concern with the current system of higher education is its expense. It does not take an expert to point out that college tuition has risen drastically over the years, and this is particularly concerning when seen in context. According to figures compiled by the CollegeBoard, published inflation-adjusted prices for a year's tuition at an in-state four-year public university have risen from about \$2000 to over \$7000 (in 2009 dollars) between 1979 and 2009, a 350% increase.²⁴ A similar increase appears in the cost of four-year private institutions. These increases have occurred while median household income for the same 30 years has remained about the same. According to the Census Bureau, the median household income in 1979 was \$16,530.²⁵ This equates to \$48,847 in 2009 dollars.²⁶ Median household income for 2009 was \$49,777.²⁷ Based on these numbers, one year of college tuition in 1979 represented roughly 4% of a family's household income, while in 2009, one year of college tuition made up about 14% of a household's income. In the face of these statistics, almost everyone commenting on higher education in the United States cites tuition cost as a concern.

The biggest concern with rising tuition costs is that they are becoming, or are already, prohibitive for some students. For example, the CFHE writes:

The commission notes with concern the seemingly inexorable increase in college costs, which have outpaced inflation for the past two decades and have made affordability an ever growing worry for students, families, and policymakers. Too many students are either discouraged from attending college by rising costs, or take on worrisome debt burdens in order to do so.²⁸

Because of increases in tuition costs compared to inflation and median income, these costs have become a limiting factor for certain individuals when considering whether or not to attend college, which has not always been the case. Potential students with adequate preparation for college may have to postpone or completely forgo enrollment solely based on economic factors outside of their academic abilities. This is particularly distressing given studies such as those undertaken by the Department of Education that suggest socioeconomic status plays a larger role in college graduation rates than academic abilities. This longitudinal study showed the following results: for students scoring in the lower quartile in math performance in the eighth grade, 3% of low income students graduated from college, compared with 7% of middle income students and 30% of high income students; 8% of low income students, 21% of middle income students, and 51% of high-income students from the middle two quartiles in eighth grade math performance graduated from college; and from the upper quartile in eighth grade math performance, 29% of low income students, 47% of middle income students and 74% of high income students graduated from college.²⁹ Perhaps the most astonishing comparison that this study reveals is not that 10 times as many high-income students as low income students from the lower quartile of math performance in the eighth grade graduate from college, but that high-income students who scored in the lowest quartile complete a college degree more frequently than low income students scoring in the highest quartile. This disparity has not escaped the notice of individuals and organizations looking at problems with higher education and is at the root of their analyses regarding deficits in access to college education. There are at least two ways of understanding the facts about differential access to higher education, however.

From the mainstream perspective, limited access is a problem because it means fewer potential able workers to participate in the national economy. There is even a collection of essays edited by Richard Kahlenberg entitled *America's Untapped Resource: Low Income Students in Higher Education*, which refers to academically capable but financially limited individuals from the lower-classes who are unable to attend college. This seems to conceive of these individuals as merely another 'natural' resource to be tapped in order to strengthen the economic prowess and global competitiveness of the nation. The report from the CFHE, for example, refers to college graduates as "intellectual capital needed to increase workforce productivity and growth."³⁰ While this is a demeaning and disturbing way to conceive of human beings, the consistent recognition of the fact that individuals from traditionally underprivileged groups are systematically excluded from higher education for one reason or another does suggest that even mainstream voices are at least sensitive to this concern, even if they choose to express it in offensive terms.

From a critical perspective, however, limited access to higher education for specific portions of the population is problematic because of its consequences for social equality. Graduation from college provides significant financial opportunities unavailable to non-college graduates. Historical data reveal that higher levels of education correlate with higher income.³¹ While discrepancies appear in the income levels of individuals based on whether or not they completed high school, discrepancies become more pronounced as individuals' education increases, with the largest jump being between an individual with only a high school education and one with a bachelors degree. For example, in 2008, a male with less than a ninth grade education could expect to earn

less than \$20,000 per year, a male high school graduate could expect to earn about \$30,000 per year, a male with a bachelors degree could expect to earn about \$60,000 per year, and a male with an advanced degree could expect to earn around \$80,000 per year.³² As these figures reveal, male college graduates can expect to earn twice the annual income of non-graduates. These figures lead some commentators to claim that “access to higher education [is] a principal—some would say *the* principle—means of achieving social mobility.”³³ Without access to and completion of a quality education beyond high school, the financial prospects for individuals remains low.

These low financial prospects are not only problematic for the specific individuals in question, but also for future generations. If non-college-graduates remain in the lower end of the income spectrum throughout their lifetime—which, without a college education, they most likely will—it is less likely that they will be able to afford a college education for their children, even if those children are equally or better prepared for college as children from middle- and high-income families. This perpetuates socioeconomic division along the current lines; individuals from low-income backgrounds will tend to remain in that class, while individuals from middle- and upper-income backgrounds will tend to remain in those classes or even move up. In this sense, the disparities in access to a college education are disturbing because they perpetuate and reinforce current social stratification. Higher education consistently separates the rich from the poor. Regardless of whether or not this is the intention of the system, it is its effect. Aronowitz and Giroux suggest that the mainstream structure of education “reproduc[es] a two-tier system of schooling designed to privilege upper middle-class whites, on the one hand, while containing the working class, the poor, and other students

of color, on the other.”³⁴ As such, this system “justifi[es] poverty and powerlessness.”³⁵ Based on this analysis, the differential access to higher education for different socioeconomic groups is clearly a problem with the current system.

Given these common (albeit disputed) concerns, it is heartening that the Commission on the Future of Higher Education focuses its investigation on more than just accountability. Although other groups discussing accountability often give passing mention to some of these other issues, they focus their investigations more exclusively on accountability itself.* The CFHE at least seems to recognize that the public concern for accountability arises within the context of other concerns, as mentioned by Brint above; the public is concerned with accountability *because* higher education is so expensive and want to be assured that the degree they are earning will somehow offset the cost. From the outset, Secretary Spellings tasked the CFHE with investigating what she saw as “key areas”: “access, affordability, quality, and accountability.”³⁶ The CFHE found all four of these categories deficient, as we would expect. It is also heartening to see that the CFHE consistently recognizes the role that socioeconomic status plays in each of the areas they investigate. For example, they find that students from different socioeconomic backgrounds have differential access to higher education, partially due to the exorbitant costs but also due to being underserved in primary and secondary education. On top of this, those who choose to attend college in spite of this limitation often need to work at or close to full-time in order to support themselves and their education or go into debt attempting to do so. This can be a difficult distraction that results in lower performance.³⁷ The acknowledgment of these concerns and limitations due to

* The NCAHE, for example.

socioeconomic status anticipates an attempt to recommend reforms that will address them, and in fact, recommended reforms to address these issues feature prominently in the CFHE's report.

This issue of differential participation in higher education due to socioeconomic status and the resulting social stratification is a tricky one, however. On the one hand, mainstream reforms, such as those suggested by the CFHE, seem to reinforce the system in a way that perpetuates the problem. On the other hand, as mentioned above, the fact that mainstream sources consistently notice that underprivileged groups are systematically excluded from higher education suggests a real concern for this. Despite the fact that they seem to envision these individuals as just another resource to be exploited in the interest of global competitiveness and national economic prowess,^{*} if we read mainstream sources generously, their desire to include them in higher education seems to suggest some kind of commitment to improving at least the financial status of these groups. For example, the CFHE wants to include underprivileged groups in higher education, giving them access to the "social mobility" available through a college education, at least in principle. The CFHE as well as the NCAHE explicitly state that they hope the higher education system will be available to "all Americans,"³⁸ and one of the recommended reforms of the CFHE is the creation of scholarship programs directed explicitly at underprivileged individuals in order to help them gain access to higher education.³⁹ It seems that they hope "all Americans" will be able to benefit from the economic advantages available through completion of a degree program; they hope to

^{*} Many of these sources seem to envision all individuals as resources capable of contributing to the economic prosperity of the nation in some degree or another, in terms of producers and consumers, so we would almost expect them to refer to traditionally underprivileged groups in similar terms.

allow an opportunity for traditionally underprivileged individuals to advance their socioeconomic position. Whatever reserves we may have about the approach they advocate, it seems that, at a very simplistic level, if the higher education system were truly accessible to all people in the US (as these groups hope it will become through their recommended reforms) and all took advantage of it, then we might be able to overcome the social stratification caused by the current system, according to mainstream sources.*

This mainstream perspective relies on several problematic assumptions, however. First of all, it seems to demonstrate an absolute faith in the current structure of society and the market-based approach that pervades economic, social, and political structures. In this, it seems hopelessly naïve. As I will address throughout this paper, the current structure of society, including higher education, contributes significantly to the problems the CFHE notices. In this regard, simply attempting to grant access to underprivileged and underrepresented groups will not successfully address their situation. First of all, we must ask where the money for the scholarship programs the CFHE recommend would come from. Zumeta and Evans seem to recognize this limitation when they question whether or not providing such scholarships is a good use of resources. Beyond this, as Colin Lankshear points out, educating people “hardly bestows the power to create jobs where none exist, or to secure a livable income where work is very poorly paid.”⁴⁰ Furthermore, the recommendations made by the CFHE do little to change attitudes and

* Mainstream sources do not seem to make this argument directly, but as I will discuss in Chapter II, it seems to be implicit in their arguments.

systems that have consistently oppressed traditionally underserved individuals.* In addition to these failures, the recommendations of the CFHE will not improve the quality of learning taking place in higher education. In fact, as I will discuss in Chapter II, the accountability measures they recommend, which they believe will promote higher quality learning, will actually impede learning by restricting the educational endeavor to narrowly defined learning outcomes measurable through standardized assessment. These failures suggest that we must look outside the mainstream perspective in order to truly address the issues of differential access to higher education and improve the quality of learning occurring in higher education in the United States.

In the interest of developing a critique of the reforms recommended by the Commission on the Future of Higher Education, I have chosen to look to the educational tradition of critical pedagogy. I find the approach of this tradition helpful in addressing the failures of the CFHE because it does not take for granted the current structure of society and higher education and the market paradigm that informs them. Instead, it puts precisely these things at issue and questions the relationship between society and education in a way that challenges both. Furthermore, in its analysis of the relationship between society and education, it addresses the two major concerns of the CFHE—namely, concerns for differential access to higher education (what we might also call social stratification) and concerns for the type and quality of learning—in a much more in-depth and socially conscious manner. In this sense, the CFHE seems to share some

* Leistyna discusses the effects that individual characteristics like race and sex have on one's salary and employment opportunities ("Neoliberal Non-sense").

underlying concerns with critical pedagogy, though the perspectives each takes on these concerns causes their discussions to manifest in starkly opposing manners.

Within the tradition of critical pedagogy, the work of Brazilian philosopher and educator Paulo Freire stands out. As Peter McLaren, a friend, mentee, and scholar of Freire, points out, “No one has done more to move the struggle forward over the role of education as a vehicle for liberatory praxis [the goal of critical pedagogy] than Paulo Freire,” and “one would be hard-pressed to find a more respected and celebrated [professor] in the field of education than Paulo Freire anywhere in the world.”⁴¹

McLaren also claims, Freire is “generally considered the inaugural philosopher of critical pedagogy,”⁴² an assessment to which Stanley Aronowitz⁴³ and many others agree. Paulo Freire is not only a major theorist of critical pedagogy but was also one of its leading practitioners, not only among oppressed groups but also in his interactions with other academics and educators.* He traveled the world discussing and implementing critical pedagogy in a variety of contexts from Brazil, to Africa, to Europe, to the United States. As such, his work offers an invaluable resource to look to in an attempt to develop a form of critical pedagogy applicable in the context of higher education in the United States. It not only offers useful insight for critiquing the mainstream perspective exemplified by the Commission on the Future of Higher Education, but it also provides a helpful discussion of a form of pedagogy that can address concerns expressed by both mainstream and critical educators. I undertake both of these tasks in this project.

* Bell hooks, among others, has pointed out Freire's open and dialogical comportment within scholarly communities ("Bell Hooks Speaking about Paulo Freire—The Man, His Work," 152).

In Chapter II, I analyze the findings and recommendations of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education through the lens of Freirean critical pedagogy, which gives further insight into the problems mentioned above. Freire’s discussion of the “banking” system of education that he undertakes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* provides useful insight for critiquing the breed of accountability measures recommended by the CFHE and other mainstream sources. These recommendations—which focus on limited, measurable learning outcomes—not only hinder students’ ability to learn but also serve to restrict and oppress their consciousness by molding it to fit the current structure of society rather than opening up a way for them to question and transform it. The focus on limited, measurable learning outcomes would require a form of pedagogy that, in Freire’s words, treats students as “‘containers,’ ... ‘receptacles’ to be ‘filled’ by the teacher.”⁴⁴ As such, while it may create great mimics, it seems unlikely that this form of pedagogy could produce the kind of individuals really able to flourish in the ‘real world.’ Not only will it fail at successfully educating students, but the imitative students it will create will be conditioned not to question their world or seek to transform it. Rather, they will be ‘fit’ to ‘function’ in the current society. As such, the form of education required by the recommendations of the CFHE will not, as addressed above, provide any means for changing the structure of society that causes the differential access to higher education and the perpetuation of social stratification widely acknowledged by most sources looking at higher education.

In Chapter III, I turn to Freire’s discussion of his solution to the banking system of education in an endeavor to develop a philosophical and pedagogical basis upon which to establish a solution to the problems present in higher education. This is needed

because, although the reforms the CFHE recommends will, at best, not alleviate the problems in higher education and, at worst, may actively worsen them, the problems will not go away on their own. Without restructuring higher education, it will continue to be problematic for many of the reasons cited above. Again, as it is mostly the current structure of society and system of higher education that contributes to these problems, we must look outside of these systems for the means to address the problems. Freire's critical pedagogy is also helpful in this regard, as he offers a detailed discussion of a form of education that would break with the mainstream system and allow students to develop the ability to understand themselves and their action in context in a way that would allow them to question and transform their world, while simultaneously learning content. To some extent, then, critical pedagogy is about political action, but, as Allen and Rossatto point out, "critical pedagogy is... about more than direct political action; it is also conceptually driven. In other words, students need to learn important concepts, which can in turn enhance political action."⁴⁵ Therefore, helping students develop the ability to understand themselves and their action in the context of the world would provide them resources for political action to challenge the current system and begin to overcome the problems it causes, while gaining an education in the process.

In Chapter IV, I address the objection that Freire's philosophy of liberatory education is unfit for implementation in higher education in the United States. Because Freire's pedagogy places a heavy stress on context, it is important to keep this in mind in discussing its applicability to higher education in the US. Specifically, as Allen and Rossatto point out, most college students are from the privileged classes in the US and, in the context of the world, these "are some of the most privileged humans to have ever

lived in the history of humankind.”⁴⁶ Given this context, the use of Freirean pedagogy—which he developed for use with severely economically depressed classes—in higher education in the US would seem misguided. For one, it would be a betrayal of Freire’s philosophy to use it to suggest a pedagogy that would only serve to further strengthen oppressors’ ability to oppress others or otherwise ignore Freire’s broader political concerns.⁴⁷ Additionally, Freirean pedagogy relies on the direct experience of oppression available to oppressed individuals, which would seem unavailable to many college students in the US. These represent serious challenges to the project of implementing Freirean pedagogy in higher education in the US, but they are not insurmountable. As I will discuss in Chapter IV, Freirean pedagogy is not only applicable to higher education in the US, it is essential to implement it in this context. Doing so will not only allow US college students to see how their status as oppressors in the world context dehumanizes oppressed individuals locally and abroad and has often devastating consequences for underprivileged groups, but it will also allow them to see ways in which they are severely dehumanized by the very structures of oppression that perpetuate their privilege. I advocate the use of Freirean pedagogy in higher education with the hopes that even privileged students will be able to conceive some concerning trends in the US and the world and will desire to change those structures. In this sense, Freirean pedagogy seems to have the ability to “influence the perspectives, ideologies, and behaviors of enough members of powerful and privileged identity groups so that new institutional and legal practices would be enacted” that would combat oppression.⁴⁸

Finally, in Chapter V, I look back to Chapter III and draw out from Freire’s discussion of problem-posing education six principles that I believe instructors interested

in implementing Freirean pedagogy in their classrooms in higher education in the US can turn to for guidance. I offer these principles not as rigid practices but as general guidelines for instructors to adapt to their own courses. I focus on ways to implement Freire's pedagogy in the current context of higher education by taking seriously the limitations that that context presents. In focusing primarily on ways to implement problem-posing education in the current context, rather than addressing a theoretical ideal that might eventually develop out of the liberatory praxis of individuals participating in problem-posing classrooms, I hope to give educators concrete ideas that may lead to actual practice. In order to facilitate this, I also offer in this chapter a discussion of how Freirean pedagogy might function in a hypothetical college composition course at all stages of the course, from course design to classroom practices.

I conclude my discussion by briefly addressing the ways in which implementing these practices in college classrooms may eventually lead to a new structure for the university and society. In discussing this progression from the current system to the system that may develop out of the liberatory praxis inspired by the critical consciousness developed in problem-posing classrooms, I return to the concerns expressed by the CFHE and others regarding the current state of higher education in the US and discuss the ways in which implementing critical pedagogy in college classrooms would address these concerns more successfully than the reforms recommended by the CFHE.

Before beginning the more detailed discussions that I have outlined above, I feel the need to address a major objection to my project that I feel needs immediate consideration. In the following pages, I discuss pedagogy. It may seem that I do more than that, however, since, as the discussions above make obvious, I reach beyond the

classroom. But as Henry Giroux points out, “It is impossible to separate what we do in the classroom from the economic and political conditions that shape our work, and that means that pedagogy has to be understood as a form of academic labor in which questions of time, autonomy, freedom, and power become as central to the classroom as what is taught.”⁴⁹ In keeping with this commitment, the form of pedagogy discussed in the following pages necessarily reaches beyond the classroom. It engages the world and its economic and political conditions. Some readers may object to the political aspects of Paulo Freire and critical pedagogy. For example, Giroux points out that “one gets the sense that conservative educators... believe that there is no place in the classroom for politics, worldly concerns, social issues, and questions about how to lessen human suffering.”⁵⁰ In other words, classroom pedagogy and lessons should focus solely on the specific, limited content of a predetermined educational program. This perspective misunderstands the educational endeavor, however. Pedagogy cannot be separated from the political; there is no such thing as neutral education.* There are only two modes of education: one that reinforces and perpetuates structures of domination and one that labors in the cause of freedom. In the pages that follow, I will elaborate on these themes and demonstrate how the findings and recommended reforms of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education fit the model of a pedagogy that negates the democratic endeavor and propose Paulo Freire’s philosophy of liberatory education as a model that would do the opposite by serving to empower students and promote free democratic behavior. Again, while some may be opposed to the political nature of this project,

* This is, perhaps, the most commonly cited insight from Freire's philosophy, which he himself addresses frequently.

Giroux reminds us that it is important to remember that “pedagogy becomes the cornerstone of democracy in that it provides the very foundation for students to learn not merely how to be governed, but also how to be capable of governing.”⁵¹ As such, “[educators] should embrace one of pedagogy’s most fundamental goals: to teach students to believe that democracy is desirable and possible.”⁵² It is with these goals in mind that I undertake the current project.

§1: Notes

¹ Richard Shavelson and Leta Huang, "Responding Responsibly to the Frenzy to Assess Learning in Higher Education," *Change* 35, no. 1 (2003): 11, <http://www.ebscohost.com/>.

² Steven Brint, "The Spellings Commission and the Case for Professionalizing College Teaching," *Academe Online* 94, no. 3 (2008), <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2008/MJ/Feat/brin.htm>.

³ Peter Ewell, "Grading Learning: Progress and Prospects," in "Measuring Up 2006: The National Report Card on Higher Education," by The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 23, http://measuringup.highereducation.org/_docs/2006/NationalReport_2006.pdf.

⁴ The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, "Measuring Up 2006: The National Report Card on Higher Education," 17, http://measuringup.highereducation.org/_docs/2006/NationalReport_2006.pdf.

⁵ Shavelson and Huang, "Responding Responsibly," 11.

⁶ U.S. Department of Education, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, (Washington, D.C., 2006), xii-xiii; 4.

⁷ Brint, "Spellings Commission."

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Karen Arenson, "Panel Explores Standard Tests for Colleges," *The New York Times*, February 9, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/09/education/09testing.html?_r=1&ref=karen_w_arenson.

¹⁰ "Obama to Push 'No Child Left Behind' Overhaul," *CNNPolitics*, March 15, 2010, http://articles.cnn.com/2010-03-15/politics/obama.education_1_states-and-school-districts-educators-low-performing?_s=PM:POLITICS.

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- ¹¹ Ibid.; Karen Branch-Brioso, Tracie Powell, and Ronald Roach, "Bush to Obama: Education in Transition," *Diverse Education*, <http://diverseeducation.com/article/12104/>.
- ¹² Brint, "Spellings Commission."
- ¹³ The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, "Measuring Up"; Paul Lingenfelter, "The National Commission on Accountability in Higher Education," *State Higher Education Executive Officers*, <http://www.sheeo.org/about/paulpres/ACE%20Presentation%20February%202005.pdf>; State Higher Education Executive Officers, "Accountability for Better Results: A National Imperative for Higher Education," (2005), <http://www.sheeo.org/account/accountability.pdf>; U.S. Department of Education, *A Test of Leadership*, 3, 16.
- ¹⁴ Michael Apple, "Can Critical Education Interrupt the Right?," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 30, no. 3 (2009), 242; Andrew Hacker, interview by Jennie Rothenberg Gritz, "What's Wrong with the American University System," *The Atlantic*, July 28, 2010, <http://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2010/07/whats-wrong-with-the-american-university-system/60458/>; among others.
- ¹⁵ This is a loose paraphrase of some of Horkheimer's discussion in Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," trans. Matthew J O'Connell, in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, 188-243, (New York: Continuum, 2002).
- ¹⁶ This is a loose paraphrase of some of Apple's discussion in Michael Apple, "Education, Markets, and an Audit Culture," *Critical Quarterly* 47, nos. 1-2 (2005): 11-29, <http://www.ebscohost.com/>.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 14.
- ¹⁸ Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux, *Education Still under Siege*, 2nd ed. *Critical Studies in Education and Culture*, ed. Henry A Giroux and Paulo Freire (Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey, 1993), 1.
- ¹⁹ "Obama to Push"; Branch-Brioso, Powell, and Roach, "Bush to Obama."
- ²⁰ "Obama to Push."
- ²¹ Apple, "Audit Culture," 13.
- ²² William Zumeta and Daniel Evans, "Does the U.S. Need More College Graduates to Remain a World Class Economic Power?" *Education and the Economy*, Miller Center of Public Affairs, 4, http://millercenter.org/public/debates/ed_econ.
- ²³ Ibid., 11-12.
- ²⁴ Sandy Baum and others, *Trends in College Pricing, 2009*, Trends in Higher Education, College Board, http://trends.collegeboard.org/college_pricing/; Catherine Rampell, "The Skyrocketing Costs of Attending College," *The New York Times*, November 21, 2010, <http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/10/20/the-skyrocketing-costs-of-attending-college/>.
- ²⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Money Income of Households in the United States: 1979*, Current Population Reports P60, no. 126 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1981), 1, <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/popscan/p60-126.pdf>.

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- ²⁶ "CPI Inflation Calculator," Databases, Tables & Calculators by Subject, Bureau Of Labor Statistics, United States Department of Labor, http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.
- ²⁷ Carmen DeNavas-Walt, Bernadette D Proctor, and Jessica C Smith, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2009*, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports P60, no. 238 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2010), 7, <http://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/p60-238.pdf>.
- ²⁸ U.S. Department of Education, *A Test of Leadership*, 2.
- ²⁹ Joydeep Roy, "Low Income Hinders College Attendance for Even the Highest Achieving Students," Snapshot, October 12, 2005, Economic Policy Institute, http://www.epi.org/economic_snapshots/entry/webfeatures_snapshots_20051012/.
- ³⁰ U.S. Department of Education, *A Test of Leadership*, 1, 7.
- ³¹ Lawrence E Gladieux, "Low-Income Students and the Affordability of Higher Education," *America's Untapped Resource: Low-Income Students in Higher Education*, ed. Richard D Kahlenberg (New York: Century Foundation, 2004); Zumeta and Evans, "More College Graduates."
- ³² Zumeta and Evans, "More College Graduates," 5.
- ³³ U.S. Department of Education, *A Test of Leadership*, xii.
- ³⁴ Aronowitz and Giroux, *Still under Siege*, 1-2.
- ³⁵ Ronald Glass, "On Paulo Freire's Philosophy of Praxis and the Foundations of Liberation Education," *Educational Researcher* 30, no. 2 (2001): 15, <http://www.jstor.org/>.
- ³⁶ U.S. Department of Education, *A Test of Leadership*, xii-xiii.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, xi; State Higher Education Executive Officers, "Accountability for Better Results," 6.
- ³⁹ U.S. Department of Education, *A Test of Leadership*, 17-19.
- ⁴⁰ Colin Lankshear, "Functional Literacy from a Freirean Point of View," in *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, ed. Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard (New York: Routledge, 1993), 94.
- ⁴¹ Peter McLaren, "Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Politics of Hope: Reclaiming Critical Pedagogy," *Critical Studies <=> Critical Methodologies* 1, no. 1 (2001): 109, <http://csc.sagepub.com/>.
- ⁴² Peter McLaren, "A Pedagogy of Possibility: Reflecting upon Paulo Freire's Politics of Education," *Educational Researcher* 28, no. 2 (1999): 49, <http://edr.sagepub.com/>.
- ⁴³ Stanley Aronowitz on back cover of Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2009).
- ⁴⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2009), 72.

⁴⁵ Ricky Lee Allen and Caesar Augusto Rossatto, "Does Critical Pedagogy Work with Privileged Students?" *Teacher Education Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2009): 174, <http://www.eric.ed.gov/>.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 165.

⁴⁷ McLaren, "Reclaiming Critical Pedagogy," 111.

⁴⁸ Allen and Rossatto, "Privileged Students," 172.

⁴⁹ Henry A Giroux, "Democracy, Education, and the Politics of Critical Pedagogy," introduction to *Critical Pedagogy: Where Are We Now?*, ed. Peter McLaren and Joe L Kincheloe (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 3.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

CHAPTER II

ACCOUNTABILITY AND ITS PROBLEMS

As highlighted in the Introduction, several concerning problems face higher education in the United States today. Though not all parties agree on the specifics of these problems, many seem to agree on the general areas that are problematic, including concerns about the cost of higher education, how these costs affect access, and concerns about the type and effectiveness of teaching and learning occurring in higher education. In response to these problems and growing public concern about them, the Secretary of Education under President George W. Bush, Margaret Spellings, convened the 2006 Commission on the Future of Higher Education (CFHE). Spellings tasked the CFHE with analyzing the state of higher education, identifying its shortcomings, and offering recommendations for improvement in four “key areas”: “access, affordability, quality, and accountability.”¹ While the analysis, findings, and recommendations of the CFHE may not represent the deepest, most thoughtful, or most compelling discussion of the problems in higher education, I believe we should take them seriously because of the potential they have to impact educational policy throughout public and private institutions across the United States. As a government-sponsored commission, the recommendations of the CFHE have a direct pipeline into the offices of government officials responsible for educational policy, and as discussed in the Introduction, the federal government has immense power over institutions of higher education in the United States because of the role it plays in funding and accreditation.* Because of the potential for the CFHE to radically alter higher education policy in the US, the following

* See Introduction pages 2-3 for further discussion of this claim.

pages discuss and analyze in-depth the findings and recommendations of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education. This task involves two stages. First, I will outline the findings and recommendations of the CFHE as it presents them and supplement its discussion where appropriate in order best to understand its claims and recommendations. In outlining the findings and recommendations of the CFHE, I deliberately choose to take their discussion and arguments in good faith and reconstruct their argument in the strongest way possible rather than look outside their discussion for ulterior motives that may influence their recommendations. While analyses that take the latter approach offer valuable insight into the kinds of recommendations the CFHE makes, and in some cases, explain these recommendations better than arguments in favor of the recommendations do themselves,* such analyses do not provide the basis for the approach I intend to take here. I choose to take the recommendations of the CFHE in good faith and reconstruct the theory behind these recommendations in order to critique it on the theoretical level, through the lens of Freire's discussion of the banking system of education. I do this in the second section of this chapter.

* Pepi Leistyna, for example, provides a devastating critique of NCLB, the basic foundation of the recommendations of the CFHE, that highlights the extent to which special interest, corporate lobbies from textbook and testing companies, and nepotism influenced the law's policies and implementation as well as the corrosive effects these policies have had on schools, students, and communities, while simultaneously massively benefiting corporations of all kinds ("Neoliberal Non-sense").

§1: The Commission on the Future of Higher Education and Arguments for Accountability

As discussed in the Introduction, although many sources agree on the general topics of concern with the system of higher education in the United States, the specific problems that each source identifies within these general topics depends heavily on the implicit and explicit philosophical and/or political commitments or world view of the source identifying the problems. In order to understand the claims of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education, then, it seems useful to begin the outline of its analysis and recommendations with a brief discussion of how it conceives of higher education in general and its place in society. While I imagine the CFHE would not oppose the humanist project that many universities see themselves as undertaking—namely, to promote intellectual development and individual flourishing—this kind of language rarely, if ever, shows up in the CFHE’s report. Instead, the CFHE often speaks of education in terms of capitalist production. For example, they often speak of it as a form of “intellectual capital needed to increase workforce productivity and growth.”² This kind of language seems a far cry from the soaring rhetoric present in college and university mission statements, which often speak of increasing individuals’ intellectual well-being. In this sense, the CFHE seems to conceive of higher education as an important economic tool and seems to understand institutions of higher education as factories producing a product. As such, it seems clear that the CFHE’s analysis and recommendations come from the mainstream perspective discussed in the Introduction,

since their conception of higher education follows the market model in which a higher education is a commodity to be bought and sold.

The role the CFHE believes “intellectual capital” plays in society further reveals its commitment to the market model. The CFHE interprets “intellectual capital” as important on two levels. * Firstly, they believe it is important for the nation at large. The CFHE often speaks of “global competitiveness”[†] and compares the US education system with those of other countries, whom we have fallen behind: “[other countries] are now educating more of their citizens to more advanced levels than we are. Worse, they are passing us by at a time when education is more important to our collective prosperity than ever.”[‡] “Intellectual capital” is increasingly important, in the eyes of the CFHE, because it is necessary for keeping the US strong and competitive in the global economic market.[‡] At the same time, “intellectual capital” is important on the individual scale. The CFHE often discusses higher education as a means for “social mobility.” It writes, “For close to a century now, access to higher education has been a principal—some would say *the* principle—means of achieving social mobility.”[§] For individuals, education means future employment, which allows them to support themselves financially, and higher levels of education correlate with higher incomes.[§] These facts

* The CFHE write: "The benefits of higher education are significant for both individuals and for the nation as a whole" (U.S. Department of Education, *A Test of Leadership*, 7).

† The CFHE write: "We want a world class higher-education system that... contributes to economic prosperity and global competitiveness" (Ibid., xi).

‡ It seems safe to assume that economic prosperity would also serve to perpetuate US military prowess and ability to protect the country and enforce its will in the world, which may explain the CFHE's seeming dread of falling behind.

§ See Introduction pages 13-14.

drive the CFHE's claims that a higher education allows individuals to move up the socioeconomic ladder, thus becoming 'socially mobile.' On both of these levels, education becomes a product produced by colleges and universities that has real economic value. Based on this conception, it is not surprising that when the CFHE cites deficits in the higher education system, it treats colleges and universities as "inefficient" factories in need of "streamlining" in order to increase "productivity."^{*} Because the CFHE adheres strictly to the market model and analyzes higher education from the mainstream perspective, it finds the current higher education system problematic because it does not adequately prepare US citizens to compete in the global economy. The CFHE seems to cite two major ways in which higher education fails to achieve this goal.

First, like nearly all sources commenting on higher education, the CFHE notices the exorbitant expenses of higher education⁵ and the effect this has on access, particularly for traditionally underserved groups,⁶ mentioned in the Introduction.[†] The high cost of higher education combined with a problematic financial aid system that does not adequately address the needs of students, especially those from the lower-class and minority backgrounds who need financial aid the most,⁷ contributes to other factors that severely limit access to higher education.⁸ This leads the CFHE to conclude, "Too few Americans prepare for, participate in, and complete higher education—especially... underserved and nontraditional groups."⁹ While the CFHE points out that differential

^{*} All of these words appear repeatedly in the CFHE's report.

[†] The costs of higher education would not really be an issue if it were not for the effects that they have on access, so these two issues are virtually inseparable.

preparation in primary and secondary education* causes a great deal of the deficits in access, some are clearly due to factors beyond preparation. For example, the CFHE cites statistics similar to those cited in the Introduction, which point out that factors outside of academic ability limit low-income and minority students from completing a degree program.¹⁰ Cost is a major factor in this. While costs may be an outright prohibitive factor to some, for others it will be a constant concern and distraction. After all, the CFHE notices that “most [low-income and minority students] will work close to full time while they are in college.”¹¹ This may have a variety of impacts on these individuals’ studies, including limiting the number of credit hours they could complete per year (resulting in the protraction of time to complete their degree), interfering with their performance, or eventual attrition.

Secondly, even students who can easily afford to attend college, or cannot and do so anyway, are not guaranteed the potential economic benefits from a higher education due to deficits in educational quality, according to the CFHE’s analysis. It notices that “at a time when we need to be increasing the quality of learning outcomes and the economic value of a college education, there are disturbing signs that suggest we are moving in the opposite direction.”¹² A number of factors influence this claim, but the CFHE cites “unacceptable” attrition rates, decreases in performance on assessments such as the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, and employers complaints regarding deficits in college graduates’ preparation for the workforce.¹³ While some of these factors result from some of the above concerns associated with cost, particularly attrition

* This, also troublingly, affects low income and minority students more so than middle- and upper-class white students.

rates—which, again, disproportionately affect low income and minority students¹⁴—others result from a general lack of quality control in higher education, according to the CFHE.¹⁵ Colleges and universities are not currently held responsible for assuring that their students are adequately mastering the skills necessary for employment. As such, many of the students who do complete their degree programs are not prepared to join the workforce without further training. Combined with the CFHE’s analysis of cost and access, these concerns with the quality of teaching and education in higher education provide the basis for its claims that the higher education system has become “inefficient” at “producing” “intellectual capital.”

Despite the CFHE’s choice to express its ideas in potentially offensive economic terms, it seems to express valid concerns regarding the state of higher education. Setting aside the issue of student learning for the moment and focusing more exclusively on the CFHE’s discussion of cost and access, it seems that it at least notices the tendency for higher education to perpetuate socioeconomic stratification. Although the CFHE may not explicitly make this claim, nor would it likely express it in these terms, its discussion seems to imply it. In all of the areas it examines, the CFHE notices differences based on socioeconomic class. Students from different socioeconomic backgrounds have differential access to higher education, partially due to the exorbitant costs but also due to differential preparation in primary and secondary education. On top of this, underprivileged individuals who choose to attend a college or university in spite of the expense often need to work at or close to full-time in order to support themselves and their education or go into debt attempting to do so. This can be a difficult distraction that results in lower performance. Considering the economic benefits to college graduates,

the deficits between socioeconomic classes is disturbing. Individuals from middle- and upper-class white backgrounds are more likely to get into, finish, and benefit from a college level education, so they are more likely to remain in the middle and upper levels of the socioeconomic spectrum—or even move up. They more easily gain access to the “social mobility” afforded by higher education. Individuals from lower-class and minority backgrounds, however, are less likely to get into, complete, and benefit from a college level education, so they are more likely to remain at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum. Therefore, as the CFHE’s report seems to acknowledge (at least implicitly), the net effect of the problems it notices is the perpetuation and potential exacerbation of current socioeconomic divisions.

It is clear from the CFHE’s report that it intends for its recommended reforms to address this issue, though again, it does not seem to say so in as many words. The fact that it recognizes the differential access to higher education based on socioeconomic background as a problem in the first place suggests that it intends its proposed reforms to address this issue. These reforms focus heavily, though not exclusively, on lower-class and minority students, which again suggests a commitment to overcoming current inequalities in the system. In order to open the access to higher education to a broader range of individuals, the CFHE advocates a variety of reforms, such as increasing financial aid programs, particularly “need-based student aid,” restructuring and streamlining current financial aid systems (which are currently “confusing, complex, inefficient, duplicative,” and indirect¹⁶), cost control measures, and competitive incentives to “institutions that show they are fostering access.”¹⁷ In addition to better

high school preparation,^{*} the CFHE believes that the reforms above will help open access to higher education, primarily through addressing escalating costs that have become prohibitive to many individuals, particularly those from lower-class and minority backgrounds. Opening access in this way implicitly seems to intend to address the issue of social stratification by bringing traditionally underserved individuals into the system of higher education and granting them access to its economic benefits, such as “social mobility.” In this sense, understood on a very simplistic level, the implicit argument seems to be that—if institutions of higher education adopted some of these policies, were successfully able to lower costs, and more scholarships became available on a need basis—the reforms suggested by the CFHE would combat the current effects of social stratification.

As most of the reforms mentioned above essentially amount to throwing money at the problem rather than addressing the underlying issues,[†] the CFHE also advocates stricter and more transparent accountability regarding the allocation and use of funds and incentives. In fact, the CFHE believes that lax accountability measures are at least partially to blame for soaring costs in higher education.¹⁸ Additionally, returning to the issue of the CFHE’s concerns with the quality of learning occurring in colleges and universities, the CFHE believes that measurable and comparable data regarding student learning are sorely lacking.¹⁹ Because of this, it is difficult to hold institutions of higher

^{*} The CFHE also believes that a necessary component for increasing access to higher education is better high school preparation (U.S. Department of Education, *A Test of Leadership*, 17-18). While this would no doubt help, these claims fall outside of the scope of their discussion and recommendations, as well as my project.

[†] This unquestioning attitude is precisely the failure with the CFHE's recommended reforms, as I will address momentarily.

learning accountable for successfully teaching students. Because accountability is lacking in both of these areas, the CFHE recommends instituting a broad spectrum “culture of accountability and transparency,”²⁰ covering everything from “cost, price, admission data, [and] college completion rates,”²¹ to “test scores, certification and licensure attainment, time to degree... adult literacy... [and] graduate and professional school exams.”²² Stricter accountability measures are so important for the CFHE, in fact, that the commissioners call them the “vital” element of their recommended reforms.²³

The CFHE writes:

We urge the creation of a robust culture of accountability and transparency throughout higher education. Every one of our goals, from improving access and affordability to enhancing quality and innovation, will be more easily achieved if higher education institutions embrace and implement serious accountability measures.²⁴

Part of the goal of greater transparency in regards to cost, price, admission data, etc. would have to do with keeping track of the extra money the CFHE advocates pouring into the system to help fund and subsidize scholarships and grants for low income and minority students. Greater transparency would also allow policymakers to have clear, reliable information about how colleges and universities spend state funds and/or student tuition. This, they presume, would encourage efficiency within the system to guarantee that no money is ‘lost.’ By providing this information, the CFHE believe that stricter accountability measures could help drive down costs, allowing more lower income and minority students to more easily attend institutions of higher education.

The stricter accountability measures the CFHE suggests would also keep track of “learning outcomes.”²⁵ Recall that in addition to citing problems with access to higher education, the CFHE believes that even students who gain access to higher education do not necessarily learn skills vital for the workforce, such as “critical thinking, writing and problem-solving skills.”²⁶ Although the CFHE seems to find these deficits problematic because of their effects on students’ ability to join the workforce, it is likely that even those who discuss education in terms of the humanist project focused on the promotion of individual flourishing would find such deficits troubling. The CFHE believes that the best way to remedy this deficit is to keep track of student performance and hold universities and colleges accountable for meeting benchmarks in learning categories. The report from the CFHE does not seem to offer much argumentation to back up its claims that holding colleges and universities accountable for student outcomes would help address the problem, however. Therefore, we must look to other sources to understand the reasoning behind claims that such measures could promote student learning.

Arguments for the use of performance-based assessment in higher education reveal reasons why the CFHE may choose to advocate for these methods. In their article “Performance-Based Education,” Gary Peterson and Robert Stakenas provide a clear, concise definition of performance-based education as well as a statement of why it is advantageous in higher education:

the performance-based approach... could maximize educational quality, access, and economy. A performance-based educational system is one in which the instructional processes are designed to foster the mastery of pre-specified skills and knowledge (outputs) at required levels of proficiency. Quality is maintained

by granting credit only for the successful demonstration of such skills and knowledge against explicit standards of mastery. Economy and accessibility are achieved through employing system design, using instructional resources efficiently, relying on student's capacity for self directed learning.... Students are granted credit for demonstrating the required knowledge and skills regardless of where or when these were acquired.

A performance-based system, when fully developed, makes it possible to offer open-access educational systems to a community while neither sacrificing standards or raising costs.²⁷

Based on this definition and explanation of the advantages of performance-based education, it becomes clear why the CFHE would advocate for its use. According to Peterson and Stakenas, performance-based education ensures quality education while streamlining, perhaps even lowering, costs and leaving admission open to all individuals. In this sense, the use of performance-based assessment helps achieve two goals of the CFHE by enforcing rigorous learning standards while providing greater access, which would begin to address the deficits in access for traditionally underrepresented groups. Additionally, performance-based assessment, assessed through standardized tests, would supposedly address the issue of the ability of students from underrepresented groups to remain in institutions of higher education because, according to Fleming and Garcia, "Proponents of standardized tests argue that they offer an objective, common yardstick that helps identify capable students who come from various backgrounds and grading

systems. Thus, they prevent discrimination against able minority [students].”^{*} Due to their supposed objectivity, standardized tests could circumvent instructor bias. This would prevent instructors from downgrading individuals from traditionally underrepresented groups, thus helping to retain minority students by avoiding attrition due to unfair grading practices. According to these claims, performance-based assessment seems to be the ideal solution for the problems in higher education because it not only ensures a quality education, does so without increasing costs, and allows for open access, it also addresses the minority and socioeconomic issues noted by the CFHE by lowering costs and removing bias from measures of achievement.

Peterson and Stakenas have in mind a particularly strict use for performance-based evaluation, and though it is unclear from the CFHE’s report whether or not it would endorse this use out right, it does not seem inconsistent with the CFHE’s views. In their article, Peterson and Stakenas suggest that performance-based evaluation should be employed to control student populations within colleges and universities. Those failing to meet proficiency levels would be dropped from their programs. It is partially in this way that performance-based evaluations are able to stem costs; they thin the student population.²⁸ The CFHE, on the other hand, mostly focuses on using the results of

^{*} Jacqueline Fleming and Nancy Garcia, 471. It is interesting that the source Fleming and Garcia cite for this claim is the College Board, which—though its website claims to be a "not-for-profit membership association"—is closely associated with the Educational Testing Service and sells preparation guides for several of the ETS's tests. The ETS also claims to be a nonprofit organization, yet it had a "revenue of more than \$700 million in the last fiscal year," its CEO makes over \$800,000 a year, and it gave out bonuses as much as \$366,000 (Lewin). The corporate nature and profitability of the use of tests such as these call into question claims about their validity made by the companies that profit, or are closely associated with those who profit, from the use of such tests. Additionally, claims about the objectivity of standardized assessment ignore overwhelming data that suggest that, far from being objective, standardized tests are heavily biased based on a variety of qualities of the test takers, including race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender (Fleming & Garcia; Horn; Wright; etc.).

assessments of student outcomes for comparison's sake and for use by policy makers and accrediting agencies. It writes, "accreditation agencies should make performance outcomes, including completion rates and student learning, the core of their assessment."²⁹ This statement comes at the end of a section of the report detailing examples of potential means of assessment and how the results of these assessments might be used meaningfully. As such, it is not explicitly clear from the CFHE's discussion how exactly it intends performance-based evaluation to affect individual students. It seems to fall short of requiring baseline performance as a condition for graduation or retention in the university or college system.

On the other hand, basing funding and accreditation decisions on the outcomes of performance-based evaluation of students would force colleges and universities to attempt to improve their students' performance on the assessments in order to secure funding and accreditation. Such reasoning is, of course, the impetus behind claims that performance-based evaluation would improve student learning. Colleges and universities not sufficiently educating their students would lose their funding and/or accreditation; therefore, colleges and universities would endeavor to ensure they meet the requirements laid out for them. While this is not an explicit call on the part of the CFHE for graduation requirement type exams, it leaves open the potential for the use of such exams. Colleges and universities finding themselves at risk of losing funding and/or accreditation would need to find ways to make performance-based evaluation matter to students because students would likely have little motivation to perform well on the assessments if nothing were at stake for them. Therefore, making such assessments required for graduation would give students a very real stake in the test and force them to perform well.

Furthermore, as the CFHE also believes degree completion rates should be an important factor in funding and accreditation decisions, it could be in the interest of colleges and universities to drop students not making satisfactory progress, which might suggest more rigorous use of performance-based evaluation, perhaps after each academic year. The CFHE also claims, “higher education institutions should improve institutional cost management through the development of new performance benchmarks.”³⁰ This statement seems to accord with Peterson and Stakenas’ discussion of lowering costs by thinning the student population, which would seem to require the more rigorous use of performance-based evaluation suggested above. Regardless of the form that the use of performance evaluation eventually took, what emerges from this discussion is an image of some form of high-stakes standardized test, with serious consequences for both institutions and students.

A number of practical problems accompany this model. Perhaps the broadest level of problem is deciding what students should gain by completing a degree program at a college or university. To a large extent, this comes down to a question of perspective. As the CFHEs seems primarily concerned with “producing” “intellectual capital,” individuals able to compete in the global economy, it would seem that it would claim that graduates should gain skills that would contribute to job performance. Others might object to this goal, however, and rather suggest that a higher education should foster individuals’ intellectual self-development, which would have a different set of more specific outcomes.

Once we decided what graduates should get out of a higher education in general, the problem would become deciding what skills, specifically, would achieve these goals.

In the case of the CFHE's views, what specific skills would help graduates become competitive in the global economy? Or, on the other hand, what specifically would help individuals foster self-development? Sticking with the CFHE's beliefs that a higher education should prepare students for competition in the global economy, we seem to have a relatively decent idea of what these skills are in the current job market.

Specifically, the CFHE notes complaints from employers that college graduates “[lack] the critical thinking, writing, and problem-solving skills needed in today’s workplaces.”³¹

This would suggest that these should be on the top of the agenda, because they are both skills “needed in today’s workplaces,” making them valuable in the CFHE’s overall scheme, as well as areas that are currently deficient. This current information is not always useful, however, because—due to the rapidly changing job market*—we do not know for certain what skills future jobs will require. While it would be difficult to argue that critical thinking, writing, and problem-solving skills are not useful skills to have in any profession, they are certainly not the only ones, nor necessarily the most important.

The CFHE also suggests that “the United States must ensure the capacity of its universities to achieve global leadership in key strategic areas such as science, engineering, medicine, and other knowledge-intensive professions.”³² Therefore, it would seem that knowledge useful for these professions would also feature strongly in performance assessments. The problem here is that, if we stress the teaching and mastery of things needed for current job opportunities, we may miss things that would actually be more beneficial to future employment. So, clearly, deciding which things to stress within

* The CFHE recognizes this (U.S. Department of Education, *A Test of Leadership*, xi, 29).

the paradigm we establish for higher education would be an essential factor in discussions regarding standardized assessment.

If we were able to decide on what exactly these skills should be, then the question would be: how do we go about testing these things? To some extent, of course, this would depend on what exactly we were testing. Regardless of the outcomes being tested, however, coming up with meaningful assessments is not always easy. The CFHE itself seems to admit this when it suggests that “faculty must be at the forefront of... developing *meaningful*, evidence-based measures of [students’] progress.”³³ Stressing the need for meaningful measures acknowledges the difficulty with doing so. The CFHE suggests using assessments such as the Collegiate Learning Assessment.³⁴ It is probable that it suggests using this assessment because it focuses on “critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and written communication,”³⁵ skills that the CFHE finds important for employment. But the use of established tests could be potentially problematic because it would run the risk of shaping outcomes to the test chosen rather than creating the test based on desired learning outcomes. Regardless of what testing techniques were eventually decided upon, we could always debate whether or not the standards of measure actually test the things they purport to test.

Despite the fact that these are all potentially difficult problems, they are not insurmountable. They are merely practical problems that would need to be carefully addressed were we to institute the kind of testing the reforms recommended by the CFHE would require. With the information about learning outcomes garnered through the use of high-stakes standardized tests combined with information about costs and expenditures provided through the more general “culture of accountability and transparency” in hand,

the CFHE believes that institutions of higher education will necessarily become more “efficient” because they will be pushed to “streamline” costs as well as maintain rigorous standards for student learning. According to this market-based model, the lower costs, in combination with scholarship programs, will open up opportunities for traditionally underserved students, which will grant them access to higher education and all of its economic benefits. The focus on accountability for learning standards will, then, ensure that these individuals achieve a valuable education, helping to further guarantee their economic prosperity. By attempting to include “all Americans” and ensuring that all students receive a quality education, the CFHE believes that its recommendations will provide for the economic well-being of more individuals, including more individuals from traditionally underrepresented and underserved groups. Even looking at the language of “the implicit model for the [CFHE]’s recommendations, the No Child Left Behind Act,”³⁶ suggests a commitment to including all individuals, to ensure that no one is “left behind.” In this way, the CFHE believes that it offers recommendations that will “empower citizens.”³⁷ Accordingly, it seems that, read generously, underneath the market terms employed by the CFHE that mask it, exists a humanizing view of education: education is important and should be made accessible to “all Americans” because doing so will allow them to participate more successfully in the current society. As such, the CFHE offers a model of functional literacy for our advanced times because the successful college graduate will be fit and adapted to function successfully in the current society.

§2: The Banking System of Education, Accountability, and the Commission on the Future of Higher Education

Unfortunately for the Commission on the Future of Higher Education, the reforms it suggests are doomed to failure. They will neither improve long-term access to higher education for individuals, particularly those from traditionally underserved groups, nor will they successfully improve student learning. In fact, as Brint points out, “the implicit model for the commission’s recommendations, the No Child Left Behind Act, had by 2006 already failed to deliver on its promises for continuous growth in student language and math proficiency.”³⁸ Brint’s claim is supported by overwhelming evidence that the high-stakes accountability measures required by NCLB not only did not improve learning but, in many cases, worsened it.³⁹ Even if its recommended reforms were successful, however, since the result of higher education in the model proposed by the CFHE is an individual more fit to participate in the current society, the breed of education it proposes will do nothing to challenge or change the current structure of society. Because the current structure of society contributes so heavily to the differential access to higher education noticed consistently by the CFHE,⁴⁰ reinforcing the structure by creating individuals more fit to it will, at best, perpetuate the problem and, at worst, exacerbate it. Even if we take the recommendations on their own terms—if we ‘buy into’ the CFHE’s belief that the purpose of higher education is to prepare individuals to compete in the world capitalist economy—the CFHE’s recommendations for improving student learning cannot succeed. It is not the difficult practical concerns mentioned above that prevent the CFHE’s recommended reforms from successfully achieving their goal, but the theory

behind strict accountability in the form of high-stakes standardized tests that runs the CFHE's program into the ground. Despite the CFHE's attempt to create standards of accountability that reflect the kind of knowledge and skills students would need in the current society, focusing on predetermined learning outcomes and high-stakes tests requires a pedagogy that fails to successfully impart this knowledge and these skills, which explains the problems with NCLB mentioned above. These critiques are near the heart of Paulo Freire's discussion of the banking system of education that he addresses primarily in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. As such, his discussion of this system provides a useful lens through which to understand the failures of the reforms the CFHE recommends on the theoretical level.

The banking system discussed by Freire is particularly applicable to the CFHE's discussion because, in addition to describing the reforms proposed by the CFHE almost perfectly, Freire's philosophy is heavily devoted to humanizing education, a project that seems to underlie the CFHE's discussion. Although, as mentioned above, it is difficult to find the commitment to a humanizing education buried in the CFHE's market rhetoric, such a commitment does seem to underlie their discussion—if read generously, as I have chosen to do. Unlike the CFHE, Freire does not bury his discussion of humanizing education. Instead, as I will address further in the next chapter, for Freire, promoting participation in the process of humanization is precisely the purpose of education. As such, his devotion to humanization features prominently in his discussions of pedagogy. Freire's pedagogy is directed at overcoming structures of oppression in society that prevent individuals from “being more fully human.”⁴¹ According to Ira Shor, successful education, “to Freire, means being an active subject who questions and transforms. To

learn is to re-create the way we see ourselves, our education, and our society.”⁴² As I will address further in the next chapter, the processes of questioning and transforming are essential components of what it means to be human, to participate in “the vocation of becoming more fully human.”⁴³ In other words, Freire’s pedagogy is designed to empower individuals and allow them to participate more fully in society. In this sense, the explicit goal of Freire’s pedagogy matches the underlying commitments of the CFHE. Furthermore, in Freire’s devotion to overcoming systems of oppression, he displays a clear commitment to overcoming issues of social stratification that, in the context of access to higher education, manifest themselves as the deficits in access for individuals from traditionally underprivileged groups that the CFHE repeatedly takes note of. Although Freire and the CFHE seem to share some of the same implicit and explicit goals, their approach to achieving these goals is radically different. The shared goals, but different approaches to addressing these goals, between Freire and the CFHE makes Freire’s discussion a prime source for getting a new perspective through which to critique the recommendations of the CFHE. Specifically, Freire’s discussion of the banking system of education provides a useful theoretical analysis to apply to the CFHE’s recommendations. Applying Freire’s analysis to the recommended reforms of the CFHE not only explains the failure of similar reforms in other contexts but also, and perhaps more significantly, reveals flaws in the theory behind its mainstream approach, which, contrary to its underlying humanizing intentions, results in a dehumanizing system of education.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire offers a critique of what he calls the “banking system of education.” The banking system of education is a metaphor that

Freire uses for the kind of education that he finds problematic and that he believes prevails in educational contexts, broadly construed, “at any level, inside or outside the school.”⁴⁴ This system involves exactly what the metaphor suggests, namely, “an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor.”⁴⁵ According to the metaphor, knowledge is “deposited” in the students by the teacher. The students then “become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store”⁴⁶ rather than active participants in their education, the latter of which Freire believes is required for genuine learning. According to Freire, the banking system of education “reveals [the] fundamentally *narrative* character” of education, which “involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students).”⁴⁷ Freire suggests that this narrative character, which he also refers to as the “student-teacher contradiction,”⁴⁸ involves a variety of “attitudes and practices”:

- (a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
- (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
- (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
- (d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly;
- (e) the teacher disciplines the students and the students are disciplined;
- (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
- (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
- (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;

- (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
- (j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are merely objects.⁴⁹

What emerges from this list and Freire's discussion of the "student-teacher contradiction" is a pretty clear picture of an educational division of labor. The teachers are the active, deciding, knowledgeable, controlling authority. The students are the passive, ignorant, powerless object.

This educational division of labor has several detrimental consequences for learning and teaching, according to Freire's analysis. For the moment, let us focus on the most basic problems with the banking system of education. On a very fundamental level, this system fails to educate students. While such a claim is, to some extent, predicated on how one defines 'educate' and what one means by 'knowledge,' the kind of 'knowledge' that results from an 'education' in the banking system of education is very limited, which is precisely the problem with 'education' in this system. Freire himself admits that in the banking system of education "[students] do... have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store."⁵⁰ They could, in fact, become quite good at memorizing and reciting the things they 'learn,' but this breed of imitative and mimetic education cannot result in genuine learning. It may give students the opportunity to 'learn' facts, but it leaves them at a loss as to what to do with this 'knowledge' because it treats the things 'learned' "as if [they] were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable."⁵¹ Students will ultimately be unable to relate these facts to their reality and

incorporate them meaningfully in their lives.* This occurs because, according to Freire, students ‘educated’ in the banking system will not participate in creative, transformative experiences, which engender the ability to incorporate the things learned into the existential realities of the learners, giving rise to genuine learning.⁵² He writes, “knowledge only emerges through invention and re-invention, through restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.”⁵³ For Freire, the passive acquisition of facts and figures does not impart knowledge; knowledge arises from active inquiry occurring between individuals, others, and the world they inhabit. Because the banking system only involves passive ‘learning,’ it negates the active processes necessary for genuine learning and, as such, can never give rise to it.

We should be concerned with the banking system of education because it accurately describes the kind of education that the accountability measures suggested by the CFHE would necessitate. Since the accountability measures that the CFHE suggests would require the establishment of specific learning outcomes for higher education, it treats learning as the kind of predetermined process that characterizes the banking system of education. Because the CFHE apparently purports to know what skills graduates will require for their participation in the global economy—namely, “critical thinking, writing, and problem-solving skills,” in addition to training in “science, engineering, medicine, and other knowledge-intensive professions”—we should expect these things to be heavily stressed by whatever measures of accountability might become implemented. But this

* Richard Rodriguez gives some interesting insight into the deficits of mimetic learning in his autobiographical essay "The Achievement of Desire: Personal Reflections on Learning 'Basics.'"

treats “reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable.”⁵⁴ It presumes to know the current and future necessities, without seeming to acknowledge the potential for change. This is not the world we live in, however. According to Freire, the world is “not... a static reality, but a reality in process, in transformation.”⁵⁵ In a transforming world always in process, it would seem difficult, if not impossible, to predict precisely what graduates would need to find successful employment (if this were the goal). Although we might be able to agree that focusing on “science, engineering, medicine, and other knowledge-intensive professions” might be currently beneficial, believing that these would always be beneficial would seem to deny the potential for the world to change or transform. New circumstances could arise that would limit the number of jobs in these fields or make the fields themselves obsolete, so focusing too strictly on skills for these fields would deny students other potentially beneficial skills and/or knowledge that may turn out to be more useful to them. I do not intend to suggest that the education system would not adapt to changing circumstances by shifting its focus to prepare new graduates for the jobs available at the time of their admission, but for students already through the system, the fact that the jobs they had trained for and participated in may no longer be available would call into question the favorability of focusing too specifically on skills useful for specific professions. This may be the reason that the CFHE also recommends focusing on the more broader range skills that they stress, such as “critical thinking, writing, and problem-solving.”

Even in the case of important skills such as “critical thinking, writing, and problem-solving,” focusing on ensuring their development through high-stakes standardized assessment is problematic. I am not arguing that these are not important

skills to acquire in a higher education. In fact, I find them extremely important. Testing for them through the use of high-stakes tests, however, will be detrimental both to the overall education of students and to the acquisition of these skills themselves. Although the CFHE seems to suggest, to some extent, that at least some of the accountability measures they advocate would require the development of new kinds of assessment, they also suggest that the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) serves as a beneficial model for the kinds of methods they would endorse.⁵⁶ It is also “the most widely praised of the current learning outcomes instruments,” according to Brint.⁵⁷ The Collegiate Learning Assessment is designed to be used as a tool for comparison between institutions rather than tests on specific students, but as previously addressed, basing funding decisions on the results of such comparisons would seem to force institutions to find ways to make it meaningful for the students, such as requiring a certain level of proficiency on it as a condition for graduation. According to a discussion of the “Architecture of the CLA Tasks,” which gives a description of the tasks of the CLA and how it measures student performance, “The CLA tasks require that students integrate critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem solving, and written communication skills.”⁵⁸ The test focuses on these particular skills because, according to Roger Benjamin’s discussion of the CLA, “these skills are emphasized in liberal arts or what is called common learning, are thought to be critical in the knowledge economy, and are reflected as core to virtually all mission statements of colleges and universities.”⁵⁹ Again, it is difficult to argue that these are not important skills or that these claims are not valid, but a look at what is involved in the CLA and preparation for it reveals drawbacks.

Despite the importance of the skills tested by the CLA, the adoption of it or any other performance-based test would inevitably narrow curriculum and restrict learning to specific predetermined knowledge and skills. It should go without saying that in order for students to do well on the CLA, they would have to be well-versed in the skills that it tests. In order to develop these skills, students would need practice. These are all obvious points. If tests such as the CLA became the deciding factor for a college's or university's funding or for a student's graduation, it would go without saying that students should get as much practice in the skills tested for as possible. Brint points out that in order for this to happen, it "would inevitably lead to the reconstruction of many college classrooms around document-based performance tasks and tasks that involve making or breaking an argument."⁶⁰ This is not just an effect of the CLA, according to Brint. He claims, "Every widely adopted test brings a focus on the skills and content it privileges and only on those skills and content."⁶¹ In other words, regardless of the means of assessment, whatever the assessment stresses will be what is taught. To some extent, of course, this is the goal of adopting a particular form of assessment because doing so would supposedly increase teaching of, practice on, and learning of the knowledge and skills tested for. The stress placed on this knowledge and these skills would, in turn, serve to restrict the curriculum to the knowledge and skills specifically tested for.

This seems to represent exactly the approach taken by educators in the banking system of education. It represents a pre-determination of learning outcomes, which fits with Freire's characteristics of the banking system, in that this predetermination is an example of the teacher (or authority) making a choice regarding the content of education

without consulting the students and forcing them to adapt to this content. While teaching “critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem solving, and written communication skills” may seem like more of a process of engaging the content under study than the actual content itself, these skills would become the content of the educational endeavor as instruction focused more on them in favor of other course content. Classes and programs not directly involved in the instruction of these skills may disappear from course schedules as colleges and universities focus more energy on improving their scores in areas required for funding and accreditation. And, as Brent suggests above, courses that did remain on the schedule would devote more and more time to the specific skills tested for, to the detriment of their ostensive content.

While this has not yet occurred extensively in higher education because the kind of accountability measures recommended by the CFHE have not been widely implemented, this phenomenon is very apparent in primary and secondary education where accountability measures similar to those recommended for higher education by the CFHE have been broadly implemented by NCLB. In summing up the findings of his study of the effects of standardized assessment in K-12 schools, Wright highlights the detrimental effects standardized assessment have had on curriculum. He explains:

The teachers reported that the district’s emphasis on the SAT-9 [a mandatory standardized test administered at the end of each year] has resulted in drastic changes to the curriculum. These changes include (a) changes to district standards and assessments, (b) the adoption of new curricular materials in math and language arts [the two subjects stressed by the SAT-9], and (c) the de-

emphasis or elimination of content areas and other activities not related to the SAT-9.⁶²

And then in a blunt, summative statement: “The teachers did not consider these to be positive changes.”⁶³ Furthermore, this restriction of curriculum does not only occur at the administrative level. As Kathryn Ecclestone points out, in the case of higher education, “there is already evidence—as yet anecdotal—that students on outcome-based programmes in higher education are becoming increasingly unwilling to take part in teaching and learning activities which do not cover the stated outcomes or which do not contribute towards summative assessment.”⁶⁴ In other words, when forced into programs structured around mandatory standardized testing, not only will administrators and course designers restructure courses around the specific learning outcomes tested for, students themselves will push educators to focus on the outcomes tested for rather than other material that might be important to a specific course.

In this sense, the move from covering the ostensive content of courses to focusing more on the specific skills required by a test like the CLA would be detrimental to the CFHE’s own motives. If, as previously discussed, the CFHE believes that the fields of “science, engineering, medicine, and other knowledge-intensive professions” will be highly important for the future employment of graduates, testing “common learning” skills, such as “critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem solving, and written communication,” would interfere with this goal. Each of the fields mentioned above, and many other professions, involve and require skills specific to those professions. While they may all also require “common learning” skills—to some extent—we must not overlook the importance of the specific skills. For example, we want our doctors to be

able to think critically and reason analytically and solve problems, but we also want them to be able to quickly and accurately identify the symptoms of specific ailments, know the treatment for the ailment, and be able to give specific advice and medication to address the problem. While, to some extent, this may seem like a poor example because doctors will learn most of their specific skills in medical school rather than as an undergraduate, acceptance to, and success in, medical school requires a background of specific skills and knowledge acquired as an undergraduate. Therefore, even at the undergraduate level, focusing on “common learning” skills to the exception of the specific skills required for particular field of study would be unfortunate because it would result in professionals less able to perform their jobs.

Brint also gives a useful idea of one of the ways in which adopting high-stakes testing would effect such a problem through a specific classroom example. He asks us to “consider what types of disciplinary skills and understandings the CLA leaves out,” then elaborates:

A teacher of history will want her students to see the interplay between and among personality, event, and larger social and political forces; to think through specific themes of particular interest to her; to appreciate the range of interpretations of an event; and to consider why dominant interpretations have changed over time. She may be interested also in teaching more technical skills, such as how to evaluate a bibliography in a subfield or how to construct an expository footnote. To develop these skills is to begin to think like a historian.⁶⁵

The things Brint mentions in this example are all essential parts of the study of history and of what it means to be a historian and think like one. As such, we can see in this

classroom example a clear description of how the specific activities in the classroom would be beneficial for students interested in becoming historians or getting a taste of what it means to be one. Brint claims that “all of this is possible in a class taught by well-trained and self-reflective teachers, but little or none of it is encouraged in the types of exercises commended by the CLA.”⁶⁶ Therefore, such a class would probably be one of the ones that would end up being restructured in order to address more adequately the skills stressed by the CLA or other standardized assessment. Were this the case, the teacher would have less time to devote to the other things she finds it important to include in a history course, making the course much less valuable for learning about the study of history. This would clearly be problematic because, as Brint points out, “the skills the CLA privileges are no substitute for the mastery of subject matter. The development of higher-order cognitive capacities has always been one of the aims of higher education, but within the context of the variety of distinctive additional skills and understandings required for the mastery of the discipline.”⁶⁷ Without the latter part of this equation, graduates could potentially be more well-versed in “common learning” but would lack the necessary training in their disciplines. Because of this, the adoption of broad-spectrum tests such as the CLA or other assessment methods that the CFHE recommends will not achieve the ends it seeks. Instead, the use of CLA-type assessment would draw focus away from the kind of discipline specific skills that would be useful in advance fields like “science, engineering, medicine, and other knowledge-intensive professions” and push it towards “common knowledge” skills. This would clearly not achieve the kind of preparation for these “key strategic areas”⁶⁸ that the CFHE desires.

While there may be ways to ensure that students learn both the general “common knowledge” skills as well as knowledge in “key strategic areas”—perhaps by implementing two separate tests and dividing courses in to those that specifically address “common knowledge” skills and those that address the “key strategic areas”—the banking approach required by the employment of CLA-type assessment would not successfully promote advancement in the areas it tests. If classrooms were restructured around specifically attempting to promote the “common knowledge” skills, such as “critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem solving, and written communication,” then many lessons and activities would probably focus on working with some form of source material, presumably relevant to the ostensive subject of the course, in a manner that would engage the faculties required in the “common knowledge” skills. It would probably involve teachers demonstrating the processes involved in these skills and activities focused on employing them. While this might outwardly look like the kind of active engagement that Freire suggests is important for genuine learning, it is rather just another form of imitation, “the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher.” It is not the strict regurgitation of facts, as a multiple-choice style test would require, but it still does not bridge the necessary gap to truly involve students’ active inquiry “in the world, with the world, and with each other.” In attempting to promote the “common knowledge” skills, it would still be assumed that the teacher has the knowledge of how to do this and the students are ignorant of these processes and must be instructed. This assumption and process is characteristic of the banking system of education: “the teacher teaches and the students are taught.” When it came time to demonstrate their

‘proficiency’ on standardized assessments, students would merely be mimicking the processes ‘taught’ to them by their instructors.

The imitative process of ‘learning’ that characterizes the banking system explains learning deficits that constantly accompany the implementation of mandatory standardized assessment. As mentioned above, copious research suggests that the accountability measures implemented in primary and secondary education by NCLB, which are very similar to the accountability measures recommended for higher education by the CFHE, have had negative effects on student learning as opposed to positive ones. Particularly, researchers notice “that performance on a high-stakes exam [does] not generalize to other tests for which students have not been specifically prepared,” which “challeng[es] the notion that high-stakes tests cause increases in academic achievement.”⁶⁹ Furthermore, even in instances where tests did reveal supposed improvement in learning outcomes, “the results are not ‘particularly deep or lasting.’ Rather, the results are artificial.”⁷⁰ Freire’s claim that students taught through the banking model can become “collectors or catalogers” of the deposits received from instructors but that they do not learn how to use these deposits in their daily lives outside of the limited, specific, mimetic ‘learning’ environment seems to perfectly explain these findings. The students may be able to demonstrate some level of proficiency on a specific test because they are simply imitating what they have prepared for. When it comes to tests outside of the one they specifically prepared for, however, they have little basis upon which to carry out any kind of effective performance because they have nothing to imitate. Instead, they find themselves at a loss because the banking process

through which they were ‘educated’ did not help them develop the ability to relate what they ‘learn’ to their realities outside of the classroom.

A look at the types of questions addressed in the CLA reveals the fact that, although the tasks may engage active reasoning abilities, they do not move beyond the “alienated and alienating” process that characterizes the banking system of education. A characteristic feature of the banking system of education is its separation from the “existential experience” of the students.⁷¹ Freire explains that in the banking system of education, “the contents of [the teacher’s] narration... are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. The words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity.”⁷² This would be characteristic both of the process of education and of testing required by standardized assessment. The CLA tasks ask students “to answer several open-ended questions about a hypothetical but realistic situation.”⁷³ Though these situations may “[mirror] the requirements of serious thinking and writing tasks faced in life outside the classroom,”⁷⁴ as “hypothetical” situations, they most likely will not represent actual situations that students have much stake in. For example, the samples of tasks given in a discussion of the “Architecture of the CLA Tasks” seem simplistic and detached from students’ realities. One task asks students to make an argument in favor or against the statement “government funding would be better spent on preventing crime than in dealing with criminals after the fact.”⁷⁵ Another asks students to critique the following argument:

The number of marriages that end in divorce keeps growing. A large percentage of them are from June weddings. Because June weddings are so popular, couples

end up being engaged for a long time just so that they can get married in the summer months. The number of divorces gets bigger with each passing year, and the latest news is that more than 1 out of 3 marriages will end in divorce. So, if you want a marriage that lasts forever, it is best to do everything you can to prevent getting divorced. Therefore, it is good advice for young couples to have short engagements and choose a month other than June for a wedding.⁷⁶

In addition to being a simplistic and clearly fallacious argument, an argument that it does not seem likely students would seriously encounter in their lives outside of the educational setting, the argument would seem to have little to do with the “existential experiences” of many students. In another instructive example, the instructions for the prompt on crime prevention asks students to disregard their “personal values and experiences” and focus specifically on the limited information provided in the prompt.⁷⁷ Therefore, instead of asking students to engage in genuine active inquiry that reaches into the world, these tasks ask students to disregard a connection with their world and, rather, to mimic the kind of limited thinking and reasoning ‘taught’ to them in the classroom. As such, in preparation for these standardized assessments, students would most likely encounter similar document-based tasks alienated from their “existential experiences.” Asking students to reason critically about things they have little stake in, though it may be a better way to educate than learning through memorization and regurgitation, still seems a far cry from genuine, collective inquiry between students, teachers, other students, and the world they both live and act in and with.

In addition to the fact that CLA-type assessment and preparation for taking such a test does not engage students in genuine collective inquiry, the CLA tasks themselves and

the assessment of them follow the banking model. The discussion of the “Scoring Criteria” for each of the sample tasks presented by the “Architecture of the CLA Tasks” demonstrates this. The “Architecture of the CLA Tasks” discussion details the “Scoring Criteria” for the divorce argument cited above:

Each Critique-an-Argument response is assessed on the holistic scoring criteria (e.g., critical thinking, writing) as well as recognition and explanation of specific logical flaws in the argument. The logical flaws are prompt-specific; however, they cover a variety of common critical thinking concepts. For this prompt, some examples of logical flaws include: number and proportion are not the same thing... correlation is not causation.⁷⁸

From this description, we can see that the learning outcomes and assessment guidelines are clearly outlined in advance. Assessors of a CLA-type test are looking for very specific concepts and for the student completing the assessment to demonstrate mastery of these concepts. They are checking the deposits to make sure they are sound. The instructions for the task make this clear to the student. They tell the students exactly how their responses will be assessed. The assessment does not ask students to do anything outside of a specific guidelines for the prompt; in fact, it requests that students do not.⁷⁹ This also reveals another way in which the tasks do not genuinely relate to real life situations. They are made up to contain specific logical fallacies that students can demonstrate mastery of, which might be why the arguments sound so ludicrous. Being able to recognize logical fallacies in overly simplistic arguments designed to make those fallacies obvious is not the same as being able to look at, analyze, and respond to complex real-life situations that graduates would encounter in work and the world, which

explains the deficits noticed in students' ability to generalize skills from one test to another.

Based on the above discussion, we can see that the CFHE's recommendations that institutions of higher education adopt rigorous accountability standards for student learning are self-defeating and will not adequately improve student learning.

Accountability standards enforced through standardized assessment may create great mimics, great "collectors or catalogers," but they will not help students become the kind of graduates the CFHE seems to desire. Accountability standards will not create skilled individuals able to boost the nation's "intellectual capital" and "global competitiveness."

Even if accountability standards did achieve these goals, however, the CFHE's recommendations are still problematic—or perhaps more so. As previously addressed, the CFHE seem to hope that their recommendations will help address the class issue in the United States, though they do not express this hope in these terms. The

commissioners hope that "social mobility" will be "accessible to all Americans, throughout their lives,"⁸⁰ which would, ostensibly, seem to allow for "all Americans" to move into the middle- and upper-classes—or at least be able to afford those lifestyles.

Unfortunately, even if stricter accountability measures could help increase student learning, this would not successfully address the implicit goal to address the class issue.

Freire's discussion of the banking system of education sheds helpful light on this flaw

with the CFHE's ideas, as well. As opposed to the mainstream analysis the CFHE

engages in, which focuses on finding minor faults within the current system and

proposing slight modifications to bolster the system, Freire's critical analysis does not

take the system for granted. Instead, Freire's analysis would have us imagine an entirely

different system. This is necessary because it is the current system of higher education itself that causes the inequities in access that the CFHE finds troubling.

As it is, the current system of higher education significantly contributes to some of the inequities that the CFHE finds troubling. The CFHE itself seems to note this fact. Recall statements that one of the major effects of successful graduation from college is access to “social mobility.” In other words, college graduates have a greater potential to move up the socioeconomic ladder than non-graduates. Considering the discrepancies in income between graduates and non-graduates, this is a significant phenomenon. Individuals from lower-class and minority backgrounds have less access to higher education and so less of an opportunity to benefit from “social mobility.” Individuals from the middle- and upper-classes have greater access to higher education and the benefits it bestows. Because of this, the current system perpetuates social stratification. The low stay low, and the high stay high. This is clearly troubling for the CFHE, which is why it stresses the differential access between lower-class and minority individuals and those in the middle- and upper-classes and tries to remedy this problem by proposing increased access through scholarships and grants and using accountability measures to make sure that the money is not wasted and that these new students gain proficiency in the outcomes the CFHE finds important. Even if these reforms were implemented and were effective at temporarily increasing access and ensuring student learning, however, they would still not successfully address the issue of social stratification because they would merely serve to strengthen the current system.

As it is partially the current system of higher education that contributes to social stratification, strengthening that system will only worsen the problem. We can see the

CFHE's intent to strengthen the current system in its conception of the purpose of a higher education and its place within our society. The CFHE conceives of higher education as advantageous because it prepares its graduates to compete in the global economy, to secure successful employment in our capitalist system to create graduates fit to function in the system. This is significant because in order for capitalism to function, it requires an abundance of laborers, whether this is physical labor or intellectual labor. Creating such laborers seems to be the obvious intent of the CFHE. This is especially apparent in passages where it expresses ideas like, "Our colleges and universities will be a key source of the human and intellectual capital needed to increase workforce productivity and growth."⁸¹ In passages such as this, the CFHE reduces human beings to mere resources to be used by a system in the name of a rather abstract idea, "productivity and growth." Essentially, while some of this would probably benefit the workers, in the form of employment and wages, the true benefits of their labor would be external to the workers. As Lankshear reminds us, when thinking about forms of "functional literacy," "We are perfectly justified in asking for whom the literacy in question here is most (or most truly) functional."⁸² While, to some extent, being able to function within society is, as addressed above, a kind of humanizing approach, the fact that, in general, while college graduates are generally well-to-do and well served by their employment, many of the benefits of their employment still flows to the elite few. The true benefits of their labor would be for the interests of others. Even more troubling is the way the CFHE talk about the traditionally underprivileged individuals that they want to grant greater access to. When discussing discrepancies in access, it explains that these discrepancies are worrisome because "the nation will rely on [underserved and nontraditional] groups as a

major source of new workers.”⁸³ In other words, the purpose of helping to improve access to higher education for these underprivileged groups is not only, or even primarily, to help these individuals become anymore self realized but to create better workers for the national economy to compete globally; it is to serve the dominant interests in society.

The CFHE seems to believe that this process of producing more able workers through broader access to higher education would have the effect of helping these individuals move up the socioeconomic ladder and, therefore, address some of its concerns about discrepancies between classes, but even if its recommended reforms were successful and “all Americans” achieved a higher education, this would still not address the class issue that seems implicit in their discussions. Rather than rework the social structure in a way that would allow for a change in socioeconomic dynamics, the CFHE’s recommended reforms would most likely result in what Zumeta and Evans call “credential inflation.”⁸⁴ Essentially, instead of changing society in a way that would drastically affect employment structures and current socioeconomic dynamics, bestowing a college level education on “all Americans” would make college graduation the new baseline upon which employers would make employment decisions. Having a college degree would no longer make an individual stand out, forcing many individuals to pursue even higher levels of education.

Assuming the highly unlikely circumstances of an unlimited job market, however, it is possible that all college graduates could find suitable employment in the new knowledge economy. Were this the case, however, the CFHE’s recommended reforms would still not address socioeconomic divisions. With everyone employed in higher paying jobs, inflation would undoubtedly result, leaving many individuals still struggling

to make ends meet and seeking higher paying jobs. As this would require higher levels of education, it would be more difficult for traditionally underprivileged groups to break into this next level than it would for middle- and upper-class individuals. As such, lower-class individuals would still be underprivileged—whether in actuality, due to inflation, or in comparison to upper-class citizens, who would undoubtedly benefit more from a more robust economy.

Based on the CFHE's outlook and the consequences of its reforms, it makes sense that the reforms the CFHE recommend match the banking model of education.

According to Freire's analysis, the banking system of education is designed to shape individuals into predetermined molds in order to serve the interests of those doing the shaping. He writes, "The more completely [the students] accept the passive role imposed on them [by the banking system], the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is."⁸⁵ Those in charge of the system seek to do this because it is beneficial for them, even if it looks like it will benefit the oppressed. As such, the veiled humanizing goals underlying the CFHE represent a form of false generosity, and its recommendations represent a form of oppression. Freire explains, "Pedagogy which begins with the egoistic interests of the oppressors (an egoism cloaked in the false generosity of paternalism) and makes of the oppressed the objects of its humanitarianism, itself maintains and embodies oppression. It is an instrument of dehumanization."⁸⁶

Furthermore, "The capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students' creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed. The oppressors use their 'humanitarianism' to preserve a profitable situation."⁸⁷ Because the banking system

programs students to work within an oppressive situation, a situation profitable to the upper class, it seems like the perfect method of instruction to create “the human and intellectual capital needed to increase workforce productivity and growth” that the CFHE finds important. It prevents students from realizing their potential to create and change their world and, instead, causes them to accept current structures as they are and strengthens their capacities to work within that system for the benefit of the masters of it. Freire elaborates, “The interests of the oppressors lie in ‘changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them’; for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated. To achieve this end, the oppressors use the banking concept of education.”⁸⁸ By “changing the consciousness of the oppressed,” the banking system produces individuals unaware of their oppression who will willfully serve the beneficiaries of capitalism.

This is a bastardization of the educational process, according to Freire. The true purpose of education, for Freire, is “to undermine the power of oppression and serve the cause of liberation”⁸⁹ through a collaborative effort between teachers and students in an effort to help both realize themselves as individuals thinking and acting with and within a dynamic reality that they have the power to change. In this way, true education honors people as individuals and as actors with the world. It is a humanizing process; it empowers individuals and helps both teachers and students to come to a better understanding of the world and how to change it. The banking system of education, however, does the opposite. As discussed above, it limits opportunities for individuals and programs them to accept the world the way it is; it is characterized by “the effort to turn women and men into automatons—the very negation of their ontological vocation to

be more fully human.”⁹⁰ While this may work out well for the oppressors, it is dehumanizing to both parties,⁹¹ especially for the oppressed because it does not honor their dignity as human actors.

Therefore, while we can see why it might make sense for the CFHE to propose reforms that take the shape of the banking system of education, a closer look reveals that it fails on many levels. Not only is the overall approach it takes and the way it conceives of higher education and how it fits into our society troubling because it does not respect the dignity of human beings, the reforms it proposes fail on their own terms. Instituting strict accountability measures in the form of high-stakes standardized assessment would not successfully improve student learning and, in fact, would result in further deficits in students’ college educations. For one, it would unduly restrict the breadth of knowledge that could be gained in colleges and universities by narrowing course curricula. Even if it restricted this breadth of knowledge to fields that the CFHE finds beneficial, such as technical skills in “science, engineering, medicine,” etc., combined with “common knowledge” skills, such as “critical thinking, writing and problem-solving skills,” the proposed reforms would still fail to improve these skills. Even if they did succeed at these levels, however, producing more educated individuals to work within the current economic system would not address the concern for traditionally underprivileged individuals that features prominently in many of the CFHE’s discussions of deficits in higher education. In order to truly address this problem, we need a revolutionary approach that will not work to strengthen the current system but that will help students and teachers alike to realize ways to change the system, to allow them to conceive of how their world functions and realize potential alternatives, while empowering them to effect

these changes. In the following chapter, I offer a discussion of such a revolutionary pedagogy by turning to Freire's own solution to the banking system of education.

§3: Notes

¹ U.S. Department of Education, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, (Washington, D.C., 2006), xii-xiii.

² *Ibid.*, 7, cf. 1.

³ *Ibid.*, x.

⁴ *Ibid.*, xii [italics in original].

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, x.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 13.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 14, 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

²¹ Ibid., 22.

²² Ibid., 24.

²³ Ibid., 4.

²⁴ Ibid., 21.

²⁵ Ibid., 22.

²⁶ Ibid., 3.

²⁷ Gary W Peterson and Robert G Stakenas, "Performance-Based Education: Method for Preserving Quality, Equal Opportunity and the Economy in Public Higher Education," *The Journal of Higher Education* 52, no. 4 (1981): 355, <http://www.jstor.org/>.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ U.S. Department of Education, *A Test of Leadership*, 25.

³⁰ Ibid., 2.

³¹ Ibid., 3.

³² Ibid., 27.

³³ Ibid., 24 [italics added].

³⁴ Ibid., 23-24.

³⁵ Ibid., 23.

³⁶ Steven Brint, "The Spellings Commission and the Case for Professionalizing College Teaching," *Academe Online* 94, no. 3 (2008), <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2008/MJ/Feat/brin.htm>.

³⁷ U.S. Department of Education, *A Test of Leadership*, xi.

³⁸ Brint, "Spellings Commission."

³⁹ Edward C Fletcher, Jr., "No Curriculum Left behind: The Effects of No Child Left Behind Legislation on Career and Technical Education," *Career and Technical Education Research* 31, no. 3 (2006): 157-174, <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/>; Daniel M Koretz and others, "The Effects of High-Stakes Testing on Achievement: Preliminary Findings about Generalization across Tests," <http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/HighStakesTesting.pdf>; Wayne E Wright, "The Effects of High Stakes Testing in an Inner-City Elementary School: the Curriculum, the Teachers, and the English Language Learners," *Current Issues in Education* 5, no. 5 (2002), <http://cie.asu.edu/volume5/number5/>.

⁴⁰ Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux, *Education Still under Siege*, 2nd ed Critical Studies in Education and Culture, ed. Henry A Giroux and Paulo Freire (Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey, 1993), 2.

⁴¹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2009), 44.

⁴² Ira Shor, "Education Is Politics: Paulo Freire's Critical pedagogy," in *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, ed. Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard (New York: Routledge, 1993), 26.

⁴³ Freire, *Oppressed*, 44.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 71 [italics in original].

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 72 (and elsewhere).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 72.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁵⁶ U.S. Department of Education, *A Test of Leadership*, 24.

⁵⁷ Brint, "Spellings Commission."

⁵⁸ Collegiate Learning Assessment, "Architecture of the CLA Tasks," 1, http://www.collegiatelearningassessment.org/files/Architecture_of_the_CLA_Tasks.pdf.

⁵⁹ Roger Benjamin and Marc Chun, "Returning to Learning in an Age of Assessment: A Synopsis of the Argument," Collegiate Learning Assessment (2009), 2, <http://www.collegiatelearningassessment.org/files/ReturningToLearningSynopsis.pdf>.

⁶⁰ Brint, "Spellings Commission."

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Wright, "Effects of High-Stakes Testing."

⁶³ *Ibid.* Fletcher notices similar effects on curricula ("No Curriculum Left behind").

⁶⁴ Kathryn Ecclestone, "Empowering or Ensnaring?: The Implications of Outcome-based Assessment in Higher Education," *Higher Education Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (1999): 43, <http://www.ebscohost.com/>.

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- ⁶⁵ Brint, "Spellings Commission."
- ⁶⁶ Ibid.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid.
- ⁶⁸ U.S. Department of Education, *A Test of Leadership*, 27.
- ⁶⁹ Wright, "Effects of High-Stakes Testing."
- ⁷⁰ Ibid.
- ⁷¹ Freire, *Oppressed*, 71.
- ⁷² Ibid.
- ⁷³ Collegiate Learning Assessment, "Architecture," 2.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., 1.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid., 20.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid., 26.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., 10.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid., 26.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid., 10.
- ⁸⁰ U.S. Department of Education, *A Test of Leadership*, xi.
- ⁸¹ Ibid., 7.
- ⁸² Colin Lankshear, "Functional Literacy from a Freirean Point of View," in *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, ed. Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard (New York: Routledge, 1993), 104.
- ⁸³ U.S. Department of Education, *A Test of Leadership*, 8.
- ⁸⁴ William Zumeta and Daniel Evans, "Does the U.S. Need More College Graduates to Remain a World Class Economic Power?" *Education and the Economy*, Miller Center of Public Affairs, 12, http://millercenter.org/public/debates/ed_econ.
- ⁸⁵ Freire, *Oppressed*, 73.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid., 54.
- ⁸⁷ Ibid., 73.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid., 74.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 75.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 74.

⁹¹ Ibid., 44.

CHAPTER III

PAULO FREIRE, CRITICAL PEDAGOGY, AND LIBERATORY PRAXIS

Based on the critique of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education and the concept of accountability in the forms of mandatory high-stakes standardized testing offered in Chapter II, it becomes clear that if we truly want an educational system that not only successfully educates students but also provides open access to all individuals, including traditionally underprivileged groups, and that serves to promote human well-being and empower individuals, then we need a model different from the one the CFHE presents. Considering how closely the suggestions of the CFHE fit the banking model of education discussed by Paulo Freire and how well the banking model explains both potential and existing problems with educational programs focused on learning outcomes tested by high-stakes assessment, it seems reasonable to look to his own solution to the banking system for pointers on a system of education better situated to address current deficits in higher education. As the following pages will demonstrate, Freire's philosophy developed out of radically different conditions than those present in the United States and with a concern for individuals starkly unlike those in higher education in the US. Considering the radically different context in which Freire wrote, the task of developing a form of Freirean pedagogy applicable to higher education in the United States will involve careful consideration and adaptation, not mere transplantation. I will address this in much greater depth in Chapter IV and Chapter V. In the hopes of proposing a critical pedagogy specific to the United States that remains faithful to Freire's project and his philosophies despite this change of context, however, it seems important to begin with a solid understanding of Freire and his philosophy on its own

terms. This chapter attempts to develop this foundation by beginning with an understanding of Freire himself and some of the existential, ontological, metaphysical, and political commitments that inform his pedagogy. With his commitments as a backdrop, the second section turns to the specific practices Freire advocates as a solution to the banking system of education.

§1: Paulo Freire: The Man and His Philosophy

In order to understand better Paulo Freire's philosophy and liberatory pedagogy, it seems useful to know a little about his history, experiences, and the origin of his philosophies, especially since his philosophy stresses the importance of history and context. Freire was born in Recife, Brazil in 1921 to a middle-class family. He enjoyed a relatively happy and easy childhood until the economic effects of the Great Depression struck his area of northeast Brazil in 1929. During the next few years, Freire became intimately acquainted with poverty and hunger. Economic hardships forced his family to move to Jaboatão when he was 10, and three years later, his father died. This resulted in the postponement of his schooling while he looked after his family.

These experiences began to teach Freire about the deep connection between socioeconomics and education. Regarding his experiences with hunger and poverty, Freire says, "I wanted very much to study, but I couldn't as our economic condition didn't allow me to. I tried to read or pay attention in the classroom, but I didn't understand anything because of my hunger. I wasn't dumb. It wasn't lack of interest. My social condition didn't allow me to have an education."¹ His hunger, combined with

his family's struggles after his father's death, interfered with his education to the point that, when he returned to school, he was several years behind. His classmates were four or five years younger than himself and also of a clearly higher socioeconomic class—"well-dressed, well-fed, and... from homes which had a certain culture"²—characteristics Freire himself could not claim. He felt intimidated by the age difference and "was afraid of asking questions in class" because he was not more advanced than his younger classmates.³ As Freire points out in the quote above, lack of innate ability or interest did not interfere with his education; only his financial circumstances did.

Freire not only felt the connection between socioeconomic status and education in his own experiences, he also encountered it in his interactions with others. During his teens, Freire played pickup soccer games with children his own age and younger from families even worse off than his. During these interactions, he noticed further differences between these individuals and himself and his classmates. He found that they spoke and expressed themselves differently. He later calls this "the grammar of the people, the language of the people."⁴ Freire also taught grammar during this time, and his experiences in the street combined with his study of the philosophy of language caused him to intuitively pursue a form of dialogic education.⁵ Later in his youth, Freire left teaching for a brief stint practicing law. He quickly abandoned it, however, when confronted with the harsh realities of the system. He became aware of the injustices in the legal system during a crystallizing interaction with a young dentist. The dentist was unable to pay the debts owed to his creditor, for whom Freire worked, but had to incur the debt because he was "legally required to have certain instruments in order to practice dentistry."⁶ The dentist could not afford the equipment but needed it in order to work to

provide for his family. Since he could not do without the equipment, he offered his furniture in exchange. Freire did not feel he could act in the interests of his employer and deprive the young dentist of his domestic trappings. So, “realiz[ing] the injustice of the legal system for the weak,”⁷ he announced his intention to the dentist to resign, which, he points out, caught the dentist by surprise.⁸ Elza, Freire’s wife at the time, could see Freire’s exodus from law coming and, when he told her about the incident and his decision to “[abandon] the practice of law for good,” she responded: “I was hoping for that. You’re an educator.”⁹ At that point, Freire pursued education, working primarily with illiterate peasant families.

Even at this early stage, Freire’s pedagogy contained something of the political. As Peter Mayo points out, Freire’s work “stress[ed] the link between education and politics and... enable[d] people to read not only the word but also the world.”¹⁰ While working with working-class families and “studying the relationships between pupils, teachers, and parents,” Freire noticed that elitist and idealistic approaches to education resulted in learning deficits in the pupils.¹¹ This led him to rethink the existing methods and advocate for, and eventually implement, a different model. This new model began by attempting to understand the existential concerns of the pupils before imposing a method of teaching on them. Freire had great success with this method, demonstrated by early experiments with it in 1962, during which “three hundred rural farm workers were taught how to read and write in forty-five days” while they were encouraged to “participate in the construction of a Brazil where they would be responsible for their own destiny and where colonialism would be overcome.”¹² This approach “caught the attention of the Federal Minister of Education,”¹³ which resulted in Freire taking part in

the planning of a nationwide literacy campaign. This campaign never saw full implementation, however, because it was interrupted by a military coup in 1964. Freire's political approach to adult literacy did not impress the new regime. As a result, he was imprisoned for 70 days and eventually deported from Brazil. Freire was not allowed to return to Brazil until 1979 and did so in 1980.

Freire's years of exile took him all over the world and broadened his theoretical and practical perspectives. Some of the places he worked include Chile, the United States, Europe, and Africa. During this time, Freire also encountered texts and ideas that bolstered the theoretical underpinnings for his pedagogical practices. Some of these included Marxist writers, including Marx himself.¹⁴ Freire's own writing reveals a strong influence from these Marxist sources, particularly Marx's notion of ideology, theory of consciousness, thoughts on alienation, and discussions of class. Freire also wrote and published his own work while taking his practices around the globe. He published *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* early in his exile, in 1968. According to his own reflections, it represents the culmination of the theoretical and practical work he had done up to that point.* As such, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is a rich, complex work, in which Freire not only discusses his pedagogy, but also elaborates on, or alludes to, several other significant philosophical themes, including his ontology. It is a political, programmatic text. But it is also deeply philosophical and draws from a variety of sources and traditions. As Carlos Alberto Torres points out, "Freire's... works have philosophical assumptions which reflect an integrated synthesis of most of the main advanced streams of philosophical thought, including Existentialism, Phenomenology, Hegelian dialectics,

* Freire discusses this in several places in *Pedagogy of Hope*, e.g. 4, 10.

and historical materialism.”¹⁵ Freire’s thought also reflects insights from Marxism, philosophy of dialogue, and even psychoanalytic theory.¹⁶ This makes it a prime resource through which to develop an understanding of Freire’s philosophy and practice.

In sticking with Freire’s commitment to the education and liberation of oppressed groups, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* discusses the connections between oppression, education, and revolutionary action. As mentioned above, this discussion is more than simply programmatic. It takes a close, careful look at the theoretical and philosophical aspects of oppression, education, and liberation, while seriously considering what it means to be human and how oppression, education, and liberation affect our humanity. According to Ronald Glass’ discussion of “the philosophical foundations of Freire’s view of liberation and education,”¹⁷ “Freire argued that liberation, oppression, and their interrelation are contingent facts, while from an ontological point of view, human historicity marks precisely the possibility to choose one way of life or another.”¹⁸ In other words, although we must accept the existence of oppression and the potential for liberation as concrete facts, our capacities as a particular kind of being allow us to actively choose between continuing oppression or working for liberation. Since, as human beings, “freedom can never be eliminated from [our] existence,”¹⁹ only the latter choice remains faithful to our humanity. As such, Freire believes that working for liberation is our humanizing vocation, meaning that it is the destiny towards which human beings struggle.* As Glass’ comments above suggest, however, while humanization may be our historical vocation, it is not the only possibility human beings

* Freire, *Oppressed*, 44. Though Freire occasionally speaks of humanization as our “destiny,” we should not understand “destiny” as a specific state to be achieved because, as Freire makes clear, and as I will address later in this chapter, humanization is an ongoing process—a praxis, not a state or condition.

can choose. Human beings can also choose to negate their historical vocation to become more fully human by continuing or furthering oppression.²⁰ This negation results in the concrete existence of oppression and the dehumanization it expresses, which, though it “occurs within history... is not an historical vocation.”²¹ These two possibilities, humanization and dehumanization, represent the only options available for human action,^{*} but as Freire makes clear, only the former is our destiny. The latter “is *not* a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed.”²² The oppressed are not the only group dehumanized by oppression, however. Freire explains, “Dehumanization... marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also those who have stolen it.”²³ Although oppression dehumanizes the oppressors in a different way than it dehumanizes the oppressed, oppression “is a *distortion* of the vocation of becoming more fully human” that affects both oppressors and the oppressed.²⁴ Because of the contradiction between liberation—which, as humanization, seeks to honor the humanity of all—and oppression—which, as dehumanization, denies full humanity—Freire begins *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* with the claim, “the problem of humanization has always... been humankind’s central problem.... Concern for humanization leads at once to the recognition of dehumanization, not only as an ontological possibility but as an historical reality.”²⁵ The acknowledgment of the existence of dehumanization and oppression, which is its concrete representation, seems to lead Freire to ask the implicit question that he addresses in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: if humanization is our historical vocation,

* Glass also points out that “the struggle [to be free] is necessary because [our given] situation contains not only this possibility for humanization, but also for dehumanization” (“Philosophy of Praxis,” 16).

how can we best ensure that we engage in this process as opposed to dehumanization; how can we best do away with oppression and its accompanying dehumanization? Before turning to Freire's answer to this question, however, it seems important to spend some time further developing his account of humanization and what it means to participate in the historical vocation to become more fully human and how oppression interrupts that vocation, especially because, as Stanley Aronowitz points out, "Freire's pedagogy is grounded in a fully developed philosophical anthropology, that is, a theory of human nature."²⁶

Although Freire occasionally discusses humanity in terms of human 'being,' his ontology is really one of 'becoming.' As Aronowitz points out, "There is reference [in Freire] to see life not as a static state of being but as a process of *becoming*."²⁷ Freire's commitment to an ontology of becoming shows up most frequently in his discussions of *human becoming*, but it has broader implications than just for humans. For instance, Freire defines oppression as follows: "Any situation in which 'A' objectively exploits 'B' or hinders his and [sic] her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression. Such a situation in itself constitutes violence... because it interferes with the individual's ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human."²⁸ As his language in this passage and elsewhere demonstrates, Freire believes that being "fully human" represents not a state to achieve, but rather a "pursuit" or a "vocation." This "pursuit" or "vocation" arises out of the broader context of Freire's ontology, however. In the same sentence in which he points out that humans are "beings in the process of *becoming*... unfinished, uncompleted beings," he makes it clear that we become "in and with a likewise unfinished reality."²⁹ Similarly, "other animals... are unfinished."³⁰ As

Freire's discussion of humans, the world, and non-human animals reveals, the entire world reality that we inhabit is unfinished, uncompleted, and in the process of becoming. Therefore, we should "see the world not as a static reality but as a reality in the process of transformation."³¹

Although the entire world reality is unfinished, uncompleted, and in the process of becoming and transforming, humans occupy a privileged place in this ontology. Only humans are "historical." According to Freire's ontology, nonhuman animals act within the world but do not consider their actions abstractly; they "live in a setting which they cannot transcend."³² In other words, they cannot understand themselves as separate from the world, so their actions represent non-conscious responses to present situations. Humans, on the other hand, "know themselves to be unfinished" and "are aware of their incompleteness."³³ This awareness comprises an essential part of human becoming because it allows humans the capacity to "emerge from the world, objectify it, and in so doing... understand it and transform it with their labor."³⁴ As Glass explains further:

For Freire, what is crucially important is that humans are animals that operate not only from reflex, habit, or even intelligent creative response; they are animals that exist meaningfully in and with the world of history and culture that humans themselves have produced. ...the essentially defining ontological feature of being human is that people produce history and culture, even as history and culture produce them.³⁵

In other words, our consciousness of ourselves as incomplete and in the process of becoming allows us to abstract ourselves from the world and conceive of the ways in which our realities influence our actions and our actions influence our realities. Freire

calls this process “reflection.” Furthermore, Freire believes that “true reflection... leads to action”³⁶ because by allowing us to conceive of the role our actions play in creating our own realities, reflection enables us to conceive of ways of consciously transforming our realities according to our desires, leading us to work to effect the desired changes. As Glass explains, when humans properly understand their historicity, “They see that life (including themselves) could be different, and the more clearly they discern *why* things (and themselves) are as they are and *how* they could be otherwise, the more effective their interventions can be to enable greater self- and community-realization.”³⁷ Freire calls this combination of reflection and transformative action “praxis” and claims that it represents a defining human characteristic, that humans are “beings of the *praxis*.”³⁸ Praxis requires both action and reflection because, without reflection, action “is converted into *activism*”—reflex, habit, or instinct—and reflection without action is “*verbalism*”—“idle chatter... an alienated and alienating ‘blah.’”^{*} We alone are historical beings participating in the vocation of becoming more fully human, then, because through praxis, which “consists of action and reflection,”³⁹ we can conceive of how past actions have created our realities, how future actions will transform those realities, and can work to produce this transformation.

Importantly, for Freire, this humanizing vocation cannot take place in isolation because it requires cooperation and active participation from all individuals, and in this belief, we can see Freire’s commitment to dialogue. As Mayo points out, “Freire argued

* Freire, *Oppressed*, 87-88 [italics in original]. Glass further stresses the importance of praxis as a distinguishing human characteristic: “Freire's theory was based on an ontological argument that posited praxis as a central defining feature of human life and a necessary condition of freedom. Freire contended that human nature is expressed through intentional, reflective, meaningful activity situated within dynamic historical and cultural contexts that shape and set limits on that activity” (“Philosophy of Praxis,” 16).

that one engages in the task of becoming more fully human not on one's own (it is not an individualistic endeavor) but in solidarity with others."⁴⁰ Freire's notion of dialogue and its role in praxis reveals why this is the case. As noted above, human praxis will constantly transform and re-create the world, and dialogue is an essential part of this distinctly human process. As Gadotti explains, "For Paulo Freire, dialogue is part of human nature. Human beings are constructed through dialogue as they are essentially communicative. There is no human progress without dialogue. For Paulo Freire, the moment of the dialogue is the moment when men meet to transform reality and progress."⁴¹ Essentially, it is through dialogue that humans are able to participate in praxis. Freire explains, "To exist humanly is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*."⁴² Praxis, and the dialogue it requires, is a cyclical and ongoing process. As the world is transformed, new problems and relations will arise that will need addressing, will need new designations. In this sense, "there is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world."⁴³ True words, and their transformative power, require more than monologue. Freire explains:

But while to say the true word—which is work, which is praxis—is to transform the world, saying that word is not the privilege of some few persons, but the right of everyone. Consequently no one can say a true word alone—nor can she say it *for* another, in a prescriptive act which robs others of their words.

Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world.⁴⁴

A couple important aspects of humanizing praxis and dialogue stand out in this passage. First of all, our humanizing praxis is not a solitary endeavor carried out by a singular individual or an exclusive group of individuals. Rather, as suggested above, it is a cooperative, dialogic encounter that includes all people and all perspectives speaking for themselves. It is “an encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized.”⁴⁵ It is an encounter in which the participants objectify the world and dialogue about their reflections on it. Gadotti claims, “We need each other to discover. Discovery is a social process, and dialogue is the cement of this process.”⁴⁶ Without the social aspects of dialogue, we cannot sufficiently reflect on the world. Secondly, as just noted, it involves more than a dyadic relationship; it is “mediated by the world.” As McLaren summarizes, “Freire believe[s] that the ongoing production of the social world through dialogue occurs in dialectical interplay with the structural features of society.”⁴⁷ The praxis required to transform the world requires mediation by the world because such a mediation gives the dialoguers something to dialogue about, something to reflect on and work to change. As each reflects on the world, each will do so from a slightly different perspective. Bringing these perspectives together allows participants in the dialogue to “‘re-consider’ through the ‘consideration’ of others, their own previous ‘consideration.’”⁴⁸ This “re-consideration” allows the dialoguers to conceive more adeptly their reality and how their actions have influenced and can transform and re-create that reality. Without the engaged, active participation of all parties, directed towards the world that mediates them, humanizing praxis cannot take place. Therefore, “dialogue is... an existential necessity” because “if it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world,

transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings.”⁴⁹ Dialogue, and the praxis—reflection and action—bound up in it, is a necessary component of our pursuit to become more fully human.

Oppressive situations interrupt our humanizing vocation by preventing individuals from participating in praxis and dialogue. In doing so, concrete instances of oppression result in the dehumanization of both sides of the oppressive relationship. As discussed above, praxis requires not only the constant acknowledgment of the incompleteness of the world but also constant work to change it. In defining human praxis, Freire explains that “it is transformation of the world.”⁵⁰ When humans no longer labor to transform their world in a way that honors the humanity of all individuals, they no longer participate in praxis. As Glass explains, “Dehumanization,” which is the abstract representation of content create instances of oppression, “makes people objects of history and culture, and denies their capacity to also be self-defining subjects creating history and culture.”⁵¹ It prevents humans from reflecting on their realities and from working to change them. While, as we have seen above, praxis requires us to reflect on our reality—requires the ability to “emerge from the world [and] objectify it”—Freire explains that “oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings’ consciousnesses.”⁵² In other words, oppressive situations prevent human beings from emerging from the world and perceiving their actions abstractly. In this sense, oppression prevents reflection, which prevents individuals from conceiving of themselves historically—conceiving of how their past actions have influenced their current reality and how their current and future action could transform their reality. Without the capacity of reflection, transformative action becomes impossible. While Freire

repeatedly claims that oppressive situations dehumanize both the oppressed and the oppressors, it seems from Freire's discussion that dehumanization arises differently in the oppressed than it does in the oppressors.

On the side of the oppressed, dehumanization happens through force, by the oppressor forcing him- or herself on the oppressed. Freire writes:

One of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is *prescription*. Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness. Thus, the behavior of the oppressed is prescribed behavior, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor.⁵³

The activity of the oppressed can be overtly prescribed, of course, through explicit violence or other coercive means, such as economic necessity. It can also be prescribed by self-censorship, however. As Freire explains, "The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom. ...[they] have adapted to the structure of domination in which they are immersed, and have become resigned to it."⁵⁴ In other words, in order to avoid overt violence, the oppressed will internalize the consciousness of the oppressor and behave according to the oppressor's prescriptions and act as their own oppressor. By circumscribing human behavior—whether through overt, explicit violence or the internalization of the oppressor's consciousness—oppressive situations transform the human praxis of the oppressed into animal activity, as discussed above, by binding it to a world that it cannot reflect on appropriately or conceive of ways to transform.

While it seems relatively clear how oppressive situations dehumanize the oppressed, it is slightly difficult to conceive of how they dehumanize the oppressors. Freire himself does not seem to discuss this much, though he repeats it often throughout *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Aronowitz provides slightly more insight into this phenomenon when he suggests that “as oppressors of their fellow humans, the ‘dominant elites’ lose their humanity, are no longer capable of representing the general will to complete the project of humanization.”⁵⁵ In other words, their dehumanization occurs not necessarily due to a force exerted on them from the outside or that they have internalized, as is the case with the oppressed, but rather it is their unwillingness to work with the oppressed in the pursuit of the humanization of all that dehumanizes them. On the one hand, it seems that the oppressors might very well have the ability to conceive of how human actions have made their reality and how they can continue to influence that reality. The oppressors might use this capacity to continue to change the world to continue profiting from the oppression of others. They might also use it to apparently better the situation of the oppressed. Because “the oppressors use their ‘humanitarianism’ to preserve a profitable situation”⁵⁶—meaning that when they appear to help the oppressed, they do so only in order to further their own interests—however, the oppressors are not participating in true praxis when they change the world to better themselves. The concrete conditions of oppression are not changed in this case, only slightly modified, perhaps even strengthened. Furthermore, this kind of transformation does not honor the cooperative and inclusive commitments of humanizing dialogue. As discussed above, such a dialogue is imperative for human praxis to take place, and Freire explains, “dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those

who do not wish this naming—between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them.”⁵⁷ In other words, any action that creates a contradiction between “those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming,” between the oppressed and the oppressors, denies true dialogue, the true word, and human praxis. Instead, it represents the very unwillingness to “complete the project of humanization” that Aronowitz discusses. As such, it is necessarily dehumanizing. The fact that oppression is dehumanizing not only for the oppressed, but also for the oppressors, is an important point that I will take up in Chapter IV. It is in this context of the widespread existence of oppression and its accompanying dehumanization in both the oppressed and oppressor groups that Freire takes up the issue of how best to combat oppression and dehumanization.

Freire’s treatment of oppression and dehumanization leads him to analyze revolutionary action, which he believes necessary for combating oppression. Perhaps most notably, Freire notices the implicit pedagogical nature of any revolutionary action. Freire writes, “The revolutionary leaders of every epoch who have affirmed that the oppressed must accept the struggle for their liberation—an obvious point—have also thereby implicitly recognized the pedagogical aspect of this struggle.”⁵⁸ Here, Freire draws on other revolutionaries’ beliefs that the oppressed must necessarily take part in the struggle for their own liberation. In order for this to come about, however, the oppressed must somehow realize that they are oppressed and that, as a large class, they have the ability to revolt against those who oppressed them. This can be difficult, however, since, as mentioned above, oppressive situations have the tendency to submerge individuals consciousnesses. Therefore, the oppressed must be ‘taught’ to understand

their oppression and their ability to change it. As they must ‘learn’ this, Freire simply points out what these other thinkers seem to acknowledge implicitly: that revolutionary action is pedagogical—it requires some form of learning, of education. Recall that, as pointed out in the Introduction, Freire believes that only two forms of education exist: (1) the kind that reinforces oppression, the banking system, which I discussed in the previous chapter; and (2) the kind that promotes liberation, which, as I will discuss presently, Freire calls the “problem-posing” method. These conclusions, that revolutionary action is inherently pedagogical and that there are only two pedagogical systems, guide Freire in the proposals he makes for the only form of revolutionary action that he believes honors the oppressed as humans and truly serves to liberate them.

Though, as mentioned above, Freire embraces and makes use of many Marxist ideas, he takes issue with Marxist thinkers who advocate for what he calls an “activist” approach to revolution. Lenin, for example, argues for a clandestine, vanguard party of revolutionary leaders that would guide the actions of the proletariat.⁵⁹ Similarly, Aronowitz claims that Lukács, also, “in his tribute to Lenin, endorses the role of the political vanguard to ‘explain’ the nature of the oppression to the masses.”⁶⁰ Lenin advocates for a clandestine party because of restrictions on open socialist action in his context, such as widespread anti-socialist sentiment, threats from a secret police force, and other conditions that made open organization dangerous. While Freire is aware of these concerns and sympathetic to them,^{*} he believes that activism is the wrong approach. As Aronowitz explains, “In fact, despite occasional and approving references to Lenin,

* In the footnotes, Freire acknowledges that revolutionary action should not occur “in the open, of course; that would only provoke the fury of the oppressor and lead to still greater repression [sic]” (Freire, *Oppressed*, 65, note 24).

Freire enters a closely reasoned argument against vanguardism.”⁶¹ Freire believes vanguardism will not inspire genuine revolution because it fits the banking model of education too closely. He writes, “[revolutionary] leaders cannot utilize the banking method as an interim measure, justified on grounds of expediency, with the intention of *later* behaving in a genuinely revolutionary fashion. They must be revolutionary—that is to say, dialogical—from the outset.”⁶² As such, “Critical and liberating dialogue... must be carried out with the oppressed at whatever stage of their struggle for liberation.”⁶³ In other words, even with the potential danger of violent oppression, revolutionary activity must take the form of a “critical and liberating dialogue” between the oppressed and any party claiming to fight with them for their liberation. Anything less would be merely exchanging one oppressive situation for another, though the specific conditions of that oppression may change significantly.

As mentioned above, Freire believes that an authentic revolution cannot be carried out on behalf of the oppressed, such as by a vanguard revolutionary party, but, instead, must be carried out with them as active, engaged agents because anything short of “critical and liberating dialogue” with the oppressed is merely a form of propaganda, which is a form of oppression, even if carried out with the best intentions. Freire explains:

The correct method for a revolutionary leadership to employ in the task of liberation is... *not* “libertarian propaganda.” Nor can the leadership merely “implant” in the oppressed a belief in freedom, thus thinking to win their trust. ... The conviction of the oppressed that they must fight for liberation is not a gift

bestowed by the revolutionary leadership, but the result of their own *conscientização*.⁶⁴

In other words, the oppressed must come to their *own* realization that they need to fight for their liberation and through this realization, come to understand better the conditions that oppress them and how to change them. This awareness is called “critical consciousness,” derived from Freire’s term *conscientização*, a Portuguese word he coined and that translator Myra Bergman Ramos explains concisely as “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.”* Since Freire seeks to liberate individuals by empowering them to change the circumstances of their oppression, perceiving and questioning those circumstances represents an essential step in the endeavor. This perceiving and questioning of circumstances is precisely the process involved in the reflection aspect of human praxis. As Gadotti elaborates, Freire believes that “the act of questioning is tied to the act of existing, of being, of studying, of building, of researching, of knowing. ... we should always continue to question, as asking is the essence of the act of knowing.”⁶⁵ As discussed above, the reflections resulting from this perceiving and questioning motivates action to work for liberation. Freire explains further the need for the oppressed to develop critical consciousness and participate in their own liberation:

If true commitment to the people, involving the transformation of the reality by which they are oppressed, requires a theory of transforming action, this theory

* Myra Bergman Ramos quoted in Freire, *Oppressed*, 35. Freire later chooses to abandon this term, but its goal and the process to which it refers remains an integral part of his philosophy and features heavily throughout his writing (Freire in Escobar and others *on Higher Education*, 46; Gadotti, *Reading Paulo Freire*, 85).

cannot fail to assign the people a fundamental role in the transformation process. The leaders cannot treat the oppressed as mere activists to be denied the opportunity of reflection and allowed merely the illusion of acting, whereas in fact they would continue to be manipulated—and in this case by the presumed foes of manipulation.⁶⁶

Merely using the oppressed as a force to bring about changes predetermined by a revolutionary party denies the oppressed genuine participation in social change. Instead, it seeks to manipulate them for the interests of others, which is not liberation but further oppression.

A brief comparison with the banking system of education further reveals the oppressive characteristics of the activist approach to revolution, which revolutionary parties often employ for the sake of expediency. In the passages cited above, we can see the banking aspects of the activist approach to revolution in its tendency to “implant” ideas in the oppressed, to manipulate them for predetermined ends, and to give them “the illusion of acting.” As Freire explains further, activism adopts the methods of domination and oppression—“manipulation, sloganizing, ‘depositing,’ regimentation, and prescription”—and dichotomizes human praxis into a group of thinkers and a group of doers: revolutionary leaders and the oppressed, respectively.⁶⁷ This approach is carried out *on behalf of* or *for* the oppressed.⁶⁸ It is the attempt to “impart” information or consciousness on them, the attempt to convert them to a particular way of thinking. As discussed in the previous chapter, these are all distinctive characteristics of the banking system of education. Recall that the banking system seeks to change the consciousness

of the students/oppressed.* Its dehumanizing attitude shows up in the way it treats students as passive objects. It treats their 'activity' as bounded to the context of predetermined outcomes chosen by the teacher, or in this case, the revolutionary leaders. In this sense, this 'activity' resembles animal activity rather than human praxis. The activist approach is doomed to fail to help individuals develop the critical consciousness necessary for genuine revolutionary action because it employs the oppressive tactics of the banking system, even when supposedly carried out on behalf of the oppressed.⁶⁹

Not only does the activist approach to revolutionary action fail because it imposes its own form of oppression, it is also a shortsighted approach that lacks information and perspectives necessary to bring about a genuine revolution. The implicit understanding in the banking system used by activist leaders suggests that the teachers/leaders are the ones with the knowledge and the students/oppressed are completely ignorant. This is entirely false in the case of oppressive reality because, as Freire explains, the organic experiences of the oppressed contain the clearest expression of the conditions that oppressed them,⁷⁰ making the oppressed the most knowledgeable about these conditions. This means that revolutionary leaders organizing in an activist fashion would not even possess an adequate understanding of the oppression they are supposedly combating because their approach would not give them access to the knowledge of these conditions possessed by the oppressed. Furthermore, ignoring this information would result in an inadequate understanding of the needs of the oppressed. If revolutionary leaders want to bring about a genuine revolution, according to Freire, they not only need to implement methods that respect the humanity of the oppressed by engaging them as active agents in

* See Chapter II page 69.

the struggle for liberation, they also require the information that the oppressed hold in their experiences of their oppression in order to understand those conditions and work with the oppressed to change them.

Bringing together the themes from above, Freire suggests that, in order to help the oppressed develop the critical consciousness necessary for their participation in a genuine revolution, revolutionaries and educators must take a pedagogical approach that honors the oppressed as human beings and attempts to engage them in a liberating dialogue. Aronowitz explains that “Freire emphasizes the idea of self-liberation, proposing a pedagogy whose task is to unlock the intrinsic humanity of the oppressed.”⁷¹ As the project of liberation seeks to restore full humanity to all individuals, the process involved cannot function in a way that denies this. Instead, it should function in a way that honors “the intrinsic humanity of the oppressed” and that treats and includes them as the engaged, active, thinking and acting individuals they are. As such, it should seek to ensure that all individuals actively participate in praxis; all women and men must think and act in the attempt to transform their world together. The pedagogy Freire advocates to overcome the pitfalls of the banking system too often employed by activist revolutionary leaders honors his strong commitment to a cooperative endeavor in which both poles of the traditional contradiction between students and teachers work together and learn from each other. Freire explains, “Political action on the side of the oppressed must be pedagogical action in the authentic sense of the word, and, therefore, action *with* the oppressed.”⁷² This commitment arises out of his dialogic perspective mentioned above, in which all individuals must participate in transforming dialogue in order to participate in praxis.

In order for this to work in education, both students and teachers would need to take the other's perspective seriously. Unlike the assumption in the banking system, in which teachers know all and students know nothing, both 'students' and 'teachers' would need to assume that both have legitimate knowledge about the world, though the perspectives would differ. The differing of perspectives is not a strength of one side over the other but an opportunity for both to learn from each other about the world they inhabit together. If both sides take this seriously, the encounter can be highly productive. Freire writes:

A revolutionary leadership must... practice *co-intentional* education. Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators.⁷³

In other words, it is through a committed, dialogic pedagogy that both 'students' and 'teachers' can come to know the world and realize themselves in their proper human place, as beings of praxis, able to reflect and act on and within the world, and in so doing, re-create that world together. Because this pedagogy breaks down the usual contradiction between 'students' and 'teacher,' Freire replaces these terms with 'students-teachers' and 'teacher-student,' respectively. Mayo elaborates on Freire's meaning:

Freire underlines the importance of 'authentic dialogue' as the key to a truly liberating education. ...Freire recognizes possibilities for critical consciousness in a learning setting where the learners are encouraged to participate through

dialogue. It is a situation where the educators are disposed, through humility and love, to relearn that which they think they already know through interaction with the learners. . . . We therefore have teacher-student and students-teachers who regard knowledge as not static but dynamic, and object of co-investigation.⁷⁴

Again, Mayo highlights Freire's notion of revolutionary action as a liberating education that seeks to increase critical consciousness in both teacher-student and students-teachers through a cooperative, critical endeavor focused on the dynamic world that mediates them. In the interest of bringing about a dialogic pedagogy intent on raising critical consciousness and liberatory praxis, Freire offers some suggestions about specific classroom practices that would facilitate the exchange between the oppressed and those in solidarity with them, between students-teachers and teacher-student. I will elaborate on this pedagogy in the following section.

§2: Problem-Posing Education: Critical Pedagogy in Practice

The pedagogy Freire advocates, which he calls the “problem-posing” method of education, has a goal starkly different from that of the banking system. The banking system of education represents a false kind of knowing that betrays human cognizance because it “inhibits creativity and domesticates the *intentionality* of consciousness by isolating consciousness from the world.”⁷⁵ When used purposefully, it actively “attempts to maintain the *submersion* of consciousness.”⁷⁶ Problem-posing education, on the other hand, “[responds] to the essence of consciousness—*intentionality*—[by] reject[ing] communiqués and embody[ing] communication. It epitomizes the special

characteristic of consciousness: being *conscious of*, not only as intent on objects but as turned in upon itself in a Jasperian ‘split’—consciousness as consciousness of consciousness”⁷⁷ and “bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality.”⁷⁸ In this sense, it “strives for the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality.”^{*} In other words, the kind of ‘knowing’ occurring within the banking system of education corresponds closely to animal activity, which cannot transcend its situation, while the kind of knowing arising through problem-posing education represents human praxical knowing, a form of knowing that is aware of itself, its context, and its reality as a particular form of knowing. As Ira Shor explains, “a Freirean class invites students to think critically about subject matter, doctrines, the learning process itself, and their society.”⁷⁹ It goes beyond the sterile transmission of preconceived thoughts and ideas, and instead, connects the classroom endeavor with the context in which it occurs and respects the humanity of the individuals in the encounter.

In order to keep up with these commitments, the very structure of ‘instruction’ occurring within a problem-posing classroom reflects human praxis. Freire explains:

The problem-posing educator constantly re-forms his reflections in the reflection of the students. The students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own.⁸⁰

* Freire, *Oppressed*, 81 [italics in original]. This reflects Freire's claims that animals are "immersed" in their world whereas human beings "emerge from the world" (*Oppressed*, 125).

As opposed to a mere transference of information—which we may consider as a mere animal activity, divorced from any serious conscious consideration—problem-posing education requires praxis, conscious reflection on the knowledge under consideration and the active reforming of that knowledge. Shor points out that “knowing, to Freire, means being an active subject who questions and transforms. To learn is to re-create the way we see ourselves, our education, and our society.”⁸¹ In this definition of Freirean knowledge and learning, echoes of Freire’s ontology show up. Just as Freire defines human praxis as the combination of reflection and action so that reflection encourages action and actions cause further reflection, knowing represents a process in which the knower “questions and transforms.” Furthermore, the dialogue occurring between ‘students’ and ‘teachers’ as they engage in the cooperative process of critical investigation reflects Freire’s commitment to the humanizing dialogue that names, renames, and creates the world. As the students-teachers and teacher-students dialogue about their reflections on the world, they are forced to “reform” their own reflections, thus bettering their understanding of the reality they co-inhabit and their conception of how to work to change this reality. As such, “problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality.”⁸² As teacher-students and students-teachers actively re-form knowledge, they create their understanding of reality.

Freire not only offers a theoretical discussion of what problem-posing education would achieve, he also explains some specific processes for carrying out his method. For Freire, education must begin with the existential circumstances of the oppressed. Colin Lankshear explains that in liberating education, “the world must be approached as an object to be understood and known by the efforts of the learners themselves. Moreover,

their act of knowing is to be stimulated and shaped by their own being, circumstances, needs, and destinies.”⁸³ Because of this, Freire believes, “The dialogical character of education as the practice of freedom does not begin when the teacher-student meets with the students-teachers in a pedagogical situation, but rather when the former first asks herself or himself *what* she or he will dialogue with the latter *about*.”⁸⁴ This thing to dialogue about is the object that mediates the relationship between the teacher-student and the students-teachers. Freire explains that “education which is able to resolve the contradiction between teacher and student takes place in a situation in which both address their active cognition to the object by which they are mediated.”⁸⁵ This mediating thing, the world, “impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it.”⁸⁶ The dialogue between the teacher-student and the students-teachers, then, takes place about the world and the views and opinions both parties bring to it. As Freire’s comments highlight, deciding what to dialogue about is an essential pedagogical moment, and because of this, Freire offers a detailed description of what these things should be and how to go about figuring them out.

If a pedagogical encounter is truly liberatory and aims to inspire the development of critical consciousness, its subject matter should relate not only to the specific content of a particular course of study but should reach beyond this content, connect with the world of the students, and be able to generate ideas for topics of further dialogue. In his discussion of Freire’s method, Lankshear points out that “it involves two structurally parallel phases: a literacy phase and a post-literacy phase. The former is galvanized around generative *words* and the latter around generative *themes*.”⁸⁷ In the case of Freire’s work with illiterate peasants, the content of the educational endeavor was,

ostensibly, basic literacy, learning to read and write. He found that the traditional approach of reading and repeating sentences from a reader had very little effect with these individuals, however,⁸⁸ and as mentioned above, experience also taught him that unless he could relate his lessons to the existential experiences of his students, they would largely miss his meaning.⁸⁹ This led Freire to use what he calls “generative words,” words chosen “in accordance with the criteria of phonemic richness, phonetic difficulty, and ‘attachment’ of a given word to the learners’ social, political, and cultural reality.”⁹⁰ Because “languages like Portuguese and Spanish are highly regular, and lend themselves to word building out of syllables[, a]s few as seventeen or so words in Portuguese provide sufficient syllable combinations for learners to generate almost any word they might wish to use.”⁹¹ Therefore, the words are “generative” in the sense that, once students learn them, the students then possess a basis upon which to learn other words and, thus, generate further literacy. And because these words reflect “the learners’ social, political, and cultural reality,” as the students learn them, they not only learn to read and write, they also begin to discuss and think about the themes of their reality suggested by these words. In this way, Freire’s pedagogy seeks to thematize its content by situating it within the students’ realities. When they begin to think about and discuss the themes suggested by the content, which in this case is basic literacy, they enter the “post-literacy phase” and begin to encounter more exclusively the “generative themes” that this phase involves.

Generative words, and the themes they suggest, arise out of the “thematic universe” in which we live and, as such, developing an understanding of them represents an important moment in the development of critical consciousness. Freire explains:

An epoch is characterized by a complex of ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values, and challenges in dialectical interaction with their opposites, striving towards plenitude. The concrete representation of many of these ideas, values, concepts, and hopes, as well as the obstacles which impede the people's full humanization, constitute the themes of that epoch.⁹²

Because these themes are all historical and interconnecting, they create the complex, historical reality in which human praxis takes place. As such, examining one leads to others. For this reason, Freire calls them “generative themes.” As he explains, “I have termed these themes ‘generative’ because (however they are comprehended and whatever action they may evoke) they contain the possibility of an unfolding into again as many themes, which in their turn call for new tasks to be fulfilled.”⁹³ Therefore, by learning generative words and thinking about and discussing generative themes specific to a certain context, a pedagogical encounter can develop into a broader concern for the world, which the students-teachers and teacher-students inhabit. In this sense, as Lankshear suggests, “Both [the literacy phase and the post-literacy phase] are necessary. This is because, for Freire, the ultimate ‘text’ to be read and written is the world itself. Learning to read and write words is an important and integral part of coming to ‘read’ and ‘write’—to understand and name—*the world itself*.”⁹⁴ By learning to read and write through words that relate to the ‘students’ existential realities, they can begin to see how the words they learn relate to the themes that characterize their universe, and as they think about and discuss these, they can begin to develop the capacity for reflection on their realities. As such, a pedagogical encounter focused on generative words and generative themes leads to the development of critical consciousness, which is a

necessary step for oppressed and dehumanized individuals on the road to participating in human praxis.

We do not always have direct access to these themes or the words bound up with them, nor can we always easily understand them, however. Particularly in oppressive situations, this has to do with the tendency of these situations to submerge human consciousness and prevent us from reflecting, as discussed above. The tendency on the part of the oppressed to internalize their oppressors' consciousness causes them to unproblematically accept dominant narratives and values that legitimate and justify their current realities. Because of this, Freire explains, themes tend to become "mythicized," which "threatens to drain the themes of the deeper significance and to deprive them of their characteristically dynamic aspect."⁹⁵ In other words, dominant forces and narratives take up the themes of an epoch and package them as static and ahistorical, separating them from their deeper, dynamic historical context. In light of this mythicization, humans cannot fully participate in praxis because their ability to perceive and reflect on their action is diminished, thus preventing them from working to change their concrete realities. Lankshear points out that these "myths and distorted perceptions... hold marginal groups in passivity or... send them down false (and often destructive or self destructive) trails."⁹⁶ By prescribing human thought and action, "mythicization" interrupts praxis not only because it prevents people from accurately reflecting upon their circumstances, but also because it prevents them from acting in a way to change the circumstances.

Although mythicization interrupts praxis and obscures themes, it also provides to the critically conscious educator a fruitful means for discovering the themes of a

particular group of oppressed individuals. Freire calls conditions that interrupt, pose limits on, or otherwise obstruct human praxis “limit-situations”⁹⁷ and explains that “*themes* both contain and are contained in *limit-situations*.”⁹⁸ Ideally, these “limit-situations” should be “perceived by individuals as fetters, as obstacles to their liberation,” and as such, should “stand out in relief from the background, revealing their true nature as concrete historical dimensions of a given reality.”⁹⁹ Accordingly, individuals should “respond to the challenge [presented by limit-situations] with actions... call[ed] ‘limit-acts’: those directed at negating and overcoming, rather than passively accepting, the ‘given’ [limit-situation].”¹⁰⁰ In other words, humans should be able to perceive limit-situations and the themes bound up with them and then be able to respond to them appropriately. This does not always occur, however, because as previously discussed, oppressive situations not only impose limit-situations, they also interrupt our ability to perceive them and respond to them with limit-acts. As just pointed out, however, these limit-situations are bound up with particular themes. Therefore, Freire believes, a careful investigation of limit-situations can lead to the unveiling of generative themes.

Because oppressive situations commonly conceal or obscure the themes of a certain people, however, finding them out is not always easy. It is important to remember that “the concept of a generative theme is neither an arbitrary invention or a working hypothesis to be proved.”¹⁰¹ Therefore, discovering generative themes is not a process of fabrication, and Freire offers a detailed outline of how best to tease out these themes. The process is a long, multi-phased investigation of a people and their contexts. Importantly, the process Freire advocates does not “[treat] the people as objects of the investigation”¹⁰² but as “*co-investigators*.”¹⁰³ Freire explains further:

The investigation of what I have termed the people's "thematic universe"—the complex of their "generative themes"—inaugurates the dialogue of education as the practice of freedom. The methodology of that investigation must likewise be dialogical, affording the opportunity both to discover generative themes and to stimulate people's awareness in regard to these themes.¹⁰⁴

Since the world and the themes they investigate exist within dialogical relationships, the investigation must honor that arrangement, otherwise it would "[transform] the organic into something inorganic, what is becoming into what is, life into death."¹⁰⁵

The investigation begins with a meeting and organizing phase, during which the investigators meet with some residents of the area they will work in and ask for volunteers to aid in the rest of the investigation process. Involving volunteers from the area in the process helps to ensure that the investigation occurs dialogically.

Furthermore, Gadotti highlights the informal nature of the "investigation." He explains that this investigation "can be made through informal meetings with the dwellers of the place in which the scheme will take place—living with them, sharing their worries, and getting the feeling for elements of their culture."¹⁰⁶ As Gadotti suggests, the goal of the investigation is, in Freire's words, to "gather a series of necessary data about the life of the area."¹⁰⁷ During this phase, nothing should escape the attention of investigators and the volunteers. Freire calls this the "decoding stage," because investigators and volunteers should treat the area "as if it were... an enormous, unique, living 'code' to be deciphered."¹⁰⁸ As the investigators and volunteers go about deciphering the living code, they work together to try to "re-consider" their own initial impressions through dialogue with each other. The goal of the investigation, at this stage, is to not only establish the

general feeling for the area, to come to know the area and its inhabitants, but also to identify contradictions, limit-situations, and the themes they suggest.

The second stage of the investigation begins once the team of investigators and volunteers begins to discover the contradictions and limit-situations. As these things are intrinsic to the community and important to it, they provide a sound basis on which to dialogue about generative themes. In discovering ways to express these contradictions and limit-situations in concrete “codifications” (“the *objects* which mediate the decoders in their critical analysis”), the investigators must ensure that the themes are “neither overly explicit nor overly enigmatic.”¹⁰⁹ As generative themes, they need to be between something that does not require decoding or something that is so complex that decoding it becomes difficult or impossible.

Once these generative themes and the concrete codifications have been identified, the third stage of investigation begins with “decoding dialogues,” which are observed by “a psychologist and a sociologist,” and are recorded for later analysis.¹¹⁰ These dialogues take place between the coordinating investigator and the volunteers from the investigation. In this case, the discussions would center around the volunteers’ interpretations of the concrete codifications identified as being pertinent to their lives, this identification being made from their own observations and conversations with the investigators.

After these dialogues, the final stage in the investigation begins when the investigators study their findings. They not only look at the initial observations, but also examine and analyze the records from the decoding dialogues. In this analysis, investigators should seek to find recurring themes applicable to the people in the contexts

they will work with. Freire acknowledges the fact that these themes may suggest other themes that the investigators will want to include but that did not arise directly from their investigation. He suggests that these themes should also have a place in the educational program because, “if the educational program is dialogical, the teacher-students also have the right to participate by including themes not previously suggested.”¹¹¹ Once the important and related themes have been identified, the investigators must codify these themes by “choosing the best channel of communication for each theme and its representation.”¹¹² As Freire often works within illiterate or semi-literate circles, he suggests using pictorial or graphic codifications. However, as the quote above makes clear, the best channel for communication would vary with the audience, so Freire’s suggestion should not be taken as final. The investigators may want to look for expert opinion on these themes to present to the individuals in the pedagogical situation to give another voice on the topic. Basically, during the latter stages of the investigation, as Gadotti explains, “the themes resulting from the initial awareness stage will be codified and decodified. They will be contextualized and replaced... by a critical and social vision. In this way, new generative themes are discovered which are related to those which were initially found.”¹¹³ Therefore, although there may be new themes in addition to the ones originally suggested, the result of this extended process is an educational campaign in which “the people will find themselves” and that “will not seem strange to them, since it originated with them.”¹¹⁴ By completing this investigatory stage of the educational encounter, the program content itself will have arisen in a dialogical manner; it will reflect the students-teachers, their context, beliefs, and lives.

By addressing content that relates directly to the students-teachers, Freire's method of working with generative themes begins to overcome some of the shortfalls of the banking system of education, but in addition to addressing program content that relates to the lives of the students-teachers, it is necessary to address it dialogically in the classroom, as well. Just as the investigation to discover generative themes should occur dialogically, so should the educational endeavor continue unfolding in a dialogic manner. It would certainly be possible to identify generative themes through the process outlined above but, having discovered the themes important to the community, simply lecture on them. As Freire points out, "The task of the dialogical teacher in an interdisciplinary team working on the thematic universe revealed by their investigation is to 're-present' that universe to the people from whom she or he first received it—and 're-present' it not as a lecture, but as a problem."¹¹⁵ In other words, the educator should not tell her or his students what she or he found out during the investigation and simply lecture on these findings and what they mean to the educator. Instead, the teacher-student should engage the students-teachers in a dialogue about the themes. As Lankshear explains:

In the presence of a critically conscious co-ordinator, group discussion of [generative] themes can quickly and easily carry participants at large to a deeper understanding of how their world has been structured, by whom, and in whose interests: by exploring contradictions inherent in participants' own ideas; by considering conflicting evidence; by addressing questions that tap or create dissonance among participants; and so on.¹¹⁶

In other words, the goal of the liberatory educator is not to impose her or his opinions on the students. Instead, the liberatory educator works with the students and facilitates a

dialogue between them about the world. Importantly, “All members bring their experience, ideas, and prejudices to discussion.”¹¹⁷ This multitude of perspectives allows the liberatory educator to juxtapose, compare, and contrast ideas about the reality of the participants in a way that brings to light previously unperceived ideas. In this process, the liberatory educator, along with her or his students, should “seek the most coherent and satisfying analysis and explanation of events, situations, and processes which confuse or concern them; which impede or frustrate them.”¹¹⁸ By helping students develop “the most coherent and satisfying” understanding of their realities, problem-posing education allows “the people to come to feel like masters of their thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades.”¹¹⁹ By enabling the people to master their own thinking, the process of problem-posing education empowers the oppressed to realize their situation and begin to respond to it. Freire hopes that the process of dialogue about generative themes will lead to further discussions and further themes, themes that will present themselves in the course of the dialogue. A problem-posing educator should expect this and be prepared to take them up. As Freire points out, “Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge.”¹²⁰ In other words, exploring generative themes and the connections they suggest is the beginning of awakening critical consciousness. Once critical consciousness is awakened, it will fan out and encounter further problems and things to consider.

Developing critical consciousness through dialoguing about limit-situations and generative themes will begin to allow the oppressed and dehumanized to participate in

human praxis by restoring the necessary reflective component. By helping the oppressed and dehumanized combat the submersive tendencies of oppressive situations and allowing them to once again emerge from the world and objectify it, problem-posing education helps the oppressed to develop critical consciousness about their realities. Critical awareness of limit-situations, then, suggests limit-acts that will allow individuals to overcome these obstacles to their humanizing vocations. Additionally, recall Freire's belief that "true reflection... leads to action." In this sense, problem-posing education anticipates revolutionary action. Lankshear suggests that "from these analyses and explanations [those resulting from problem-posing education] emerge ideas for action aimed at creative change grounded in popular rather than elite interests."¹²¹ Neither Freire nor Lankshear necessarily address what this action will be, however. This is consistent with Freire's belief that revolutionary action, if it is to be genuinely revolutionary, must arise from the oppressed themselves. As such, he cannot give a predetermined program of what it would look like or how it would necessarily reshape society. Because of this, it may seem difficult to suggest that this form of liberatory pedagogy—which, as the next chapter will address, seems ill-fitted to higher education in the United States—will address the concerns about higher education in the US, such as those of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education. On the other hand, because Freire leaves the programmatic content of the revolutionary aspect of his pedagogy open to be shaped by those participating in it, we are not limited by a predetermined mold when thinking of how to apply it in the US. Before discussing how Freirean critical pedagogy would successfully address the concerns with higher education in the United States—such as creating a system that successfully educates students, provides open

access to all individuals, and helps to empower students—several tasks remain. In the next chapter, as mentioned above, I will address the objection that Freirean critical pedagogy is simply not suited for higher education in the United States. Then, in Chapter V, I will propose theoretical and practical methods for implementing Freirean pedagogy in higher education in the US. With these two tasks finished, I will return to the Commission on the Future of Higher Education and suggest how a form of critical pedagogy fitted to higher education in the United States could successfully address its concerns.

§3: Notes

¹ Paulo Freire quoted in Moacir Gadotti, *Reading Paulo Freire: His Life and Work*, trans. John Milton, (New York: SUNY, 1994), 5.

² Gadotti, *Reading Paulo Freire*, 3.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁶ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, trans. Robert Barr (New York: Continuum, 2004), 9.

⁷ Peter Mayo, "Critical Approaches to Education in the Work of Lorenzo Milani and Paulo Freire," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 26, no. 6 (2007): 527, <http://www.ebscohost.com/>.

⁸ Freire, *Hope*, 9-10.

⁹ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰ Mayo, "Critical Approaches," 527.

¹¹ Gadotti, *Reading Paulo Freire*, 7.

¹² Ibid., 15.

¹³ Mayo, "Critical Approaches," 527.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Carlos Alberto Torres, "From the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to *A Luta Continua*: The Political Pedagogy of Paulo Freire," in *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, ed. Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard (New York: Routledge, 1993), 120.

¹⁶ Stanley Aronowitz, "Paulo Freire's Radical Democratic Humanism," in *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, ed. Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard (New York: Routledge, 1993), 15.

¹⁷ Ronald Glass, "On Paulo Freire's Philosophy of Praxis and the Foundations of Liberation Education," *Educational Researcher* 30, no. 2 (2001): 16, <http://www.jstor.org/>.

¹⁸ Ibid., 18.

¹⁹ Ibid., 16.

²⁰ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2009), 43.

²¹ Ibid., 44.

²² Ibid. [italics in original].

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. [italics in original].

²⁵ Ibid., 43.

²⁶ Aronowitz, "Humanism," 12.

²⁷ Ibid., 11 [italics in original].

²⁸ Freire, *Oppressed*, 55.

²⁹ Ibid., 84 [italics in original].

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Paulo Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Continuum, 1990, quoted in Stanley Aronowitz, "Paulo Freire's Radical Democratic Humanism," in *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, ed. Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard (New York: Routledge, 1993), 11.

³² Freire, *Oppressed*, 125.

³³ Ibid., 84.

³⁴ Ibid., 125.

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- ³⁵ Glass, "Philosophy of Praxis," 17.
- ³⁶ Freire, *Oppressed*, 66.
- ³⁷ Glass, "Philosophy of Praxis," 17-18 [italics in original].
- ³⁸ Freire, *Oppressed*, 125 [italics in original].
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Mayo, "Critical Approaches," 540.
- ⁴¹ Gadotti, *Reading Paulo Freire*, 29.
- ⁴² Freire, *Oppressed*, 88 [italics in original].
- ⁴³ Ibid., 87.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 88 [italics in original].
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 88-89.
- ⁴⁶ Gadotti, *Reading Paulo Freire*, 29.
- ⁴⁷ Peter McLaren, "A Pedagogy of Possibility: Reflecting upon Paulo Freire's Politics of Education," *Educational Researcher* 28, no. 2 (1999): 49, <http://edr.sagepub.com/>.
- ⁴⁸ Freire, *Oppressed*, 112.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 88.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 125.
- ⁵¹ Glass, "Philosophy of Praxis," 16.
- ⁵² Freire, *Oppressed*, 51.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 46-47 [italics in original].
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., 47.
- ⁵⁵ Aronowitz, "Humanism," 13.
- ⁵⁶ Freire, *Oppressed*, 73.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., 88.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., 67-68.
- ⁵⁹ Vladimir Lenin, *What Is to Be Done?: Burning Questions of Our Movement*, trans. Joel Feinberg and George Hanna (New York: International, 1999).

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- ⁶⁰ Aronowitz, "Humanism," 13.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., 16.
- ⁶² Freire, *Oppressed*, 86 [italics in original].
- ⁶³ Ibid., 65.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., 67 [italics in original].
- ⁶⁵ Gadotti, *Reading Paulo Freire*, 89.
- ⁶⁶ Freire, *Oppressed*, 126.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid., 65.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid., 66.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid., 45, 96.
- ⁷¹ Aronowitz, "Humanism," 13.
- ⁷² Freire, *Oppressed*, 66.
- ⁷³ Ibid., 69 [italics in original].
- ⁷⁴ Mayo, "Critical Approaches," 537.
- ⁷⁵ Freire, *Oppressed*, 83-84 [italics in original].
- ⁷⁶ Ibid., 81 [italics in original].
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., 79 [italics in original].
- ⁷⁸ Ibid., 84.
- ⁷⁹ Ira Shor, "Education Is Politics: Paulo Freire's Critical pedagogy," in *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, ed. Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard (New York: Routledge, 1993), 25.
- ⁸⁰ Freire, *Oppressed*, 81.
- ⁸¹ Shor, "Education Is Politics," 26.
- ⁸² Freire, *Oppressed*, 81.
- ⁸³ Colin Lankshear, "Functional Literacy from a Freirean Point of View," in *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, ed. Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard (New York: Routledge, 1993), 110.
- ⁸⁴ Freire, *Oppressed*, 93.

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- ⁸⁵ Ibid.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid.
- ⁸⁷ Lankshear, "Functional Literacy," 110 [italics in original].
- ⁸⁸ Gadotti, *Reading Paulo Freire*, 25.
- ⁸⁹ Freire, *Hope*, 19.
- ⁹⁰ Lankshear, "Functional Literacy," 114.
- ⁹¹ Ibid.
- ⁹² Freire, *Oppressed*, 101.
- ⁹³ Ibid., 102, note 19.
- ⁹⁴ Lankshear, "Functional Literacy," 110.
- ⁹⁵ Freire, *Oppressed*, 102.
- ⁹⁶ Lankshear, "Functional Literacy," 110.
- ⁹⁷ Freire, *Oppressed*, 99.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid., 102 [italics in original].
- ⁹⁹ Ibid., 99.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid.
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid., 97.
- ¹⁰² Ibid., 107.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid., 106 [italics in original].
- ¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 96-97.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 108.
- ¹⁰⁶ Gadotti, *Reading Paulo Freire*, 22.
- ¹⁰⁷ Freire, *Oppressed*, 110.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 111.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 114.
- ¹¹⁰ Ibid., 117.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 120.

¹¹² Ibid., 121.

¹¹³ Gadotti, *Reading Paulo Freire*, 22.

¹¹⁴ Freire, *Oppressed*, 123.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 109.

¹¹⁶ Lankshear, "Functional Literacy," 112.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Freire, *Oppressed*, 124.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 81.

¹²¹ Lankshear, 112.

CHAPTER IV

FREIREAN PEDAGOGY AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

In the previous chapter, I gave an outline of Freire's life experiences with oppression and his dedication to the empowerment and liberation of oppressed individuals and groups. Because Freire's pedagogy arises from his own experiences, it seems to focus on the specific circumstances of severe economic oppression in the Two-Thirds World.* Some of the effects of these conditions include widespread illiteracy. Freire's own work in literacy campaigns focused on the illiterate peasantry and laborers further suggests a primary concern with basic education. Because of this focus on basic education within severely economically oppressed societies and the fact that Freirean pedagogy developed in this context, it may seem that critical pedagogy is simply not applicable in the United States, in general, and in higher education in the United States, specifically, due to the stark differences in context between the former and the latter. Allen and Rossatto, for example, point out that "in the U.S., most live a relatively privileged life. ...students in U.S. teacher education classrooms, specifically those who are white and middle or upper class, are some of the most privileged humans to have ever lived in the history of humankind."¹ Although Allen and Rossatto focus their discussion specifically on teacher education programs, these programs take place in colleges and universities, so even though they represent a small portion of overall student population, we can see them as a microcosm of the larger university setting. As such, the conditions that exist in these classrooms would seem also to apply to the broader climate of higher

* I use this term to remind readers that what is often referred to as the "developing world" or the "Third World" represents roughly two-thirds of the world's population.

education in the United States. The findings of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education support this assumption, in that they find access to higher education concernedly limited for individuals from traditionally underprivileged groups, such as those from lower socioeconomic classes and racial minorities. This suggests that most students in colleges and universities in the United States are white students from the middle- and upper-classes. As such, they are far from suffering the kind of economic hardships that face individuals from underserved groups in the US and even farther from the conditions of hunger and deprivation that affected Freire himself and continue to affect many others in the Two-Thirds World. Furthermore, despite complaints about lack of preparation for higher education, in terms of learning deficits at the levels of middle school and high school education, the average student entering higher education in the United States is far from illiterate.

The ostensive difference in context between Freire's world of the severely economically oppressed and illiterate peasantry and the comparatively privileged, literate population in institutions of higher education in the United States causes some scholars to question the use of critical pedagogy in the latter context. Allen and Rossatto, for example, ask precisely this question in their article "Does Critical Pedagogy Work with Privileged Students?" Building on their experiences in teacher education classrooms focusing on critical pedagogy literature, Allen and Rossatto come to the conclusion that in order for privileged students to undergo the kind of transformative experiences that a critical approach to education should effect, the specific pedagogy of the critical approach must be significantly adapted to deal with oppressor-students.² They first became suspicious about failures in the current use of critical pedagogy and exposure to

the literature of critical pedagogy in education classrooms when encountering “resistance and outright anger from many of the students” who were exposed to the material.³ In attempting to understand this resistance, they undertake “a sympathetic critique of critical pedagogy,” which leads them to the conclusion noted above.⁴

While Allen and Rossatto’s article is extremely valuable, as we will see below, for its discussion of some of the characteristics of the student population in higher education, there are some limiting factors in its focus that should temper our understanding of the students’ responses to exposure to critical pedagogy literature. The “resistance and outright anger” that Allen and Rossatto encounter arises from teacher education classrooms. These classrooms feature syllabi “based almost exclusively on critical pedagogy readings,” and one of the authors’ “intention was to engage students in a critical examination of the role schooling plays in reproducing hegemony.”⁵ It is unclear from Allen and Rossatto’s article how this class was conducted, but the fact that the author had a specific outline predetermined for the course, with a syllabus already set and prepared that featured readings primarily from a single perspective, suggests that his pedagogy may not have taken the form of Freirean pedagogy outlined in the previous chapter. In designing his course in advance, it seems doubtful that he could have taken the students’ existential concerns too seriously or centered the classroom around the kind of dialogic encounter that a problem-posing pedagogy would require. Instead, it almost seems that it would have to necessarily follow the banking model, in which this author attempted to think for his students by convincing them that schooling reproduces hegemony. Regardless of the truth of his claims, this kind of activist approach to the endeavor does not seem to let the students come to their own realizations regarding “the

role schooling plays in reproducing hegemony” but rather imports the views of critical pedagogy into the students. It is a given, and it is important, that students—especially the kind of students in higher education in the US—feel challenged and slightly uncomfortable when dealing with issues of inequality, privilege, and hegemony, but taking too strong an approach is dangerous because it seems to lead precisely to the kind of “resistance and outright anger” the author experienced from his students. Being heavy-handed with the endeavor, such as basing the syllabus “almost exclusively on critical pedagogy readings,” seems to be the kind of strong, ‘oppressive’ approach that may turn some students off, which would explain the author’s experiences. As Huerta-Charles points out in a separate article on student exposure to critical pedagogy literature in teacher education classrooms, “students mentioned that the professors that taught the critical pedagogy classes were not modeling to them, or at least they were not using in the classroom, critical pedagogy in action.”⁶ In other words, instructors addressed the theory of critical pedagogy through methods incoherent with the theory itself, such as a lecture and other practices that follow the banking model, rather than actually implementing the problem-posing practices true coherence to the theory would require. The lack of coherence between theory and practice exhibited in such classrooms may also contribute to student resistance to the material.* It is partially for these reasons that I do not imagine the implementation of Freirean pedagogy as involving reading or discussing critical

* As I will address in the following chapter, coherence between theory and practice is of key importance in Freire’s pedagogy.

pedagogy literature but rather as *engaging in* critical pedagogy itself.* Despite this potential limitation, Allen and Rossatto’s critique provides some significant analysis of the conditions of students in higher education in the United States, as well as some strong potential objections to the use of critical pedagogy in that context.

§1: The Oppressor-Student and Critical Pedagogy

Perhaps the most significant characteristic to notice about the context of higher education in the United States is that, as mentioned above, most students in institutions of higher education in the US are “relatively privileged”—in fact, some are “the most privileged humans to have ever lived.” This is especially significant because as some of “the most privileged humans who have ever lived,” these students seem to fit the bill of the oppressor more so than they do that of the oppressed, whether they self-identify with that status or not or actively, willfully, and knowingly participate in activities of oppression. These students are members of an oppressor class simply by sake of their situation as citizens of the United States—and, more specifically, as members of a relatively well-to-do demographic within this broader citizenry. This occurs because, as Allen and Rossatto point out, “oppression is a structural phenomenon, no individual person can escape their [sic] location as the oppressor anymore than no individual person can escape their [sic] location as the oppressed.”⁷ As citizens of one of the richest and

* Furthermore, focusing courses on the literature of critical pedagogy, while perfectly reasonable for education courses, would not be applicable more broadly. It would require modifying all courses to become classes on the socio-cultural effects of education rather than courses devoted to specific disciplines. Therefore, instructors should think about ways to implement the practices of critical pedagogy rather than discuss it theoretically. I will say more about this in the following chapter.

most powerful nations on the earth*—and from a relatively privileged group within that broader demographic—who intimately (though perhaps non-willingly) benefit on a daily basis from structures of oppression that support their way of life, college students in the US cannot escape their position as members of an oppressor class. This might be difficult for some people to accept, but as Allen and Rossatto illustrate, “Even the most radical White student... is an oppressor because they still benefit [sic] (relative to people of color) from the social context of Whiteness.”⁸ A similar argument applies more broadly: even the most radical and socially conscious individual from the US still benefits, relative to people in some other nations, from her or his social context. Membership of a class does not have to do with one’s political, intellectual, or humanitarian intentions but rather with one’s social situation.

Even though most college students in the United States are members of an oppressor class (relative to many others), most of these students are not aware of this condition. Allen and Rossatto point out, “many of them believe they are just ‘normal’ humans.”⁹ This phenomenon arises from the submersion of consciousness that characterizes oppressive situations. Recall that, as discussed in the previous chapter, “oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings’ consciousness. Functionally, oppression is domesticating.”¹⁰ Allen and Rossatto explain the effects of this on the oppressed individual or student: “the oppressed student does not always understand the ways in which oppression has become a part of their [sic] everyday lives. In fact, the oppressed student might not even believe that they are [sic] oppressed.”¹¹ The submersion of consciousness caused by oppressive situations prevents

* If not in actuality, then at least hegemonically.

oppressed individuals from abstracting from their situations and perceiving their reality critically, thereby preventing them from understanding the oppressive contradictions that affect their lives. This phenomenon is not limited to the oppressed, however. Similarly, it seems that many oppressors cannot realize how the systematic structures of oppression into which they fit have contributed to their own privilege. In fact, this phenomenon might even be more pronounced with oppressor groups than oppressed groups. Freire explains that, despite the fact that “[the oppressed’s] perception of themselves as oppressed is impaired by their submersion in the reality of oppression,” “this does not necessarily mean that the oppressed are unaware that they are downtrodden.”¹² In other words, although the oppressed may not be aware of the reasons for their oppression, of the contradictory reality of hierarchy and hegemony that affect them, they feel the effects of these phenomena in their daily lives. Oppressor-students, however, do not necessarily feel societal constraints and influences the same way oppressed individuals might. Because they are relatively privileged, they probably do not encounter the concrete realities of oppression in their regular daily experiences. For example, it is unlikely that many oppressor-students confront the kind of obstructive hunger that Freire himself experienced as a young man. Without these experiences, it becomes incredibly easy for oppressors to coast through a life that they conceive of as relatively free of limit-situations and to conceive of this existence as ‘normal.’

Oppressor-students’ non-consciousness of their status as oppressors is exacerbated by the ease with which they internalize the ‘normality’ of oppressive situations. The oppressed, as Freire points out, have a tendency to internalize the consciousness of their oppressor and “have adapted to the structure of domination in

which they are immersed and have become resigned to it.”¹³ Like the submersion of consciousness in oppressive situations, this phenomenon is not limited to the oppressed, either, and is, similarly, more pronounced in the oppressors. Because of the relative ease of their privileged lives, oppressors have little reason to doubt dominant social narratives that justify and reinforce the oppressive hegemony and hierarchy, thereby making it much easier for them to internalize them. Some of these narratives include the strong bias towards individualism and predominant notions of the universal human. These narratives abstract individuals from their existential conditions and present them as idealized, equal subjects free from outside determination. In Freire’s terms, this removes the historical and dialogical aspects from human becoming and treats individuals as ahistorical and disconnected from the world that they shape and are shaped by. As such, the narratives of individuality and the universal human justify social inequalities by blaming individuals for their own (mis)fortunes. * These dominant narratives, then, attribute the privilege of oppressor groups to their own actions, regardless of the context in which those actions occur. This, in turn, allows oppressors to develop a positive self image, in which they believe they have worked hard for and deserve their status. As Allen and Rossatto point out, “most Whites believe that they are nice, kind, caring, and benevolent people who have worked hard to obtain their wealth and status.”¹⁴ They feel ‘normal’ because they believe that anyone who has worked as hard as they supposedly have could achieve a similar status; there is no oppressive reality that has benefited them and hampered others. The ease with which oppressors can internalize the dominant

* Glass, "Privileged Students," 15. It does not seem coincidental that these are the narratives picked up by mainstream educators and used to justify and reinforce the market model of education.

consciousness of an oppressive situation, then, prevents them from conceiving of how the hegemonic and hierarchical structures into which they fit contribute to their own privileged status.

The oppressor status of many students in college classrooms in the US and their non-consciousness of this fact most likely contributes to the resistance to critical pedagogy literature that Allen and Rossatto notice. Students who think of themselves as ‘normal’ probably do not want to confront the fact that they benefit from a “form of hegemony that gives them... unearned privilege.”¹⁵ They do not want to think of themselves as the ‘villain.’ As such, they resist the material, either through various forms of disengagement—resulting in everything from poor grades to dropping the course—or through frustration and dismissal. Allen and Rossatto point out that many of the oppressor-students

hold onto individualistic educational psychologies that privilege positivistic learning techniques or non-critical strategies of self-actualization and “higher-order” thinking skills. They often seem to not understand, or not want to understand, why members of oppressed groups do not simply assimilate to the normative order, and they feel that they have “accommodated” the oppressed as much as they are willing to.¹⁶

Because privileged students see themselves as ‘normal,’ they do not want to hear that the things they believe they have earned or are otherwise entitled to are in fact “unearned privileges.” They do not understand why they should have to give up these things so that people who have supposedly not earned them can benefit from them as well, or for the sake of greater equality. Because they see themselves as ‘normal’ and do not feel the

same constraints that oppressed individuals might and are relatively comfortable in their lives, they have little interest in changing society for themselves or others and would rather receive the kind of education that would help them get along in a society that they see as unproblematic, which is, understandably, precisely the kind of education the Commission on the Future of Higher Education advocates.*

Given the oppressor status of students in college classrooms in the US, their non-consciousness of this fact, and their resistance to the project of critical pedagogy, there are various reasons why one might argue that critical pedagogy should not be used in these contexts. First of all, it would seem unnecessary to employ a pedagogy designed to liberate oppressed students in the context of a classroom in which the students are not oppressed. As discussed in the previous chapter, Freire's pedagogy was originally aimed at liberating individuals suffering severe economic and political oppression, and as mentioned above, students in institutions of higher education in the United States rarely fall into this category. Furthermore, the fact that they consider themselves 'normal' and see little problem with society as it is would suggest that the existential concerns of these students do not have to do with the conditions of oppression but rather with continuing their status as oppressors (even if this is a non-conscious and non-willed status). Since Freire's pedagogy is designed to address students' existential concerns while imparting critical consciousness, addressing existential concerns of privileged students might run contrary to the Freirean project of working towards a critique of existing structures of society, considering the fact that those structures would seem to serve the interest of

* Though, as I have discussed in Chapter II, the reforms the CFHE suggests would not achieve this goal.

privileged students. Secondly, using critical pedagogy with the oppressor-students in higher education would seem ineffective because, as discussed in the previous chapter, and as Allen and Rossatto remind us:

In critical pedagogy, the oppressed student's experience of living as an objectified and dehumanized being becomes the critical focal point for learning in the classroom. The oppressed student is seen as being close to the experience of oppressive social structures, giving them [sic] a degree of epistemological authority. ... This intimacy with oppression is seen as a source of knowledge that can be developed into a critical literacy experience that empowers students to change how they are represented and transform the institutions that maintain the status quo.*

Since privileged students do not have this experience and closeness with oppression, they will not have the prerequisite experiences to build upon in order to develop critical consciousness about their reality. As such, their experiences as privileged individuals would suggest to them not a world of oppression and external constraints on their action but rather one of relative freedom. These two implications of the oppressor-student population—that students are neither concerned with nor understand oppression—suggest an additional reason why we should be suspicious of implementing Freirean pedagogy in US colleges and universities.

* Allen & Rossatto, "Privileged Students," 4. This claim derives from Freire's discussion in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, where he states, "We must realize that [the people's] view of the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their *situation* in the world" (Freire, *Oppressed*, 96 [italics in original]).

As several of Freire's commentators and interlocutors have pointed out, using Freire's pedagogy without awareness of its grander political and social commitments betrays his project. It would be quite possible to take a look at Freire's problem-posing method of education and extract from it some basic principles for classroom discussion without fully embracing his project. This has occurred frequently and in numerous contexts. For example, Margolis, in his conversation with Freire, points out that Freire's methods are used in Mexico by some rather "bourgeois" organizations "that [are] never going to allow a literacy campaign to reach all the Mexicans who need it."¹⁷ McLaren notices a similar tendency when he points out that Freire is often invoked by individuals who conceive of him as "the grand seigneur of classroom dialogue" but who "antiseptically excise the corporeal force of history from his pedagogical practices."¹⁸ In both of these cases, Freire's methods are adapted for an institution's or individual's own limited purposes, while dropping the broader socially conscious aspect of his methods. This is clearly absolutely counter to Freire's own project, as he advocates his method for the pursuit of greater social and historical consciousness in the interest of increasing true equality and diminishing oppression. As such, considering the limitations present in a classroom made up primarily of privileged students, it would seem that using Freirean pedagogy in such a context would limit the extent to which it could achieve either of those goals and, without that aspect, would clearly betray Freire's grander project of social awareness and social change.

Finally, Freire himself denies that oppressors can work to bring about the end of oppression, a task that he believes belongs solely to the oppressed. Freire believes that the task of liberation "is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed."¹⁹ The

oppressors cannot serve this purpose because “any attempt to ‘soften’ the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed almost always manifests itself in the form of false generosity.”²⁰ In order for the oppressors to be able to behave generously towards the oppressed, they must have the power to do so. Therefore, they do not truly seek to change the conditions that oppress the oppressed but rather seek to slightly alleviate the suffering of the oppressed, thus appearing to make things better for them and make the oppressors feel more comfortable with their privilege and the oppressed more comfortable in their oppression, so as not to foster resistance to the status quo that benefits the oppressors. These beliefs lead Freire to conclude that “the pedagogy of the oppressed cannot be developed or practiced by the oppressors. It would be a contradiction in terms if the oppressors not only defended but actually implemented a liberating education.”²¹ It seems that this conclusion arises from some of the concerns noted above, namely that the oppressors cannot understand the conditions of oppression nor the needs of the oppressed—nor can they really desire to change the conditions of oppression because that would not only contradict their ability to maintain their privileged status but also their ability to appear generous towards the oppressed.

§2: Oppression, Dehumanization, and the Oppressor-Student

The critiques discussed above build a strong case for suggesting that Freirean pedagogy is simply not fit for use in higher education in the United States, but despite this, there are responses that suggest the opposite. Oppressors should be concerned with the existence of oppression, and not just out of humanitarian concern for the oppressed

(although this is certainly a compelling reason, even if Freire believes it represents false generosity). First of all, while I certainly do not intend to downplay or dismiss the oppressor status of many students in colleges in the United States, their status as privileged oppressors is not necessarily as clear-cut as it first seems. Simply labeling all students in higher education in the US ‘oppressor-students’ seems to simplify unjustly the complex interplay of the numerous hierarchies and hegemonies that function in our current globalized society. As Allen and Rossatto point out, “Students should understand that they can be simultaneously the oppressor within one totality and the oppressed within another and they should be concerned about both their own oppression and their oppression of others.”²² In other words, an individual could be a student from a middle- or upper-class background and, as a virtue of that social status, a member of an oppressor class, while simultaneously being a member of a racial minority or a woman and, in virtue of that social status, a member of an oppressed class. And furthermore, both of these statuses are important. As such, flatly labeling all students in higher education in the US ‘oppressor-students’ seems to dismiss—and, therefore, unjustly ignore—the complex ways in which varying structures of oppression interact in our society. Additionally, there are varying degrees of privilege. While middle-class individuals in the US are incredibly privileged compared to many others, both in the lower-classes in the US and from around the world, their privilege is situated within a system that even further privileges a very select few individuals in the US and around the world. Finally, regardless of the situation of oppressor-students within the varying oppressive hierarchies and hegemonies or within structures of privilege, the systems of oppression that support whatever level of privilege a particular student has not only dehumanize those whom they

oppress but also dehumanize the oppressor-student. In our society, this dehumanization is so intense and so systematic, and yet so unrecognized, that it demands serious attention. Exploring these claims further gives credence to the need to implement critical pedagogy in higher education.

Before elaborating further on the claims above, it would seem helpful to revisit in summary some of the characteristics of the general condition and mindset of the student population in higher education in the United States addressed above. First of all, let me reiterate that most students currently in higher education in the US are members of an oppressor class. As the concerns with access expressed in the Introduction and Chapter II alone would suggest, underserved and underprivileged groups—such as individuals on the lower end of the economic spectrum and racial and ethnic minorities—are systematically excluded from higher education by a variety of obstacles, including the expense of higher education and because of under preparation caused by systematic under-service in primary and secondary education. As these findings suggest, the student population in higher education in US is made up primarily of middle- and upper-class whites.* I stress this because I do not want it to be forgotten in the midst of some of claims I make later on in this chapter. Although I will suggest that there are ways that even these traditionally privileged individuals are not immune from the oppressive effects of certain structures of oppression, neither we nor they can forget that, in general, individuals in US colleges and universities are, as Allen and Rossatto point out, “some of the most privileged humans who have ever lived in the history of humankind.” I also want to reiterate the fact that many of the students are unaware of their oppressor status

* Allen and Rossatto notice similar things in their article.

and believe themselves to be merely ‘normal’ human beings. Allen and Rossatto elaborate (drawing insights from Gallagher, hooks, Leonard, and Macintosh):

most Whites believe that they are nice, kind, caring, and benevolent people who have worked hard to obtain their wealth and status. They seem to have little consciousness of how many people of color distrust and fear them. Also, they are unaware, or repress awareness, of their day-to-day privileges, let alone what was done historically to procure the privileges that come with being White in society built by White racism.²³

They do not realize the extent to which they have benefited from systematic structures of oppression and are most likely unaware of it because “privilege” implies the absence of the kinds of barriers that reveal the existence of oppression. In this sense, though we cannot say that oppressor-students—like many of the oppressed—have internalized their oppressor, it seems that they have internalized their oppressor status and the mainstream individualistic and market narratives systemic in society to the point that they uncritically accept these as ‘normal.’ Even as oppressor-students, however, the students in higher education in the US should be made aware of, and be concerned with, the structures of oppression into which they fit and how these may affect them for the reasons mentioned above—namely, the designation of ‘oppressor’ and ‘oppressed’ is not always a clear-cut transcendent distinction and, perhaps more significantly, the same situations that grant privilege to oppressors simultaneously dehumanize them.

Although the United States is massively wealthy compared to many Two-Thirds World nations, and even some other ‘developed’ nations,^{*} it is not free from its own forms of oppression. In other words, while individuals in the US may generally be oppressors in the world totality, within the totality of the US population itself, different structures of oppression operate that further complicate this larger dichotomy. First of all, the massive wealth of the United States is not equally distributed among all individuals. As Leistyna points out, “class mobility in this country is more restricted than ever before, unless of course the direction is down,” and “with the exception of Russia and Mexico, the United States has the most unequal distribution of wealth and income the industrialized world.”²⁴ According to David Johnston’s 2007 *New York Times* article, “Income inequality grew significantly in 2005, with the top one percent... receiving their largest share of national income since 1928.”²⁵ Furthermore, “The new data... shows [sic] that the top 300,000 Americans collectively enjoyed almost as much income as the bottom 150 million Americans. Per person, the top group received 440 times as much as the average person in the bottom half earned.”²⁶ And this disparity is growing and is expected to continue to grow.²⁷ While those in the lower income end of the spectrum often struggle to make ends meet—with their incomes barely rising, rising slowly, or even occasionally declining over time—those in the upper income range—those who need more income the least—are seeing significant growth in their incomes. Added to these already troubling statistics, Leistyna claims, “the current tax system in this country is structured to perpetuate the class hierarchy,” with low- and middle-income earners

^{*} Though some of this wealth is fueled by massive deficit and credit spending on the part of individuals, corporations, and the federal government.

paying a higher percentage of their income in taxes than high income earners.²⁸ As money moves upwards and the income of lower income individuals fails to keep up with inflation, more and more individuals and families struggle to keep up with mounting expenses.²⁹ Leistyna points out that by 2007, “37 million people in this country live in poverty, a number that is up 1.1 million from 2003.”³⁰ These facts reveal the existence of economic oppression even within the relatively rich United States, and as discussed in the Introduction and Chapter II, level of education plays a significant role in where an individual falls within this broad spectrum of income.

While college graduates have traditionally found themselves relatively well situated financially, there are reasons to question this state of financial comfort. We cannot ignore the fact that, even within the totality of the United States, graduation from college and successful employment has traditionally situated college students well into the middle- and upper-ends of the spectrum of incomes in the US, according to statistics cited in the Introduction. Within the totality of the world, this situates college graduates even higher in the spectrum of world incomes. This clearly situates them as part of their privileged, oppressor group that benefits hugely from worldwide structures of oppression. However, as income statistics and Leistyna’s analysis suggest, while college graduates benefit largely from their employment, their employers generally benefit much more—if not directly by under compensating their employees, then through massive government subsidies of taxpayer money funneled to corporations.* It is for these reasons that Lankshear suggests “we are perfectly justified in asking for whom the literacy in question

* Leistyna, "Non-sense," 112-113. Also evidence the most recent taxpayer bailout of corrupt and irresponsible Wall Street firms.

is most (or most truly) functional.”³¹ In other words, we are perfectly justified in asking for whom a college education is most beneficial. While it certainly bestows financial benefits to graduates, the existence of massive disparities in income reveals a system that privileges a small minority of individuals. By preparing college graduates to work within the system, it seems that the education bestowed by the system of higher education in the United States is most truly beneficial for this small minority. The physical and intellectual labor of the many benefits the few captains of industry. In this sense, and without attempting to downplay the ways in which college graduates are clearly an oppressor class within one totality, we can begin to see how within another, they are not as clearly privileged as a simple understanding would suggest.

The notion of the oppressor-student is further complicated within the totality of the United States population due to the role personal characteristics play in salary and hiring chances. Leistyna points out the fact that “on average, women make 77 cents to a man’s dollar. . . . Leading occupations for women are all lower-middle and working-class jobs. In addition, the majority of jobs at the bottom of the economic scales are held by women, especially women of color.”³² This trend is particularly interesting because, while one could argue that statistics about employment status with regards to race differences stem from the fact that, as noted by the CFHE and others, racial and ethnic minorities are systematically excluded from higher education, women are not. In fact, according to Mary Beth Marklein, in Minnesota, “women earn more than half the degrees granted statewide in every category, be it associate, bachelor, master, doctoral or professional.”³³ This is not an isolated incident in Minnesota, either, it is a reflection of a nationwide phenomenon.³⁴ With more women educated at higher levels than men, it

seems odd that they would continue to make less money on average and be employed in lower earning jobs. This phenomenon further complicates the notion of the oppressor-student in higher education in the US because if the majority of the students are female, though they remain privileged in relationship to the broader world totality, they are clearly suffering the effects of oppressive hiring practices within the totality of the United States and, as such, are not clearly only oppressor-students.

Beyond just the ways in which college graduates' position in the middle-class might reveal the influence of systems of oppression that benefit others more so than the graduates themselves, the privileged comfort of a middle-class lifestyle is no longer guaranteed for graduates. In a 2010 article appearing in *Business Insider*, Michael Snyder cites "22 statistics that... prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the middle class is being systematically wiped out of America."³⁵ His article suggests that, as the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' continues to grow, the middle class—made up primarily of college graduates—will gradually disappear. Leistyna also notices this trend and explains, "the middle-class is imploding into the working class, which in turn is imploding into the working poor who are literally relegated to life on the streets."³⁶ Snyder explains that this is largely due to "globalism and 'free trade.'"³⁷ While this has hugely benefited corporations and their governing boards, it has hurt US workers. Snyder explains: "The reality is that no matter how smart, how strong, how educated or how hard-working American workers are, they just cannot compete with people who are desperate to put in 10 to 12 hour days at less than a dollar an hour on the other side of the world."³⁸ As a result, there are fewer and fewer jobs available for US workers, and those that are available pay much lower wages than in the past.

While knowledge dependent fields have resisted the effects of globalization and free trade longer than un-skilled labor, they, too, are gradually losing the globalization battle. Recall the findings of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education which suggest that “other countries... are now educating more of their citizens to more advanced levels than we are.”³⁹ Because in many of these countries “there is no minimum wage and very few regulations,”⁴⁰ it makes it easy for corporations to ship traditionally high-paying jobs overseas, where they can have access to equally or better educated workers for a fraction of the cost. This has already largely happened in the high-tech field and is expanding to other areas as well. The law profession, for example, is also falling victim to outsourcing. According to Rama Lakshmi, “In the past three years, the legal outsourcing industry [in India] has grown about 60% annually.”⁴¹ This suggests that as individuals in foreign countries achieve education rates similar to or better than those in the United States, US corporations seeking to lower expenditures will continue to look overseas for employees, where they can employ individuals just as well educated as United States citizens at a fraction of the cost. Although these trends will undoubtedly have significant effects on college graduates and their ability to enter the privileged lifestyle that they expect,^{*} we should not forget that the fact that there are people “desperate to put in 10 to 12 hours days at less than a dollar an hour” reveals

^{*} Lee, for example, points out that outsourcing and downsizing has resulted in historically high unemployment rates for college graduates. Additionally, Lee also points out that entry-level salaries are lower than in the past and explains that these are particularly troubling because “where [new employees] start is one of the biggest factors in how much they're earning a decade later” (Lee, “Job Market Worsens”). Following Lee’s analysis, although college graduates have traditionally enjoyed a relatively comfortable place in society, recent trends in globalization, including outsourcing and downsizing—resulting in the systematic destruction of the middle class—are disrupting this comfort. Although they are still relatively privileged, college graduates may soon find themselves—or are already finding themselves—in a similar plight as more traditionally underserved and underprivileged groups.

massive structures of global oppression. The fact that workers in the United States could historically expect much higher wages than people in other countries for similar work underscores the huge privilege of people living in the US, even of those not as well-paid as college graduates. As Snyder points out, however, as the effects of globalization continue, “US workers are slowly being merged into the new ‘global’ labor pool.”⁴² As income statistics suggest, it is much more likely that salaries will equalize down than up, meaning college graduates competing for employment with people in other countries willing to work for a fraction of the cost will be forced to accept positions for less pay, which will gradually lower their financial status relative to the soaring profits of the elite few. The end result of globalization, therefore, which the US government and corporations continually laud,⁴³ will be the massive restructuring of incomes into the superhigh in the superlow, oppressors and oppressed, respectively, and college students will progressively begin to find themselves grouped in with the superlow.

Even as some of the trends mentioned above progress, as the effects of globalization increase and college graduates become less able to find jobs that support a middle-class lifestyle, the fact that they will need to accept lower pay is not enough to suggest that they will immediately fall in with the oppressed classes globally or even nationally (though this may eventually happen). A slightly lower paying job in the US still provides a fair amount of privilege when compared internationally. Despite this, it does seem possible, to some extent, to see at least some students in higher education in the US as suffering the effects of some form of oppression or another despite their general status as oppressor-students, particularly women, racial and ethnic minorities, those lower-class individuals who do gain access to higher education, individuals

discriminated against due to sexual preference, etc. As discussed in Chapter V, the presence of the effects of some form of oppression on some students in higher education in the US provides useful ways to engage in a critical examination of their realities by providing for a variety of perspectives on potential limit-situations for discussion. The fact that some form of oppression may affect some of the students in higher education in the US is not enough, however, to deny their oppressor status and consider them entirely as members of the oppressed.

While it would be inaccurate to say that even the oppressors are oppressed by systems of oppression because of the limits these systems impose on human action or because they may suffer oppression within a smaller totality, the oppressors are dehumanized by these structures. Allen and Rossatto point out:

In fact, some believe that the oppressor is oppressed, that indeed we are all oppressed. For instance, some say that the oppressor is “oppressed” by his/her unfound fear of the Other and lives their [sic] life seeking to create a comfortable place away from those they [sic] fear. However, this notion goes too far. If everyone is oppressed, then the term “oppressed” loses its value in naming a different type of human experience. Freire clarifies this issue by saying that the oppressor is dehumanized but not oppressed.⁴⁴

The argument, here, is that the fear experienced by the oppressors places limits on their pursuits by causing them to “[seek] to create a comfortable place away from those they fear.” While the oppressors may feel put upon and controlled by this fear, it is not really a form of oppression but rather a dehumanizing consequence of their irrational fear. As addressed in the previous chapter, true human praxis requires open dialogue between and

among all individuals. The historical vocation of humanization is a cooperative project that occurs between humans in dialogue with each other about the world that mediates them. The fear of the other experienced by oppressor groups or their tendency to willingly or non-willingly deny the oppressed participation in naming the world prevents oppressors from working with the oppressed in the pursuit of becoming more fully human. This attitude continues the contradiction between the oppressors and oppressed. Furthermore, the fact that oppressors generally tend to willingly or non-willingly (through their non-consciousness of the existence of oppression) preserve structures of oppression also prevents them from participating in human praxis because they do not seek to transform oppressive reality but rather “preserve a profitable situation.”⁴⁵

In the context of higher education in the US, this phenomenon appears in the use of the banking model of education. A simple understanding of Freirean pedagogy would suggest that students in classrooms in US colleges are oppressed by the student/teacher contradiction that characterizes the banking form of education they experience. Recall the way the banking model treats students as passive containers to be filled by the active teacher. In Freire’s discussion, this is clearly a form of oppression. In the context of an oppressor-student population, however, this understanding seems flawed. As Allen and Rossatto point out, it would seem disingenuous to claim that privileged, oppressor-students are oppressed by a system of education that perpetuates their privilege. Recall the “social mobility” and social stratification effected by higher education in the US discussed previously in the Introduction and Chapter II. It is precisely through completing college that graduates are more easily able to fulfill their oppressor roles. Despite this, the type of education required to teach to accountability measures is

certainly not the humanizing, problem-posing pedagogy discussed in the previous chapter. Therefore, while we cannot claim that privileged, oppressor-students are oppressed by the banking system, they are certainly dehumanized by it. ‘Learning’ in the manner dictated by the banking model—by storing and regurgitating skills and information transmitted to passive, ‘ignorant’ students from active, ‘knowledgeable’ teachers—clearly negates participation in the dialogic encounter required by problem-posing education. It programs privileged, oppressor-students to non-consciously fulfill their oppressor role. So, while we cannot say that oppressor-students are oppressed by their education in the banking system, they—like oppressed students and individuals—are prevented from participating in human praxis because they—like the oppressed—do not possess the critical consciousness required to illuminate their reality to the point that they could conceive of it and their action in it in a way that would allow them to realize their ability to change the world. So, even as oppressor-students who benefit from systems of oppression existing in society, students in higher education in the United States have a personal investment in developing critical consciousness.

Although Freire believes that the oppressors cannot liberate the oppressed, and that it is up to the oppressed to bring about their own liberation, making oppressors aware of their status as oppressors seems like an admirable goal, nonetheless. As Allen and Rossatto’s analysis makes clear, many oppressor-students see themselves as merely ‘normal.’ They do not understand their privilege nor the fact that many of the freedoms they enjoy come at great cost domestically and around the globe. Recall that as Allen and Rossatto point out, most oppressor-students have a positive self image and think of themselves as good people deserving of their privilege. As such, their thinking clearly

exhibits the kind of incoherence that Freire suggests often characterizes oppressive situations and naïve consciousness. As mentioned above, oppressor-students are completely unaware of the fact that they are severely dehumanized by the structures of oppression that benefit them.

The dehumanizing nature of our national education system and employment structure in the US may explain widespread job dissatisfaction. According to Pepitone's discussion of a "Conference Board" survey, "only 45% [of US workers] were satisfied in their jobs."⁴⁶ Comparatively, this is "the lowest level since record-keeping began 22 years ago."⁴⁷ Furthermore, as Lynn Franco, "director of the Consumer Research Center of the Conference Board," explains, this downturn has been a continuing trend: "Through both economic boom and bust during the past two decades, our job satisfaction numbers have shown a consistent downward trend."⁴⁸ This consistent downturn has persisted in spite of supposed "big improvements in the work environment, such as reduction of workplace hazards and an increase in vacation days."⁴⁹ Finally, and significantly for the discussion of oppressor-students in colleges and universities in the US, while "employee satisfaction dipped across the board... workers younger than 25 were the most unhappy in their jobs."⁵⁰ In other words, although most people in the US, especially college graduates, benefit from their employment enough to place them solidly in the ranks of the oppressors worldwide, this privilege is not necessarily satisfying. The employment structure is largely dehumanizing, as evidenced both by the system of education that prepares oppressor-students for it and by the kind of work achieved by college graduates. Richard Shaull highlights the dehumanizing nature of our society in the "Forward" to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* when he suggests that "there are certain parallels [between

the poverty and illiteracy in Latin America and our situation in the US] that should not be overlooked”; one such parallel being that “our advanced technological society is rapidly making objects of most of us and subtly programming us into conformity to the logic of its system. To the degree that this happens, we are also becoming submerged in a new ‘culture of silence.’”⁵¹ Given some of the trends mentioned above, this “culture of silence,” the oppressor-students’ non-awareness of their oppressor status, the dehumanization that accompanies this, and the widespread dissatisfaction with the dehumanizing employment environment presents a very serious limit-situation that needs addressing.

Despite seemingly clear and obvious signs of dehumanizing limit-situations that face the oppressor-students that populate US colleges and universities, there seems to be little ability for even the supposedly ‘empowered’ college graduates to effect changes in the system. A look at the current political climate in the United States, for example, highlights just how difficult it is for even oppressor-students to change their realities. Our voting system, once revolutionary, is now archaic. It has not been significantly changed since its inception. Our options for major offices almost exclusively fall between two parties, which, as discussed in the Introduction, both consistently ‘buy into’ and place their faith solidly in the mainstream paradigm of the market model.* Not only do both parties exhibit absolute faith in the market model, the selection of candidates highly depends on market principles and monetary contributions. In light of the recent Supreme Court decision to abolish limitations on corporate and special interest campaign

* As Leistyna details, adherence to the market model is largely responsible for the devastating effects on US workers of globalization, outsourcing, and downsizing ("Neoliberal Non-sense").

contributions, candidates abilities to gain office will depend at least as much on appeasing these interests in order to raise money as it will on convincing enough of the populace to vote for them.

Our limited capacity to make political decisions is even more problematic given recent studies that suggest that less than 25% of the population is satisfied with the state of the nation and even fewer trust the government. Mirroring the consistent downturn in job satisfaction, popular faith and satisfaction in the government has largely been sliding recently (though it has enjoyed brief upturns from time to time). Satisfaction and trust in the two major political parties is also at an all-time low.⁵² This suggests that although citizens are largely dissatisfied with the state of the nation and the current government, they have little faith in challengers to the incumbents. Neither option seems desirable, and voting often comes down to voting against the worst candidate and grudgingly voting for a less worse one, instead. It seems, then, that despite our financial privilege, many citizens in the United States have few options when it comes to political freedoms and the ability to make political decisions that will have a real effect on their realities or effect any change to the system responsible for the massively dehumanizing nature of our education and employment systems.

In the face of the complex social, political, and economic landscape discussed above—in which students in higher education in the US are both privileged, oppressor-students, while also facing the dissatisfying nature of our massively dehumanizing society—it would be in their interest to be able to conceive of their realities in a way that would reveal some of the complex interplay of structures of oppression that they both benefit from and suffer under. Unfortunately, they seem largely unable to do this. The

fact that most privileged students are blind to these structures, view themselves as ‘normal,’ and have internalized narratives of the market and individualism to the point that they seem unable to conceive of the connections between the exploitation of Two-Thirds World countries and soaring domestic unemployment rates and falling salaries reveals the phenomenon that Shaull calls the “culture of silence.” As cited above, Shaull believes that “we are... becoming submerged in a new ‘culture of silence.’”⁵³ In other words, most individuals in the United States seem to ‘buy into’ “the principles of the marketplace and the logic of rampant individualism”⁵⁴ and do not conceive the roles these play in many societal problems.* This is due at least in part to an educational system that stresses a kind of “functional literacy” that attempts to create individuals that will ‘fit’ society as it is, that “subtly program[s] us into conformity to the logic of its system.” The “culture of silence” seems to present a serious obstacle to our ability to address societal problems in a meaningful way. If we are unable to conceive and talk about the issues, it seems impossible that we would be able to work towards solving them. Furthermore, when it comes to thinking about the use of critical pedagogy in higher education, it would seem that a “culture of silence” would preclude the use of problem-posing education. It might lead individuals to ask, How can one pose a peoples’ reality to them as a problem if they do not conceive of it as such? While this may initially seem like a limitation, it is telling and reveals precisely why we need critical pedagogy.

* McLaren calls this “an alienation from alienation—that is... the disappearance of our consciousness that we exist in a vertiginous and toxic state of alienation” (“Paulo Freire and the Academy: A Challenge from the U.S. Left,” 151).

Because, as mentioned in Chapter III, oppression can be domesticating and, as mentioned above, results in the oppressed not consciously knowing that they are oppressed, Freire's discussion of problem-posing education anticipates the confrontation with a "culture of silence." First of all, as Freire points out, "the fact that individuals in a certain area do not perceive a generative theme, or perceive it in a distorted way, may only reveal a limit-situation of oppression in which the people are still submerged."⁵⁵ In the case of oppressor-students in higher education, the fact that they do not perceive their reality as problematic suggests that they are submerged by the alternately oppressing and dehumanizing system in which they operate. This oppressing and dehumanizing system prevents them from achieving the level of consciousness required to participate in human praxis, thereby submerging even the oppressor-students' consciousness. But, as Freire makes clear, this silence is telling. He writes, "A group which does not correctly express a generative thematic—a fact which might appear to imply the nonexistence of themes—is, on the contrary, suggesting a very dramatic theme: *the theme of silence*."⁵⁶ It is in this that critical pedagogy and problem-posing education responds to the "culture of silence" and the fatalism it engenders. Although the goal of the background investigation that Freire advocates is to break this silence and find generative themes about which to begin a dialogue between students-teachers and teacher-students, carrying out such a background investigation might not always be possible—especially within the confines of institutions of higher education where funds may not be available. In that case, critical pedagogy itself provides the tools for overcoming this apparent limitation. It takes up the silence and uses it as a generative theme upon which to engage in a dialogical encounter.

As a generative theme, “the theme of silence” will lead to other themes about which to dialogue and will open ways to enter into what at first may have seemed like an unproblematic world and elucidate disturbing structures of oppression. Freire explains:

Whereas the banking method directly or indirectly reinforces men’s fatalistic perception of their situation, the problem-posing method presents this very situation to them as a problem. As the situation becomes the object of their cognition, the naïve or magical perception which produced the fatalism gives way to perception which is able to perceive itself as it perceives reality, and can thus be critically objective about that reality.⁵⁷

As addressed more extensively in Chapter III, the problem-posing approach of critical pedagogy breaks through the veneer of our reality and allows us to conceive of it critically. As such, implementing it with oppressor-students would allow them to understand better the oppressing and dehumanizing systems into which they fit. And, as Freire believes, “A deepened consciousness of their situation leads people to apprehend that situation as an historical reality susceptible of transformation.”⁵⁸ An awareness of the oppressing and dehumanizing systems they act within will allow oppressor-students to realize that they are not, in fact, ‘normal’ and are, rather, comparatively privileged individuals. It will also help them to see how their privileged status is connected with oppression both domestic and international. And, finally, it will reveal the reason behind the rampant dissatisfaction with the political and employment climate. Considering the fact that most oppressor-students see themselves as “nice, kind, caring, and benevolent people,” realizing that the privileges they enjoy come at the expense of others would either challenge them to do something about these conditions or force them to change

their perceptions of themselves. While it is possible that the latter may occur, I remain hopeful that most oppressor-students, made aware of their privilege, would seek to maintain their identity as “nice, kind, caring, and benevolent people,” and therefore, develop a solidarity with the oppressed and work with them to challenge and change reality in order that both may participate in the vocation become more fully human.

This development of critical consciousness among oppressor-students will most likely be a painful process. Allen and Rossatto claim in their article that their “belief is that oppressors can neither come to the realization that they are members of an oppressor group nor come to a problematized understanding of their oppressor identity without a significant emotional and cognitive experience.”⁵⁹ In other words, they must be strongly challenged, and their comfort in their position must be shaken. In order to achieve this, Allen and Rossatto advocate confronting the oppressor-student “with a systematic and persistent deconstruction of their privileged identity, and, above all, they must be in an educational context where they are a part of, but not in control of, the classroom discourse.”⁶⁰ Allen and Rossatto counter the charge that this is a “paternalistic approach to teaching” by invoking Freire’s claim that

the restraints imposed by the former oppressed on their oppressors, so that the latter cannot resume their former position, do not constitute oppression. An act is only oppressive when it prevents people from being more fully human.

Accordingly, these necessary restraints do not in themselves signify that yesterday’s oppressed have become today’s oppressors.⁶¹

In other words, they believe that it is consistent with Freire’s pedagogy to use force with the oppressors in the interest of the oppressed. While they are correct in this claim, I

wonder whether or not this is the most successful approach for deconstructing privileged identity. It seems that confronting oppressor-students too strongly, by placing them in a “hot seat,”⁶² would only further provoke the resistance and anger that Allen and Rossatto notice in privilege students when confronted with critical pedagogy literature. This seems counterproductive, considering the lack of engagement that resistance and anger engender. Invoking resistance and anger on the behalf of oppressor-students would not seem to aid the development of critical consciousness because it would more likely result in their retreat back into their own passive acceptance of the system as it is and the stubborn reaffirmation of their preconceived identities.

The process of developing critical consciousness in the oppressor-students will necessarily be slightly discomforting and painful, as it is in the oppressed as well,^{*} but if conducted carefully, it would not need to lead to anger and resistance. Similar to Freire’s belief that it is necessary for the oppressed to realize on their own the conditions of their oppression, I believe it is necessary for oppressor-students to realize on their own the conditions of their privilege. This would necessarily involve critical, dialogic encounters with oppressed perspectives, but it seems that Freire’s problem-posing education opens up ways for even oppressor-students to realize their privilege. It would undoubtedly require slight modifications, as the privileged status of oppressor-students would seem less conducive to the presence of limit-situations. As I hope the discussion above has revealed, however, just because oppressor-students might be relatively privileged within

* Freire writes: "Liberation is thus a childbirth, and a painful one. The man or woman who emerges is a new person, viable only as the oppressor-oppressed contradiction is superseded by the humanization of all people. Or to put it another way, the solution of this contradiction is born in the labor which brings into the world this new being: no longer oppressor nor longer oppressed, but human in the process of achieving freedom" (*Oppressed*, 49).

one totality, there are still ways in which some of them may suffer some form of oppression within the different totality. Elucidating these systems of oppression would seem to begin to help oppressor-students realize the existence of these systems and how they begin to link together in the broader scheme of their overall privilege. Furthermore, as I have also suggested above, the theme of silence presents a very potent theme upon which to begin a dialogue. If nothing else, engaging in a critical encounter about the theme of silence would seem to illuminate the dehumanized and dehumanizing reality of oppressor-students and the systems of oppression that perpetuate their privilege and their dissatisfaction.

Getting oppressor-students to care about these things through problem-posing education seems like a good way to begin developing critical consciousness in the oppressors, which would seem to force them to confront the realities of their privilege. While Freire himself remains somewhat doubtful as to whether or not “discovering himself to be an oppressor” will “necessarily lead to solidarity with the oppressed,”⁶³ “discovering himself to be an oppressor” seems different from the genuine development of critical consciousness. Just because one realizes that she or he is an oppressor does not mean that she or he has also developed enough critical awareness to fully participate in human praxis, to see the world as changing and changeable, and to understand the role of history and human action in creating their realities. Developing critical consciousness in oppressor-students through the use of problem-posing education, on the other hand, seems like it has precisely the potential not only to unveil the oppressor status of privilege students, but to also engender genuine concern with and for oppression, which, if Freire is correct, will necessarily lead to action. Allen and Rossatto point out that

“political revolution is not the only type of radical political vision that the oppressed consider and use.”⁶⁴ They cite the Civil Rights Movement and the Women’s Movement in the United States as examples of moments of social change that relied on “an essential appeal to the moral sensibilities of the oppressors in order to bring about social and legal changes within the existing nation-state.”^{*} This suggests that, although Freire remains doubtful that the oppressors can effect humanitarian changes, there is at least some use in awakening critical consciousness in the oppressors. Furthermore, Freire himself believes that, although they cannot make liberatory changes for the oppressed, members of the oppressor class can join in solidarity with the oppressed and work together to achieve liberation with the oppressed.⁶⁵ Critical educators are such individuals, according to Freire. While it would be nice to believe that all individuals with critical consciousness would join in solidarity with the oppressed and actively fight with them for their liberation, this might be an optimistic goal; however, we can hope that, even if they would not actively fight with the oppressed, they would not oppose social movements that would benefit the oppressed. Because critical pedagogy and problem-posing education have this potential, I believe it is necessary to apply it in higher education in order to combat the problematic social stratification and systems of oppression and dehumanization that it perpetuates in its current incarnation.

Although, as I have discussed above, I believe that implementing a form of critical pedagogy in higher education in the United States is essential despite the

^{*} Allen and Rossatto, "Privileged Students," 172. While we should question the effectiveness of these movements because they have modified the systems of oppression affecting racial minorities and women rather than completely doing away with them, these movements, nonetheless, seem to represent key moments in the ongoing struggle for the liberation of these groups.

difference in context between higher education in the US and the context in which Freire wrote and conceived of his problem-posing pedagogy, this difference in context does present a problem for implementing the specific methods of critical pedagogy outlined by Freire. As addressed above, these were designed for use with extremely economically oppressed and mostly illiterate individuals. As such, as Shaull explains, “certainly, it would be absurd to claim that [Freire’s method] should be copied here.”⁶⁶ I do not disagree, and as Freire himself points out, “The fact that a certain procedure has worked well in a given society does not give me the authority to say that if transplanted to another society, sometimes to another time, it will be the same thing.”⁶⁷ Given the problems with the system of higher education in the US discussed in the Introduction and Chapter II and the societal problems discussed above, however, it seems that implementing some form of critical pedagogy would be beneficial in addressing these problems. I will elaborate on this claim in the Conclusion. In order to do so, however, I must first propose some theoretical and practical suggestions for how we might implement Freirean problem-posing education in the context of higher education in the United States, given the difference in context. I turn to this task in the following chapter.

§3: Notes

¹ Ricky Lee Allen and Caesar Augusto Rossatto, "Does Critical Pedagogy Work with Privileged Students?" *Teacher Education Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2009): 165, <http://www.eric.ed.gov/>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 163.

⁴ Ibid., 165.

⁵ Ibid., 163.

⁶ Luis Huerta-Charles, "Pedagogy of Testimony: Reflections on the Pedagogy of Critical Pedagogy," in *Critical Pedagogy: Where Are We Now?*, ed. Peter McLaren and Joe L Kincheloe (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 252.

⁷ Allen and Rossatto, "Privileged Students," 165.

⁸ Ibid., 166.

⁹ Ibid., 165.

¹⁰ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2009), 51.

¹¹ Allen and Rossatto, "Privileged Students," 168.

¹² Freire, *Oppressed*, 45.

¹³ Ibid., 47.

¹⁴ Allen and Rossatto, "Privileged Students," 175.

¹⁵ Ibid., 166.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Elías Margolis in Miguel Escobar and others, *Paulo Freire on Higher Education: A Dialogue at the National University of Mexico*, Teacher Empowerment and School Reform (New York: SUNY, 1994), 45.

¹⁸ Peter McLaren, "Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Politics of Hope: Reclaiming Critical Pedagogy," *Critical Studies <=> Critical Methodologies* 1, no. 1 (2001): 111, <http://csc.sagepub.com/>.

¹⁹ Freire, *Oppressed*, 44.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 54.

²² Allen and Rossatto, "Privileged Students," 171.

²³ Ibid., 175.

²⁴ Pepi Leistyna, "Neoliberal Non-sense," in *Critical Pedagogy: Where Are We Now?*, ed. Peter McLaren and Joe L Kincheloe (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 111.

²⁵ David Cay Johnston, "Income Gap Is Widening, Data Shows," *The New York Times*, March 29, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/29/business/29tax.html?_r=1.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Emanuel Saez, "Striking It Richer: The Evolution of Top Incomes in the United States (Update with 2007 Estimates)," <http://elsa.berkeley.edu/~saez/saez-UStopincomes-2007.pdf>.

²⁸ Leistyna, "Non-sense," 112.

²⁹ "Rich/Poor Income Gap Widening to Chasm," *The Early Show*, CBS News, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/05/03/earlyshow/living/money/main4068795.shtml>.

³⁰ Leistyna, "Non-sense," 111.

³¹ Colin Lankshear, "Functional Literacy from a Freirean Point of View," in *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, ed. Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard (New York: Routledge, 1993), 104.

³² Leistyna, "Non-sense," 112.

³³ Mary Beth Marklein, "College Gender Gap Widens: 57% Are Women," *USA Today*, October 15, 2005, http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2005-10-19-male-college-cover_x.htm.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Michael Snyder, "22 Statistics That Prove the Middle Class Is Being Systematically Wiped out of Existence in America," *Business Insider*, July 15, 2010, <http://www.businessinsider.com/22-statistics-that-prove-the-middle-class-is-being-systematically-wiped-out-of-existence-in-america-2010-7#83-percent-of-all-us-stocks-are-in-the-hands-of-1-percent-of-the-people-1#ixzz0tmn4EiOc>.

³⁶ Leistyna, "Non-sense," 111.

³⁷ Snyder, "22 Statistics."

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ U.S. Department of Education, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, (Washington, D.C., 2006), x.

⁴⁰ Snyder, "22 Statistics."

⁴¹ Rama Lakshmi, "US Legal Work Booms in India," *The Washington Post*, May 11, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/10/AR2008051002355.html>.

⁴² Snyder, "22 Statistics."

⁴³ Leistyna, "Non-sense," 112.

⁴⁴ Allen and Rossatto, "Privileged Students," 170.

⁴⁵ Freire, *Oppressed*, 73.

⁴⁶ Julianne Pepitone, "U.S. Job Satisfaction Hits 22-Year Low," *CNNMoney.com*, January 5, 2010, http://money.cnn.com/2010/01/05/news/economy/job_satisfaction_report/.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Lynn Franco quoted in Ibid.

⁴⁹ Pepitone, "22-Year Low."

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Richard Shuall, forward to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, by Paulo Freire, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2009), 33.

⁵² "Distrust, Discontent, Anger and Partisan Rancor: The People and Their Government," Survey Reports, The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, <http://people-press.org/report/606/trust-in-government>.

⁵³ Shuall, forward, 33.

⁵⁴ Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux, *Education Still under Siege*, 2nd ed. Critical Studies in Education and Culture, ed. Henry A Giroux and Paulo Freire (Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey, 1993), 1.

⁵⁵ Freire, *Oppressed*, 103.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 106.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 85.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Allen and Rossatto, "Privileged Students," 175.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Paulo Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. MB Ramos (New York: Continuum), 38-39 quoted in Ibid.

⁶² Allen and Rossatto, "Privileged Students," 175.

⁶³ Freire, *Oppressed*, 49.

⁶⁴ Allen and Rossatto, "Privileged Students," 172.

⁶⁵ Freire, *Oppressed*, 49-50.

⁶⁶ Shuall, forward, 33.

⁶⁷ Freire in Escobar and others, *on Higher Education*, 33.

CHAPTER V
PROBLEM-POSING EDUCATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION
IN THE UNITED STATES

As discussed in Chapter IV, when looking at the liberatory pedagogy outlined in Chapter III, it seems bizarre to suggest that we should employ its problem-posing methods in higher education, let alone in the United States. Recall Richard Shaull's words from the "Forward" to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: "Paulo Freire's method of teaching illiterates in Latin America seems to belong to a different world from that in which we find ourselves in this country. Certainly, it would be absurd to claim that it should be copied here."¹ As discussed in Chapter IV, this remains an accurate and valid concern, especially considering the oppressor status of many students in higher education in the US. Yet, in outlining Freire's method in Chapter III, I do not mean to suggest that we should copy it precisely. Freire himself denies that methods should be copied exactly from one context to another.² Instead, as Freire's method itself suggests, we should ask ourselves how it might apply to our context to address our problems. Ira Shor points out, "Inside the frontier of critical education, Freire has provided guidance and inspiration. But in making his contribution, he denies that his ideas or methods should be followed as rigid models. We have to reinvent liberating education for our own situations, according to Freire."³ So, we should look back to Freire's methods discussed in Chapter III not as a rigid set of practices to be followed exactly but as suggestions to be drawn upon. With these in mind and with consideration of Freire's philosophical and ontological commitments to ensure that any suggestions offered for how we might adapt Freire's

methods to our contexts remain faithful to his project, I will offer a discussion of how critical pedagogy might function in higher education in the United States.

A discussion of how to implement Freirean critical pedagogy in higher education in the US seems to demand two things: (1) a discussion of how Freirean critical pedagogy would function ideally in US colleges and universities and (2) a discussion of how to enact changes within the current system that could help give rise to critical consciousness, which could provide the basis for liberatory action not only directed towards overcoming limit-situations in our present society but also directed towards the implementation of the ideal model. These two tasks reflect the two stages of liberatory pedagogy Freire discusses. He explains:

The pedagogy of the oppressed, as a humanist and libertarian pedagogy, has two distinct stages. In the first, the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation. In the second stage, in which the reality of oppression has already been transformed, this pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation.⁴

This first stage that Freire discusses involves “educational projects” that take place on the small scale with the oppressed, while the second stage represents the “systematic education” that will exist in the new society created through the liberatory praxis carried out in the first stage.⁵ While Freire admits that “only a revolutionary society can carry out [problem-posing] education in systematic terms,” he stresses that “revolutionary leaders need not take full power before they can employ the method.”⁶ This accords with Freire’s belief that “critical and liberating dialogue... must be carried out with the

oppressed at whatever stage of their struggle for liberation.”⁷ From this, we should understand that we must not fall into fatalism in the face of factors that might limit the widespread use of critical pedagogy in higher education. The fact that widespread acceptance of his method seems doubtful should not deter dedicated teachers from attempting to implement methods that accord with his pedagogy. In fact, as Freire’s discussion seems to suggest, it is essential that these individuals do precisely this in the hopes that, through their methods, conditions will begin to change in favor of a broader implementation of problem-posing education.

Neither suggesting an ideal model of the systematic implementation of Freirean pedagogy nor a discussion of the kind of “educational projects” that can effect this implementation is an easy one, but each is challenging for its own reasons. Offering a discussion of how Freirean critical pedagogy would ideally function systematically in higher education in the US is difficult for several reasons. First of all, offering a specific, predetermined mold would seem to betray the dynamism of the Freirean project. Such a proposal would seem to represent precisely the predetermined, prescribed outcome that Freire is suspicious of. Rather, because the systematic implementation of Freirean pedagogy would occur in the new, revolutionary society, shaped by the praxis of the oppressed and those working in solidarity with them, it is difficult to envision exactly how they would reimagine education. Because of this, it seems more important to engage the other task discussed above and offer a discussion of realistic policies and “educational projects” that teachers could implement within the current system of higher education in order to bring about the desired changes. Offering such a discussion is difficult in its own turn, however, because it requires us to work within a system so bloated and

entrenched in the problem that real change to the system seems difficult, if not impossible. The kind of changes that seem feasible within the current system might not seem sufficient to bring about the eventual changes that the systematic implementation of Freirean critical pedagogy would require. We must be careful not to fall victim to fatalism, which often characterizes oppressive situations,⁸ however, and remember that, as Ira Shor suggests, “The transformation of teachers and students from authoritarian to democratic habits is a long-term project.”⁹ So, these tasks remain and demand serious treatment. In this chapter, I will discuss some concrete and practical suggestions for how problem-posing education might occur within the current system. I reserve the discussion of how critical pedagogy might ideally function systematically in higher education until the concluding chapter, in which I treat how a move towards systematic implementation would address some of the common concerns regarding the current state of higher education in the United States.

In order for my discussion of practical suggestions for implementing Freirean pedagogy in the current context of higher education in the United States to respond appropriately to that context, it seems important to begin with an acknowledgment of some limitations that confront this endeavor. In addition to the change in the student population from oppressed, illiterate peasants and laborers to oppressor-students discussed at length in the previous chapter, a number of other conditions might present obstacles to the endeavor to implement Freirean pedagogy in higher education in the US, including: (1) resistance to the goals of critical pedagogy; (2) external curricular requirements; (3) budgetary limitations, which would affect class size and format among other resource concerns; (4) class size and format; (5) other resource limitations, such as

time and people to carry out things like the background thematic investigation; and (6) teacher involvement and time commitment, as Freirean pedagogy would require committed involvement from educators. There are most likely other concerns, but these seem some of the major ones. Combined with the fact that most students in higher education in the US are oppressors and not oppressed, the presence of these limitations may lead some to believe that it is simply impossible to implement problem-posing education in higher education in the US. As mentioned above, however, this kind of fatalism only further indicates the existence of the effects of oppressive structures operating on higher education in the US and the need for resistance against these structures. In order to develop further my suggestions for implementing Freirean pedagogy in higher education in the US, I will begin by further discussing some of the limitations mentioned above. Then, I will offer some practical suggestions of how Freirean pedagogy might function in the context of higher education in the US in spite of these limitations.

Perhaps the most significant obstacle confronting the implementation of problem-posing pedagogy in higher education in the US is resistance to the goals of critical pedagogy. I have addressed this to some extent in the previous chapter when I addressed claims that critical pedagogy simply does not fit the context of higher education in the US. That discussion does not entirely cover this objection, however. Even if someone were to acknowledge that problem-posing education could survive the change in context, she or he may still object to its goals and outcomes. Individuals from the mainstream perspective may fall into this camp, since the endeavor to educate for the transformation of society conflicts with the mainstream faith in the market principles of the status quo.

Seals highlights this obstacle when he points out that one of the major reasons he believes Freirean pedagogy is not more present in higher education is that “Freiren [sic] participation may simply not support commonly desired educational outcomes.”¹⁰ In other words, a program of university study within the current system may not support critical consciousness raising education and/or, conversely, some individuals may believe that critical pedagogy would not provide sufficient instruction in the specific learning outcomes they find valuable. Programs of study may be too steeped in the banking model. As such, these programs may prefer forms of teaching and learning that focus on predetermined, measurable learning outcomes and believe that problem-posing education is simply too unstructured, too “laissez-faire”¹¹ to successfully deal with concrete content.

To a large extent, then, resistance to the goals of critical pedagogy also influence and involve curricular limitations. Individuals may object to the critical consciousness raising goals of critical pedagogy simply because these goals do not seem to match existing or desired curricular requirements. Either this, or individuals may object to the political nature of Freire’s pedagogy. Recall Henry Giroux’s words cited in the Introduction: “one gets the sense that conservative educators... believe that there is no place in the classroom for politics, worldly concerns, social issues, and questions about how to lessen human suffering.”¹² As such, these things should be strictly excluded from classroom curriculum and, instead, course curricula should focus explicitly on content deemed important by administrators or faculty committees. Concerns such as these have, to some extent, contributed to calls to maintain a focus on traditional curricula, often “defined scholastically as the Great Books, or as a Great Tradition of literature, music,

painting, etc., or as the correct usage of the upper classes, or as the information and experience familiar to the elite.”¹³ Anything that strays away from these traditionally defined areas of academic and scholastic importance is seen as undesirable and dangerous to the educational pursuit.* As discussed in the Introduction and Chapter II, ensuring competence in these traditionally understood areas of importance fuels “the frenzy to assess learning in higher education.”¹⁴ Also as discussed in Chapter II, the culture of accountability that has begun to pervade higher education will continue to impose stricter curricular limitations, which will make it difficult to pursue problem-posing education, if it is interpreted as something counter to these concerns.

Also recall that, again as discussed in Chapter II, some of the concern for accountability in higher education arises from unease about the exorbitant expense of tuition at colleges and universities in the US. In the face of increasingly exorbitant costs, colleges must be constantly cognizant of budgetary limitations. Budgetary concerns have already resulted in particular structures within universities. While there are several significant ways that budgetary concerns have affected universities and their employees, perhaps the effects most limiting to the endeavor to implement critical pedagogy in higher education are the effects budgetary limitations have had on class size and personnel resources. One of the ways many colleges and universities throughout the US have dealt with limited budgets is to increase the number of students in the classroom and decrease faculty positions.¹⁵ The prevalence of large classrooms in higher education is probably one of the reasons for the reliance on the banking model; it is simply easier to lecture to students in a classroom of 100-500 students than it is to devise ways to

* See The David Horowitz Freedom Center, for example (<http://www.horowitzfreedomcenter.org/>).

implement problem-posing education in this setting. It seems that most of the methods associated with problem-posing education, such as dialogue and attention to students' personal experiences, would be much easier to implement in small classes than in large classrooms. In addition to the difficulty presented to critical educators by large classrooms, limited personnel resources would also constrain educators' ability to carry out important aspects of Freirean pedagogy that would take place outside the classroom. Recall, for example, the detailed background investigation of a people and their contexts that Freire advocates to uncover themes important to those people, discussed in Chapter III. Such an investigation would require time, personnel, and money. Given the already limited supply of these resources in colleges in the US, it seems unlikely that university administrators would want to devote additional resources to new, experimental measures, especially if they felt that these measures conflicted with traditional curricular pursuits.

The final limiting factor mentioned above, the extra time and commitment required on the part of educators, relates to budgetary concerns but also has further implications. Instructors' time and resources are already stretched pretty thin in most research universities, between their teaching commitments and research requirements, so much so, in fact, that these interests often conflict. Retired professor Andrew Hacker, for example, argues that in today's 'publish or perish' climate, "professors spend their time doing research and teaching relatively few classes."¹⁶ The need to publish takes away from the time faculty members have to devote to teaching. Add the administrative duties that many professors in small departments must take on themselves because funds for support staff are not available, and the time available for thinking about and preparing lessons becomes starkly truncated. This is a devastating obstacle for implementing

Freirean pedagogy for several reasons. First of all, as mentioned above, if institutions engaged in the background thematic investigation Freire advocates, personnel participating in the investigation would need to spend a significant amount of time doing so. As discussed in Chapter III, instructors are an integral part of this thematic investigation, and so it would require their participation. This participation would be extremely difficult in light of the already existing limitations on instructors' time. Even beyond involvement in the thematic investigation, however, the nature of a dialogic classroom would require a greater time commitment to teaching. It would require a more flexible approach. Because Freirean pedagogy requires a dynamic learning environment, professors could not necessarily count on using the same material in more than one course. Since problem-posing education requires educators to reconsider their own thoughts and perspectives as they encounter those of their students, they would need to be open to changing course plans while the course is still ongoing. Rather than arriving on the first day with syllabi containing a relatively rigid schedule of events planned out for the entire term, educators would need to leave this open and flexible to mold to the flow of the dialogue. While this may involve less planning initially, it would involve a significant amount of instructor time later in the term as instructors worked with the flow of the class and attempted to find and adapt material to the discussion going on in the classroom.

Given these limitations, it may seem difficult to implement Freirean problem-posing pedagogy in higher education in the US, but it is not impossible. Even in the face of the obstacles discussed above, however, there are ways that dedicated educators could implement changes in their classroom pedagogy that could aid in the development of

critical consciousness. In the following pages, I offer a series of suggestions and discussions of principles that those interested in implementing critical pedagogy in higher education classrooms can draw upon. In offering these suggestions, I return to some of the principles discussed in previous chapters, as well as introduce new discussions of Freire's practices. This discussion leads me to the following six principles that educators should consider when thinking about implementing Freirean pedagogy in their classrooms: (1) thematize the course material by connecting it to the existential and political lives of the students; (2) investigate the thematic elements of this material through dialogic discussion; (3) seek coherence in explanations and analyses of the themes present in the material; (4) respect the historicity of themes and the structures of oppression they reveal; (5) introduce interpretations from the underside; and (6) challenge students' sense of comfort with, and reinforce student resistance to, the status quo. I derive the first four of these principles almost exclusively from Freire and discussions of his pedagogy. The latter two, I include in order more adequately to adapt problem-posing education to the oppressor-student population of institutions of higher education in the United States. In discussing these principles in the next section, I draw on some of the theoretical and practical explanations of Freire's practices as a way to offer specific suggestions and practices. In the second section, I will follow up the discussion of the six principles with a more concrete example of how they might function in a hypothetical college classroom.

§1: The Problem-Posing Classroom: Theoretical Underpinnings

(1) Thematizing the Course Material

A critical pedagogy fitted for the oppressor-students that populate institutions of higher education in the United States should not take the form of direct political education but rather pursue a political, socially conscious investigation and discussion of the course content. In many cases, this would involve a new approach to teaching the same or similar material as opposed to introducing an entirely new curriculum.* I do not intend that in advocating for the use of critical pedagogy in higher education all courses should become politically bent socio-cultural education courses. Instead, educators should pursue the course content of their discipline through problem-posing pedagogy. After all, Allen and Rossatto point out that “critical pedagogy is, or at least should be, about more than direct political action; it is also conceptually driven. In other words, students need to learn important concepts, which can in turn enhance political action.”¹⁷ In the case of the oppressed, illiterate peasantry and laborers that Freire worked with, the content for study was basic literacy skills, learning to read and write. As previously discussed, however, Freire believes that simply using standard literacy exercises that require students to repeat random sentences that have nothing to do with their lives is “useless.”¹⁸ Instead, he advocates thematizing the material so that the words, phrases,

* Although, if the goal of these smaller scale "educational projects" is successful and students develop a greater critical awareness, begin to take charge of their reality (including their education), and work to change it, the curriculum may change significantly. However, this change would probably take place as we begin to move into the "systematic education" that Freire suggests accompanies later stage liberatory education.

and sentences used to acquire literacy skills relate directly to the lived experiences of his students.¹⁹ In this sense, Freirean education is more of a process of learning than a specific content to be learned; the content will change from context to context, but the process will persist.* In following this structure of thematizing the material and Freire's notion of education as a process rather than content, educators wishing to implement problem-posing education must think about ways to thematize their course content so that it directly relates to the lived experiences of the students.

Perhaps returning to Freire's process in more detail will provide useful pointers for beginning to think about means for thematizing the content of college courses. As outlined in Chapter III, Freire advocates a careful background investigation to elucidate the themes relevant to a particular people and context. Once these themes have been established, generative words and themes can be found that will relate directly to the people and their existential circumstances. In the case of basic literacy, this process would start with generative words. Gadotti gives a helpful breakdown of how generative words can help give rise to discussions that in turn promote critical consciousness. First of all, recall that, as discussed in Chapter III, a limited number of words in Portuguese can be used to learn basic phonemes that can then generate most words in the language. Words should be chosen according to their phonemic potentials but also according to their connection to the lives of the people in the course. Gadotti explains:

* Though, as Gadotti points out, "Paulo Freire has insisted that he never invented any literacy method" (*Reading Paulo Freire*, 21), and, as Aronowitz warns us, we should be wary of becoming fetishists of a method ("Humanism," 8), Gadotti also points out that learning is an essential process of human being. Our historical vocation to become more fully human requires us to continuously learn and relearn.

These words should *codify* (represent) the way of life of the people from the place. At a later stage, they would be *decodified*, and each word would be associated with a nucleus of questions which were both existential (questions about life) and political (questions about the social factors which determine the conditions for life). For example, for the generative word *government*, the following generative themes could be discussed: political plans, political power, the role of the government and social organization, the participation of the people.²⁰

From this example, we can see how choosing generative words that not only provide the basis for literacy but also provide basis for critical discussion about themes important to the students can open the door to critical consciousness raising questioning and reflection. It lets students learn words directly relevant to their existential and political conditions. And as they begin to think about these conditions and discuss them with each other and instructors, they can begin to perceive, understand, and question their conditions—precisely the things involved in critical consciousness and reflection.

Gadotti elaborates further on how this process might work through a discussion of the generative word ‘wages.’ Gadotti’s discussion is instructive, so I quote it at length:

1. Ideas for discussion: the value of work and its rewards. The use of wages: maintaining the worker and his family. The timetable for work, according to the law. The minimum wage and a just wage. Weekly rest, holidays, bonus salary.
2. Aims of the talk: make the group discuss the situation of the salary of the rural farm workers. Discuss the reason for the situation. Discuss their value and

rewards of work. Help the group to discuss the right each of them has to demand a just salary.

3. Steps of the talk: What can you see in this picture [the codification of ‘wages’ used in the context of the illiterate peasants]? What is the situation of the wages of rural farm workers? Why? What are wages? How much should your wages be? Why? What do you know about the laws about wages? What can we do to get a just wage?²¹

Once again, in this example, we can see how Freirean pedagogy seeks to go beyond the classroom and engage the existential and political lives of the students. First of all, rather than simply asking students to repeat essentially nonsense phrases, the process begins with a word directly relevant to their lives. Then, rather than simply learning the word ‘wages,’ the pedagogical encounter seeks to connect learning the word—how to read it and how to write it, which is the goal of a literacy course—with the world the word expresses and how the ideas contained in it connect to the lives of the students.

Therefore, in addition to learning how to read and write, the students learn how to read and write the words that relate to and express their lives, as well as begin to see some of the structures in which these words, and their lives expressed by these words, fit. Finally, the discussion also addresses issues of action, encourages the students to think about ways to change their situations. Thus, the reflection involved in the critical consciousness raising dialogue begins to suggest action, which allows the students to see ways of changing their reality rather than accepting as static. In this process, we can see how, as previously cited from Lankshear, “for Freire, the ultimate ‘text’ to be read and written is the world itself. Learning to read and write words is an important and integral

part of coming to ‘read’ and ‘write’—to understand and name—*the world itself*.”²²

Similarly, instructors in college courses should search out ways to connect the course material to the existential and political circumstances of their specific students so that the learning of that material will not only teach students important concepts but will also teach them what these concepts mean to their lives and how they relate to the broader social and political context within which we all live.

(2) Investigating the Thematic Material through Dialogic Discussion

In addition to stressing the importance of thematizing the content under study by connecting it directly to the existential and political experiences of the students, the discussion above begins to suggest the importance of teasing out the themes contained in the material and, notably, doing so through dialogic discussion. Notice, for example, that the “steps of the talk” discussed by Gadotti above involve questioning rather than lecturing. This commitment to questioning fits with Gadotti’s claim that, according to Freire, the problem-posing educator “should attempt to enable everyone to participate, stimulating them with questions and trying to extend the discussion around the generative word” or theme.²³ Importantly, however, this questioning and extension should not merely take the form of a ‘question and answer’ interaction. Shor points out that “through problem-posing, students learn to question answers rather than merely to answer questions.”²⁴ In this sense, the role of the critical educator is not only to push the students to express their own views on the themes suggested by generative words but also to dialogue about these themes in a way that “explode[s]” the myths that hide them.²⁵

Recall Freire's suggestion that the role of educator is to "re-present" [the thematic] universe to the people from whom she or he first received it... not as a lecture, but as a problem."²⁶ While this must occur dialogically and without authoritarianism,* it does not mean that the educator stays out of the conversation. Instead, he or she should take an active part in the conversation and, as mentioned above, challenge the students. Shor gives some insight into the reasoning for this:

Inside a rigorous dialogue, the teacher poses problems and asks questions, while encouraging students to do the same. But, the critical teacher who teaches for democracy and against inequality also has the right and the responsibility to put forward her or his ideas. The problem-posing teacher is not mute, value-free, or permissive. The democratic teacher in this pedagogy extends the critique of domination beyond teacher-student relations and the education system into a critique of the system at the root of social conditions. This critique of economics is not a teacherly lecture on good and evil. Dialogic teachers do not separate themselves from the dialogue. The teacher who relates economic power in society to the knowledge under inquiry in the classroom cannot impose her or his views on the students but must present them inside the thematic discussion in language accessible to the students, who have the freedom to question and disagree with the teacher's analysis.²⁷

Because the role of the dialogic educator is to facilitate discussion in a way that seeks to "explode" myths and expose structures of oppression, she or he must contribute her or his own perspective to the dialogue and play an active role in questioning and challenging

* Though, as Gadotti makes clear, it does not occur without authority (*Reading Paulo Freire*, 50).

the students' views, just as the student should question and challenge those of the dialogic educator.

Again, looking to Freire's practice is instructive when attempting to think about ways for educators to behave in a dialogic, problem-posing classroom and to encourage classroom dialogue. Gadotti explains Freire's comportment in the classroom:

As a teacher, [Freire] always analyzes at length what a student says. And when he doesn't agree, he doesn't answer aggressively but strongly defends his point of view. This shows his respect for his interlocutor.

But this respect doesn't make him lose his attention. Autonomy doesn't mean abandonment, *laissez-faire*. He always intervenes, he never stays out of the discussion, and he constantly gives his opinion. In this he is directive. As a teacher, Freire has always been the director of the process of learning, using the information that has sedimented through his considerable experience.²⁸

This strong, present involvement in the dialogue is necessary because the goal of the encounter is to pierce the veneer that obscures structures of oppression. The goal is to think beyond the naïve consciousness, characteristic of dehumanized individuals, that aspires to “accommodation to this normalized ‘today’” of the oppressors,²⁹ to fit into their system. The goal is to give rise to critical consciousness that becomes aware of structures of oppression that underlie existential and political realities and that strives for “the continuing transformation of reality, in behalf of the continuing humanization of men.”³⁰

In order to achieve this, as discussed in Chapter III, the critically conscious educator must challenge students' experiences “by exploring contradictions inherent in participants' own ideas; by considering conflicting evidence; by addressing questions that tap or create

dissonance among participants; and so on.”³¹ It is necessary to “create dissonance among participants,” to bring together conflicting views, on the themes discussed because seeing multiple perspectives on a particular theme begins to crack through naïve understandings of situations that display contradictory thinking and can help students to come to the most clear and coherent explanation and analysis of their realities.

In order for classroom dialogue to work, both students and teachers must “reject neutrality,” which, according to Rivage-Seul, is “the most important criterion” of the three she suggests for implementing Freirean pedagogy in the college classroom.³² Rejecting neutrality requires students and teachers to acknowledge that their “vision is limited by elements such as time, space, race, and gender.”³³ Among other things, these characteristics of each individual filter her or his perceptions of, and ideas about, the world. Classroom dialogue relies on these differences, and so, as educators go about drawing students into the discussion, they should do so in a way that encourages students to maintain their partiality. Recall that, as discussed in Chapter IV, in the case of higher education in the United States, even though most students fit the bill of oppressor-students, they are not necessarily free from structures of oppression that may affect them, such as racism, sexism, etc. Rejecting neutrality requires students to claim the ways in which the structures of oppression have affected them and influenced their perspectives. By bringing these experiences into the dialogue and remaining partial to the ways in which these have characterized their experience, classroom dialogue will bring together varying interpretations of the themes discussed, which opens up the potential for critical consciousness raising dialogue. By challenging students to maintain their partiality and maintaining their own, instructors respect Freire’s commitment to dialogue because, as

cited above, voicing one's disagreement respects one's interlocutor by proving you take his or her perspective seriously enough to want to challenge it. Such a challenge may cause one's interlocutor to reply to this challenge and push her or him to clarify her or his thinking and attempt to re-present that perspective. In this way, both parties focus their attention on the world that mediates them and work to “re-consider” through the ‘considerations’ of others, their own previous ‘consideration,’”³⁴ the essence of the dialogic encounter.

(3) Seeking Coherence

In this discussion of the role of the critical educator in classroom dialogue, we can begin to see another key component of Freire's pedagogy: the commitment to coherence. Gadotti claims that “coherence, which [Freire] defends as the first virtue of the revolutionary educator, is his main virtue.”³⁵ This “coherence” refers to several things. On the one hand, it refers to coherent thought, developed through dialogue. As discussed in Chapter III, Lankshear points out that, in the dialogic classroom, the participants “collectively seek the most coherent and satisfying analysis and explanation of events, situations, and processes which confuse or concern them; which impede or frustrate them.”³⁶ In this sense, the participants attempt to come to explanations that accurately reflect reality and are free of the confusing effect of dehumanized, naïve consciousness. As Rivage-Seul elaborates in her discussion of the use of Freire in a college classroom, we should look for three things in a coherent explanation: “1) internal coherence, 2) external coherence, and 3) explanatory value.”³⁷ She elaborates:

Internal coherence refers to the logical consistency of arguments. Questions to pose are: Is the argument logical? And, are there contradictions? To be valid, arguments should avoid self-contradiction. *External coherence*, on the other hand, directs us away from the immediate context, to what we know outside. ... Does this information fit with what I know to be true? And are there counterexamples? *Explanatory value* refers to the comprehensiveness and plausibility of the arguments. Do they explain the phenomena in a way that makes sense? Is the argument plausible?³⁸

Although some aspects of Rivage-Seul's conditions for coherence are potentially problematic from a Freirean standpoint—for instance, because the conditions for what counts as a “coherent and satisfying analysis” are strongly culturally relative and the idea of “what I know to be true” could be closely tied to oppressed consciousness and dominant narratives*—we should not overlook the value of Rivage-Seul's conditions. Striving to achieve these three things is what the dialogic encounter is all about. A critical educator should pose questions and direct the dialogue in a way that seeks explanations and analyses that display internal coherence, external coherence, and have high explanatory value. While this kind of coherence is essential, we must remember that coherence also refers to consistency between theory and action, for Freire. It would be incoherent, for example, for someone to arrive at a theoretically coherent explanation for certain structures of oppression and yet act in a way that reinforces or maintains those structures. As Gadotti explains, there must be “coherence between what one does, says,

* Though, looking for internal coherence in what one 'knows to be true' could circumvent this dangerous potential.

and writes.”³⁹ Therefore, in seeking the best and most coherent explanations for structures of oppression and developing coherent arguments about how to change these structures, problem-posing education seeks to give rise to liberatory praxis by encouraging individuals to act in a way that coheres with their critically conscious reflections on their realities.

(4) Respecting History

The striving for coherence in thought and action and the resulting liberatory praxis owes its success, in part, to a concern for history. Recall that, as addressed in Chapter III, understanding history and its status as something that both is created by and creates human beings is an essential component of what it means to possess critical consciousness. The creation of history and culture is the effect of human praxis, which is action and reflection—of which critical consciousness plays an integral part. As such, participating in human praxis requires an awareness of how past actions have made our reality and how future actions can change it. Oppressive reality interrupts this, however, by submerging human consciousness and confusing nature and culture. The confusion of nature and culture causes the fatalism of dehumanized consciousness by making the current reality appear constant and unchangeable. Breaking out of this submersion through respect for history, then, becomes a key component of problem-posing education. Lankshear explains, “Of crucial importance [in problem-posing education] is the value of codifications for enabling participants to arrive at the distinction between nature and culture, and to comprehend their status as cultural agents possessing the ability to make

history.”⁴⁰ In other words, when discussing generative words and themes, critical educators should push students to see that some things are natural and, therefore, unchangeable, while other things are cultural aspects of history that have been created by human action. This allows students to conceive of the ways in which past human actions have created structures of oppression that underlie the limit-situations bound up with the themes of the students. Specifically, according to Lankshear, “Learners are to understand how [the world] has been made into *what it is* by what (other) humans have done, and failed to do.”⁴¹ Critical educators should encourage discussion and analysis of the historical factors that have influenced and lead to students’ perspectives, opinions, and realities. As problem-posing achieves this goal and begins to exchange the fatalism of naïve consciousness that sees the world as constant and unchangeable for critical consciousness that realizes the impact of human action on the world, the students will feel more able to change their circumstances and begin to participate in the humanizing vocation of praxis.

These first four principles arise more or less directly from Freire’s own thought and practices. As addressed extensively in Chapter IV, however, the general student population of institutions of higher education in the United States is drastically different from the oppressed, illiterate peasants and laborers that Freire worked with. Instead, they, more often than not, are members of the oppressor class. As such, authors like Allen and Rossatto argue that critical pedagogy cannot work with oppressor-students “without... significant changes in the theory of critical pedagogy itself.”⁴² While, as addressed in the previous chapter, some might argue that this suggests critical pedagogy has no place in higher education in the United States, I believe that it does and that, with

some slight changes, problem-posing practices can be implemented successfully in US colleges and universities. Allen and Rossatto, themselves, offer “a refinement of critical pedagogy that deals more explicitly with students from oppressor groups.”⁴³ While, as discussed in Chapter IV, their analysis is particularly useful for its elucidation of characteristics of students in higher education in the US, I find their suggestions not entirely satisfying. While there are some questionable aspects to their suggestions, however, they do offer some helpful pointers in adapting critical pedagogy to colleges in the US. Similarly, Rivage-Seul seems to pick up on the oppressor characteristics of the student population in higher education in the US when she offers a discussion of her use of Freire in a college classroom in the US. In order to honor this difference in student population, I propose we add the following two principles to the four extracted from Freire.

(5) Introducing Interpretations from the Underside

In order to help oppressor-students arrive at the most coherent explanations and analyses of themes relevant to them, problem-posing educators in US colleges should attempt to introduce interpretations of these themes that arise from the underside of the oppressive relationship. Recall that in Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed, the existential experiences of the oppressed students serve as valuable expressions of oppressive structures. As such, examining these experiences with a critical eye reveals these oppressive structures. Oppressor-students do not necessarily have this connection to structures of oppression, however, because they experience the privileged side of the

contradiction as opposed to the oppressed side. As such, they are less likely to possess the dual consciousness that characterizes the oppressed.⁴⁴ Recall that, for Freire, the oppressed “are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized.”⁴⁵ This dual consciousness provides a unique opportunity for teasing out interpretations regarding structures of oppression because, through careful analysis, students can begin to see the contradiction between the goods and values supported by oppressive society and their dehumanizing effects on both the oppressors and the oppressed, as well as the existence of two clearly different forms of experience—namely, the privileged and the disadvantaged. Because oppressor-students will, more likely than not, lack the dual consciousness that tends to characterize oppressed individuals, they may have more difficulty arriving at an understanding of the contradiction between their privilege and the disadvantage of the oppressed. While discussion of thematic content might raise greater awareness about oppressor-students’ privilege, without the opposing perspective afforded through dual consciousness, it might be more difficult for oppressor-students to realize what this privilege means for the other side of the contradiction or how the oppression of the oppressed actually effects oppressor-students’ privilege. Because of this, it seems less likely that such a discussion could truly give rise to the kind of transformative experience necessary for the development of critical consciousness. As such, it seems essential to include the perspective of the oppressed in the dialogue occurring in a classroom of oppressor-students.

Including perspectives from the underside should not occur in an overbearing or authoritarian way, however. To do so would seem to betray the problem-posing nature of

the classroom and, rather, transform it into a banking classroom. This is one of the concerns I have with Allen and Rossatto's suggestions. I address this to some extent in Chapter IV, but let me elaborate here. The context of Allen and Rossatto's argument is slightly different than the one I advance here because they provide suggestions for education classrooms in which critical pedagogy is the content of the course as opposed to a process for engaging thematic course content. The goal of their classroom encounters is to create critically conscious educators aware of "the role schooling plays in reproducing hegemony."⁴⁶ Therefore, their article focuses on how to create such individuals more so than how critical pedagogy should function in college courses in general. Despite this difference, Allen and Rossatto do provide some suggestions on how to give rise to critical consciousness in oppressor-students. Allen and Rossatto believe that, in order to create critically conscious educators out of oppressor-students, these students "must be confronted with a systematic and persistent deconstruction of their privileged identity."⁴⁷ While such a deconstruction may help in some cases, Allen and Rossatto advocate a forceful approach. They suggest that "above all, [the oppressor-students] must be in an educational context where they are part of, but not in control of, the classroom discourse," and in which "being in 'the center' is more like being in the 'hot seat' or being the spectacle of oppression that serves as the focus of inquiry and critique."⁴⁸ As addressed in Chapter IV, they rightly cite Freire to back up their claim that this is not a paternalistic approach to education because imposing restraints on oppressors in order to prevent them from oppressing others is not in itself a form of oppression. While this may be the case, such an approach seems similar to that of the "moralistic educator"⁴⁹ that Freire is suspicious of. It seems, to some extent, like it has

the potential to become a sermon rather than a dialogic discussion about the privilege of the oppressor-student and, as such, take the form of the banking model rather than the problem-posing one.

Instead of including oppressed perspectives in an overbearing, authoritarian, or sermonizing manner, then, these perspectives should be included as part of the problem-posing endeavor. While a direct critique and deconstruction of the privileged identity of oppressor-students might occasionally be needed in problem-posing classrooms, it should not be the focus of the educational endeavor. Instead, students and teachers should turn their intention to the thematized course material and attempt to work through it in a way that not only reveals their privilege but also how their privilege affects the oppressed. Rivage-Seul suggests a way to include perspectives from the underside of the oppressive contradiction that seems more faithful to a problem-posing approach. As mentioned above, respecting the historicity of the themes present in course material is a key component of Freire's pedagogy. While we should not exclude the oppressor version of history because "the actions and rationalizations of the minority wealthy cannot be ignored in [the] analysis since they constitute the very system under analysis,"⁵⁰ we should also include the opposite perspective. Rivage-Seul explains, "truth seeking needs to be constructed with 'ideological suspicion' by seeking out those whose viewpoints are underrepresented in standard histories. Arguably, adopting the viewpoint of the excluded—three-fifths of the world's population—is the closest one can come to 'objectivity[.]' understood as examining what is most real and undeniable."⁵¹ While this advice is instructive, we must also be careful of the way we include these perspectives because, according to McLaren, "experiences never speak for themselves, even those of

the oppressed.”⁵² Therefore, “one important task of the critical educator is to translate cultural difference.”⁵³ But even here we must be careful because “neither the practice of signification nor translation occurs in an ideological void, and for this reason educators need to interrogate the sign systems that are used to produce readings of experience.”⁵⁴ In other words, while underrepresented interpretations and perspectives should be included, they should not be included un-problematically. Rather, “The translation of other cultures must resist the authoritative representation of the other through a decentering process that challenges dialogues which have become institutionalized through the semantic authority of state power.”⁵⁵ Instead of taking excluded and underrepresented perspectives and their representations as dogma, class discussion should examine how these interpretations may themselves demonstrate, contain, or otherwise be affected by oppressive power structures. In this way, critical educators can include interpretations from the underside while remaining faithful to a dialogic, problem-posing approach. This is important because bringing these excluded or underrepresented perspectives into the classroom dialogue, juxtaposing them with the oppressor consciousness of the oppressor-students, and challenging oppressor-students to take these perspectives into consideration when seeking coherent explanations and analyses for the themes present in the course material could help overcome the fact that oppressor-students most likely do not possess the dual consciousness of the oppressed and allow the oppressor-students to see how their privilege is effected by, and affects, the oppression of others.

(6) Challenging Students' Comfort and Reinforcing Resistance

The approach of introducing interpretations from the underside of oppressive structures and outside the mainstream perspective provides a useful way of challenging oppressor-students' sense of comfort with, and reinforcing student resistance to, the status quo. To a large extent, this principle is the most general of the six that I have addressed because it represents the basic goal of problem-posing education: to enhance students' ability to perceive and act against oppressive and dehumanizing situations. In order to do this, students must, of course, be uncomfortable with the status quo and desire to resist structures that maintain and enforce it. As previously addressed, this may be difficult in the case of oppressor-students because they do not feel the oppressive effects of dehumanization in the same way as the oppressed do. To some extent, then, resistance to the status quo will need to be developed where it does not currently exist. On the other hand, however, there seems to be forms of resistance already present in oppressor-students and tapping into these forms of resistance can be a key gateway through which to develop further resistance in oppressor-students.

One of these forms of resistance arises from the fact that, as addressed in Chapter IV, oppressive and dehumanizing structures do not always clearly delineate the oppressed from the oppressors. As Allen and Rossatto remind us, "Students should understand that they can be simultaneously the oppressor within one totality and the oppressed within another, and they should be concerned about both their own oppression and their oppression of others."⁵⁶ In other words, although most students in higher education in the US are oppressor-students, they may also suffer forms of oppression as members of one

sub-group or another. In the United States, for example, although strides have been made in gender equality, women still generally do not enjoy the same privilege as men in many arenas of life. Similarly, individuals identifying as nonwhite encounter obstacles that whites do not. In keeping with Freire's commitment to encourage partiality, instructors should encourage students who do fall into oppressed categories within the oppressor-student totality to remain situated in, and faithful to, those identities and bring those perspectives into the conversation. Elucidating these more familiar forms of oppression, dehumanization, and resistance to the status quo that they engender would seem helpful ways to move into a discussion of the further ways in which the status quo oppresses and dehumanizes individuals.

In addition to forms of resistance present due to the unequal effects of oppressive structures on individuals, there appears to be another form of directionless resistance present in many individuals in the US, including students in higher education and workers at all levels of employment. In the case of oppressor-students in higher education, this resistance manifests itself in a passive aggressive stance towards education in which students grudgingly do the minimum required of them to pass a course, get a degree, and take their place in existing society. While many students take their education seriously and are heavily invested in learning as much as they can during their time in college, others simply see it as a hoop to jump through on their path to a career. This is epitomized in the maxim "Cs get degrees." Some students are simply not invested in their studies and do not take the time to learn the material, opting, instead, to cram days or hours before a test, remembering the information only long enough to regurgitate it on the test, only to forget it as quickly as they 'learned' it. It seems that

harnessing this resistance can serve as an absolutely essential gateway for developing critical consciousness in oppressor-students. In the case of oppressor-students who have graduated and are now employed, the directionless resistance manifests itself as the widespread job dissatisfaction discussed in the previous chapter.

As addressed extensively in Chapter IV, even though oppressor-students are privileged and well served by the status quo in their employment in it, it nonetheless dehumanizes them. Like the oppressed, oppressor-students, more often than not, simply operate non-consciously within an oppressive structure according to dominant, oppressive, and dehumanizing values. Again, although oppressor-students are privileged by the status quo whereas the oppressed are disadvantaged by it, the banking form of education too prevalent in higher education in the US prescribes oppressor-student behavior as much as it prescribes oppressed behavior. It programs oppressor-students to non-consciously take their place in the system of capital, a place that largely dissatisfies them. The dehumanizing qualities of this prescription may be the underlying cause of oppressor-students' directionless resistance to existing forms of education and the widespread job dissatisfaction. Exploring this resistance and the deep-seated structures of oppression that give rise to it seems like an invaluable way to help oppressor-students begin to develop critically conscious perspectives on their own lives, privilege, and how their lives and privilege affect others.

I believe that these six principles—the first four derived more directly from Freire, and the latter two added to address the difference in context between the illiterate, oppressed peasantry and laborers that Freire worked with and the oppressor-students that populate institutions of higher education in the US—suggest some useful ways to think

about implementing Freirean problem-posing pedagogy in college classrooms in the United States. Through the implementation of these principles, I believe that problem-posing educators can help oppressor-students arrive at “the realization that they are members of an oppressor group [and] come to a problematized understanding of their oppressor identity,”⁵⁷ that is necessary for them to begin to think about, and desire to participate in, action to change the conditions that effect their oppressor status. While I hope that the discussion above has already begun to suggest ways to apply these principles in college classrooms in the US, perhaps a more concrete example would be helpful. Therefore, in the following pages, I trace how these principles might function in a hypothetical college course. In discussing this example, I attempt to take seriously the limitations posed by the current context of higher education in the US.

§2: The Problem-Posing Classroom: An Example

In giving an example of how the six principles discussed above might function in a hypothetical classroom, I have chosen to focus on a hypothetical college composition course because, while I believe Freirean pedagogy can apply more broadly to most, if not all, courses within US colleges and universities, I am most familiar with teaching in a composition classroom.* In my experience, the general goals of a college composition course are to help students develop critical reading, critical reasoning, argumentation, and

* As such, I do not necessarily feel qualified to make specific suggestions for, or discuss examples in, courses outside of this familiarity. I will leave this task to others more familiar with these courses—such as Marilyn Frankenstein who applies Freire's pedagogy to mathematics education (“Critical Mathematics Education: An Application of Paulo Freire's Epistemology”)—but I hope my example will be instructive.

written communication skills. They generally approach these goals through reading and discussion of, and writing about, academic or argumentative texts, while focusing on important aspects of the task of writing itself, such as sentence structure, paragraphing, organization, grammar and punctuation, etc.* To a certain extent, composition courses are unique because, whereas many courses require students to learn content and develop skills relevant to that content, composition courses focus almost exclusively on the development of particular skills with little need for students to master the ‘content’ through which these skills are developed. This makes them, perhaps, more adaptable to the goals of critical pedagogy than other courses. Even in courses with strict curricula laid out by administrators or even governments, however, educators could still take a critical approach to addressing the material. As Leistyna explains in the context of the strict, controlled curricula of K-12 schools enforced through mandatory standardized tests:

if testing is such an important part of society as advocates... claim, then students should also know more about testing; not just what’s on the test and how to take it, but how the tests are generated and operate. This opens the possibility for an interdisciplinary approach where history, math, social studies, etc. are part of analyzing these tests. In the spirit of critical pedagogy, teachers should also teach to the test. But by this, I mean that they should engage the students in ideological analysis of the knowledge that they are being exposed to. It is important for

* As these are the type of skills college students will need to communicate effectively in college courses more broadly and, most likely, their later employment environment, college composition courses seem to be their own type of ‘literacy’ course—collegiate level literacy for a college population. As such, they provide a useful simile to Freire’s literacy circles, thus making for an effective comparison between his principles in his context and his principles in the college context in the US.

young people to take a critical look, for example, at the history lessons that are taught in schools whose curricula and textbooks are generated by the current standards regime.⁵⁸

In other words, in addressing the content of the specific course, instructors should look at why the content that is stressed is important, or at least considered important, and what it can tell us about society. Therefore, while a composition course may offer us a unique opportunity to be even more faithful to Freirean pedagogy because the ‘content’ through which students learn critical reading, critical reasoning, argumentation, and written communication skills is more adaptable than content in courses that are more geared towards addressing both content and skills, a composition course should not only attempt to address students’ personal and political lives by adapting the ‘content’ used in discussion and written assignments but should also do so through a critical examination of why the skills taught are important and what their use can tell us about societal structures of oppression and dehumanization. With this in mind, I turn to my example of how the six principles discussed above may function in a college composition course. Although for the sake of description I have divided Freire’s pedagogy into six principles, we should not think of these as six individual steps but rather as six inter-relating principles that constantly influence and play off of each other. Therefore, in the following example, I have attempted to show how these principles work together in the design and practice of a hypothetical college composition course rather than discuss each individually.

In almost any pedagogical situation, the design and content of the course is the first issue an instructor must address. In the current context of higher education, most

instructors decide on course design and content before the course begins and before meeting the students. This seems problematic in a problem-posing classroom because it would seem difficult for an instructor to take into account the existential and political lives of her or his students before even meeting them. Thematizing the course material requires familiarity with one's students and their circumstances. This familiarity is not always easy to come by, however. It is for this reason that Freire advocates the detailed background investigation of the population with which one will work and the existential and political circumstances of that population. While the findings of such a thematic investigation are invaluable to Freire's pedagogy, the prospects of carrying out a full-scale thematic investigation in the current context of higher education in the United States seem dubious. For one, as mentioned above, there are already severe limits on personnel and funds for current practices, so there would seem to be even less available for experimental methods, especially if these do not seem ostensibly to support learning outcomes valued by administrators.

While this is potentially a serious blow to the endeavor to implement Freirean pedagogy in higher education, Freire himself discusses ways to implement his pedagogy in the presence of resource limitations that prevent educators from carrying out the thematic investigation. Freire explains, "If educators lack sufficient funds to carry out the preliminary thematic investigation... they can—with a minimum knowledge of the situation—select some basic themes to serve as 'codifications to be investigated.' Accordingly, they can begin with introductory themes and simultaneously initiate further thematic investigation."⁵⁹ So, "with a minimum knowledge of the situation" in higher education, of the student population and some general concerns, educators could select

themes with which to thematize the course material and, in the process of dialoguing about these, search out further themes relevant to the students. Freire suggests that dialogue about even basic themes should suggest further concerns to students. He even recommends asking the students directly what themes suggest themselves from their initial interactions with the educator and the initial material.⁶⁰ This process is not only productive within a single classroom. Freire suggests that in a setting where multiple groups of educators and students meet, the educators can share with each other the concerns raised in their different circles.⁶¹ In the college setting, this would seem particularly applicable, as professors could arrange times to get together and discuss their classroom interactions with students and themes found worthy of investigation. In this way, dialogue between professors could serve to supplement the investigations carried out within a single classroom and help achieve some of the goals of the initial background investigation that budgetary concerns may preclude.

The goal of thematizing the content of a college composition course would require educators to investigate and analyze how the learning of writing could reveal structures of oppression and dehumanization. To a large extent, this follows Shor's suggestion that students should "face problems from their lives and society through the special lens offered by an academic discipline."⁶² In other words, students should learn how the critical reading, reasoning, and written communication skills they should develop in a college composition course can help them understand and address personal and societal problems. This would involve adapting the material to the particular students as much as possible, without removing the important focus on the knowledge and skills students should develop through the course. Adapting material to specific sets

of students makes giving a concrete example somewhat difficult, as the particular course material would most likely change from context to context. Given this limitation, however, let us imagine how an instructor might go about discovering the themes of a batch of students and how to incorporate those themes into the material.

First of all, let us imagine how an instructor might go about discovering themes important to a particular batch of students. Imagine that, rather than arriving at class on the first day with a syllabus in hand that lays out the entire arc of assignments for the term—including readings, activities, and assignments—the instructor arrives with a note pad. Rather than spending the first day going over a preconceived syllabus and what the instructor expects, the instructor could dialogue with the students about their concerns, things they feel confronted and limited by, and take note of these things. Perhaps the instructor could break the class into groups and enlist one student in each group to record the discussion and keep track of things that concern the students and how they express these concerns. This, to some extent, would follow Freire's suggestion that the background thematic investigation should involve the people themselves and not simply treat them as objects to be investigated. This discussion should take place dialogically. The instructor should encourage his or her students to maintain their partiality and speak from their own perspective, to bring in problems and concerns they feel confronted by, and not just that people in general might feel confronted by. In the context of a composition classroom, this dialogue should also involve the place of written communication in the students' lives. The instructor should attempt to find out what aspects of writing concern the students, what things limit their ability to produce writing they are happy with as well as how they might use writing in their own daily lives now

and in the future. The goal of this first class session would be, rather than instilling in the students a fear of the syllabus, to work with the students to develop material to study for the rest of the term. Construction of the syllabus would begin on the first day but should not end there. As the course progresses, the syllabus should stay flexible and allow for changes based on the progress of the dialogue of the course. This would allow students to participate, to some extent, in deciding the material for study. It would also communicate to the students from the get-go that the instructor cared about their input and valued them as human beings, which could foster dialogue later on in the course.

Then, based on the concerns suggested through dialogue on the first day, the instructor should attempt to incorporate the themes contained in these concerns into the syllabus. For the sake of argument, let us imagine that one of the overwhelming concerns that arose during the discussion on the first day was about getting a job in the current stagnant economy. It is not difficult to imagine how students might see this as a limit-situation because, without securing gainful employment, they would have difficulty experiencing the same financial comfort they were used to as children mostly from oppressor-families. Perhaps some of them are particularly concerned about this because, in the current context of ever-increasing tuition costs, they had to take out student loans in order to attend college and worry that, if they cannot get a job, they will not be able to pay back these loans. The theme of employment, then, can serve as a beginning for constructing the course. It may not prove fruitful enough on its own to sustain discussion for an entire term, but as a generative theme, it should lead to other themes that could sustain this discussion. Let us just begin with this theme, however, and see how an instructor could go about incorporating it into a college composition course.

In order to address this theme, instructors should follow Freire's suggestions to codify the theme. As Lankshear explains:

Codifications "stand in," as it were, for the world. They capture situations which participants are continually in; but in which they are *so* immersed that it is difficult otherwise to stand back and view them objectively. Codifications permit participants to step back from the immediate reality which affects them profoundly, and to reflect upon it critically: to approach it as something to be understood, evaluated, and addressed (with a view to beneficial change), rather than as an inescapable "given" which can only be accepted, suffered, and adapted to.⁶³

As Freire often works within illiterate students, he recommends pictorial codifications, but as discussed in Chapter III, he also advocates that we choose the most appropriate medium for the context. In the case of college students in the US, the codifications do not necessarily need to be pictorial. In the case of the limit-situation of employment, the codification could take many forms. Regardless of what form they take, as Shor points out, these codifications should not be "presented as academic jargon or as theoretical lectures or as facts to memorize, but rather as problems posed in student experience and speech."⁶⁴ In other words, the codifications should be easily accessible to the students and appear as something familiar to their experience. The codifications of the theme of employment could even take a humorous or satirical stance on the issue. Such codifications could be particularly useful because they show some of the contradictory aspects of the need for employment. Regardless of the codification chosen, in the context

of a composition course, it should attempt to contain both the limit-situation, and the theme bound up with it, as well as an expression of how writing fits into that theme.

While there are at least as many ways to encode the theme of employment as there are students and instructors interested in engaging in the conversation, let me pick one example, albeit a potentially silly one. In the case of the theme of employment in the context of a composition classroom, one potential codification is the film *Office Space*. It is a comedy film about the daily trials and tribulations of working as a low level ‘cubicle employee’ in a software firm. As such, it pokes fun at many of the structures of the workplace, partially through exaggeration. While these exaggerations and the satirical approach it takes makes the film not entirely an accurate representation of office life, these exaggerations also provide useful windows into real issues present in the office. It is also a useful film in the context of a college composition course because it features the place of writing in the context of an office job. The main character is constantly pestered by his boss to complete his assigned TPS reports. The exact nature of these reports is left unexplained by the film, but they seem to represent the kind of dull, repetitive interoffice memo writing that characterizes low level professional employment. The overall message of the film is that the kind of employment it portrays is largely unsatisfying. Viewing scenes from a film such as this that codifies a potential employment situation could be useful in examining employment and the place of writing in that scheme because it would allow students to step back from their realities and analyze them critically.

In the context of the college composition classroom, the analysis of codifications should involve more than simply discussing a particular representation. The codification

of the situation should initiate the discussion, but the discussion should be broadened and sustained through the inclusion of a variety of sources. Although instructors should attempt to avoid “academic jargon” as much as possible in the classroom and, instead, work with ideas in terms that more closely reflect the students’ existential experiences and are expressed in their language,⁶⁵ exposure to and work with ideas expressed in academic texts is an integral part of a college education. Therefore, the use of codifications should be supplemented by academic texts that relate to the discussion. These texts could represent the kind of expert opinion that Freire finds valuable for the decoding of limit-situations.⁶⁶ Although academic texts would not be quite as accessible as the expert opinion Freire advocates including through interviews with specialists carried out “in language comprehensible to the audience,”⁶⁷ the instructor could work with the students in an effort to ‘translate’ it into more comprehensible language. Even this process of ‘translation’ could be an opportunity to investigate structures and customs that influence the language of a particular text. Not all of the supplemental sources should be academic texts, either. The idea would be to explore the theme from different perspectives, so the use of texts from a variety of sources, encompassing a variety of perspectives on the issue of employment would help give more material for analysis. The sources could include newspaper articles, op-ed articles, academic texts, style manuals from companies regarding formats for memos, accounts of individuals’ experiences in varying employment environments, etc.

The inclusion of sources to supplement the discussion of a generative theme close to the students represents a valuable opportunity for instructors to consider the principles of including interpretations from the underside of oppressive relationships and that

respect the historical aspect to the current employment environment. As oppressor-students, many students in higher education in the US might not realize that the kind of life they expect their employment to support is not, in fact, 'normal' but privileged. Therefore, including accounts and discussions of perspective employment for people outside of the oppressor-students' sphere of understanding could help reveal the privilege of the oppressor-students. Additionally, instructors could include material that points to the historicity of the theme discussed. This may include the discussion of historical texts, which the instructors should seek to situate in the time and space of the writing. When Freire discusses the reading of historical socialist literature in search of inspiration for current movements, for example, he makes it clear that focusing specifically on this literature without attention to the broader historical context, both of the time of the literature and of the time of its study, is a faulty approach. Instead, he explains, "It is necessary to make historical reading of the text"; for example, "We must read Lenin, but we must situate him in space and in time, the space of the time in which he wrote. This does not mean you have to change everything completely, but you have to lend your space and your time."⁶⁸ This attention paid to the historicity of the themes discussed and the texts read would help achieve the principle of respecting the history of the themes under discussion.

In the context of a composition course, it would be helpful if some of the accounts from the underside and historical accounts addressed the role of written communication in employment prospects. For example, looking at what one's ability to write means for his or her chances of employment, including advancement within a company, both from a historical and cross-cultural perspective. Including multiple sources addressing the issue

of employment from a variety of perspectives would also provide an opportunity to dialogue about the different ways sources from different perspectives speak about and deal with the issue. This could be a valuable opportunity to explore different uses of language and argumentation and how the type of critiques or discussions about employment influence the kind of language used. In this way, similar to the way in which Freire's illiterate peasants and workers would learn how to read and write while simultaneously learning about and discussing themes important to them, college students in a problem-posing classroom could learn about and discuss the issue of employment while simultaneously learning about writing, written argument, and how writing fits into not only discussions of employment but also the employment context itself. Successfully thematizing the material through discovering a theme pertinent to the students and then addressing that theme through the use of a codification appropriate to the students and historical and cross-cultural material that will help students "explode" the myths contained in this theme and its codification will provide the material through which to engage in problem-posing practices. In order to successfully carry out the problem-posing practices presupposed in the thematized material, instructors must address it dialogically in the classroom.

In the context of the college composition course discussing the generative theme of employment, teachers should attempt to extend the dialogue by asking the kind of questions suggested in Gadotti's example of a discussion of the generative term 'wages.' Questions should focus on both students' past experiences as well as their projections for the future. Some general lines of questioning to pursue might include: What were your experiences like growing up in the family you did? What kind of jobs did your parents

have? What kind of job do you expect to secure in the future? What obstacles can you foresee in getting this job? What factors might influence your ability to get a job (education, outsourcing, personal characteristics, such as race or sex, etc.)? What kind of education will you need for this job? What kind of income you expect to have? What kind of lifestyle will this allow? What conditions have to exist to support this lifestyle? How will your position in the company affect others, such as your boss or the owners? How will your ability to write affect your position in the company? By including texts that relate to this theme as discussed above, the line of questioning could expand to how the discussions of employment found in the texts relate to the past experiences and future expectations of the students. In discussing the texts, instructors could include lines of questioning such as: What does this texts tell us about employment from the particular perspective that it takes up? How does this author use language? What does this tell us about writing? The overall goal of the discussion would be to pursue lines of questioning that would help students to see the position in society of the kind of employment that they—as college graduates and oppressor-students—could expect. Particularly, in the context of a composition course, it should pursue lines of questioning that reveal how students' ability to communicate effectively in writing influences their chances for employment. This could lead to a broader concern for the role of education in securing gainful employment, as educators bring in interpretations that are potentially unfamiliar to oppressor-students.

As the classroom dialogue evolved, instructors should challenge students', and push students to challenge each other's, perspectives on the themes discussed in order to seek coherence in their explanations and analyses of these themes. In line with the

discussion above about how an educator in such a course should challenge students to present their views as partial and bring these views into conflict, the teacher should push students to analyze their own perspectives in light of the discussions of others. In this endeavor, the questions suggested by Rivage-Seul above are incredibly helpful. They suggest further lines of questioning that an instructor could pursue in a classroom dialogue. This would challenge students to investigate their own and each other's perspectives for coherence rather than simply presenting a perspective that could be fraught with contradiction. The inclusion of perspectives from the underside of oppressive relationships would aid students in coming to coherent analyses that have high explanatory value for the conditions around their ability to achieve employment. In the context of a composition classroom, this process of seeking coherence would clearly be beneficial for students' learning of written communication. In order to make a clear point in a composition, the writer needs to present a coherent argument, otherwise the reader can become confused as to the author's meaning. Therefore, as students seek coherence in classroom discussion, in this case about the generative theme of employment, they will learn important concepts that apply to written communication.

Finally, throughout the entire process, from planning the class with the students to dialoguing about the themes, instructors should continuously challenge students and attempt to develop their expressed and latent resistance against the sources of their frustration. The goal of liberatory pedagogy is to help students come to a clear understanding of their realities and the forces at work that influence their lives and then conceive of ways to change these realities. In the case of the oppressor-students that populate colleges and universities in the US, this clear understanding of their realities will

mean their realization of themselves as oppressors. Considering the fact that, as addressed in Chapter IV, “most Whites believe that they are nice, kind, caring, and benevolent people who have worked hard to obtain their wealth and status,”⁶⁹ as Freire points out, “discovering [themselves] to be... oppressor[s] may cause considerable anguish.”⁷⁰ Freire himself believes that this anguish is not enough to inspire the oppressors to change the circumstances of oppression. In fact, he believes that oppressors cannot genuinely act in the interests of the oppressed because doing so only represents false generosity. While Freire may be correct to some extent, it seems that the project of the liberation of the oppressed has much more potential for success if the oppressors realize their oppressor status and what the dehumanizing nature of structures of oppression mean both for the oppressed and for themselves and are willing to work with the oppressed in the interest of changing society for the better, for the humanization of both. As Allen and Rossatto point out, social movements have been beneficial to the oppressed in a variety of contexts. These movements have been successful due to the “essential appeal to the moral sensibilities of the oppressors.”⁷¹ Although Freire is suspicious of oppressors participating in the liberation of the oppressed, he does believe that it is possible for individuals from the oppressor class to be “truly in solidarity with [the oppressed].”⁷² Therefore, developing these moral sensibilities in oppressor-students through the use of problem-posing education in the effort to give rise to greater critical consciousness in the oppressor-students seems like an essential endeavor. And, as addressed in Chapter IV, developing critical consciousness and participating in a liberatory praxis to transform oppressive and dehumanizing structures of society not only benefits the disadvantaged oppressed but also benefits the privileged oppressors by

restoring their humanity, which may combat the instances of dissatisfaction with politics, society, and employment in the US. If oppressor-students can successfully develop critical consciousness and begin to work with the oppressed to change oppressive structures that dehumanize both of them, it will open up ways to re-envision the system of higher education in the United States in a way that will address many of the problems with the current system and with the reforms suggested by mainstream sources. I will explore this claim further in the following brief concluding chapter.

§3: Notes

¹ Richard Shuall, forward to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, by Paulo Freire, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2009), 33.

² Paulo Freire in Miguel Escobar and others, *Paulo Freire on Higher Education: A Dialogue at the National University of Mexico*, Teacher Empowerment and School Reform (New York: SUNY, 1994), 33.

³ Ira Shor, "Education Is Politics: Paulo Freire's Critical pedagogy," in *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, ed. Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard (New York: Routledge, 1993), 34.

⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2009), 54 [italics removed].

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 86.

⁷ Ibid., 65.

⁸ Ibid., 61.

⁹ Shor, "Education Is Politics," 29.

¹⁰ Greg Seals, "Mechanisms of Student Participation: Theoretical Descriptions of a Freirean Ideal," *Educational Studies* 39, no. 3 (2006): 286, <http://www.ebscohost.com/>.

¹¹ Moacir Gadotti, *Reading Paulo Freire: His Life and Work*, trans. John Milton, (New York: SUNY, 1994), 86.

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- ¹² Henry A Giroux, "Democracy, Education, and the Politics of Critical Pedagogy," introduction to *Critical Pedagogy: Where Are We Now?*, ed. Peter McLaren and Joe L Kincheloe (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 3.
- ¹³ Shor, "Education Is Politics," 31.
- ¹⁴ Richard Shavelson and Leta Huang, "Responding Responsibly to the Frenzy to Assess Learning in Higher Education," *Change* 35, no. 1 (2003): 11, <http://www.ebscohost.com/>.
- ¹⁵ Steven Graham, Suzette Hieman and Rob Williams, "Budget Woes in Higher Education: A Call for Leadership," *Academic Leadership Live* 2, no. 4 (2007), http://www.academicleadership.org/leader_action_tips/Budget_Woes_in_Higher_Education_A_Call_for_Leadership.shtml.
- ¹⁶ Andrew Hacker, interview by Jennie Rothenberg Gritz, "What's Wrong with the American University System," *The Atlantic*, July 28, 2010, <http://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2010/07/whats-wrong-with-the-american-university-system/60458/>.
- ¹⁷ Ricky Lee Allen and Caesar Augusto Rossatto, "Does Critical Pedagogy Work with Privileged Students?" *Teacher Education Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2009): 174, <http://www.eric.ed.gov/>.
- ¹⁸ Gadotti, *Reading Paulo Freire*, 25.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 20 [italics in original].
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² Colin Lankshear, "Functional Literacy from a Freirean Point of View," in *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, ed. Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard (New York: Routledge, 1993), 110 [italics in original].
- ²³ Gadotti, *Reading Paulo Freire*, 21.
- ²⁴ Shor, "Education Is Politics," 26.
- ²⁵ Lankshear, "Functional Literacy," 110.
- ²⁶ Freire, *Oppressed*, 109.
- ²⁷ Shor, "Education Is Politics," 30.
- ²⁸ Gadotti, *Reading Paulo Freire*, 86-87.
- ²⁹ Freire, *Oppressed*, 92.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*
- ³¹ Lankshear, "Functional Literacy," 112.
- ³² Marguerite Rivage-Seul, "Freire in the Classroom: Thinking Critically after September 11," *Philosophical Studies in Education* 34 (2003): 100, <http://www.ovepes.org/>.

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- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Freire, *Oppressed*, 112.
- ³⁵ Gadotti, *Reading Paulo Freire*, 89.
- ³⁶ Lankshear, "Functional Literacy," 112.
- ³⁷ Rivage-Seul, "in the Classroom," 103.
- ³⁸ Ibid., 103-104.
- ³⁹ Gadotti, *Reading Paulo Freire*, 90.
- ⁴⁰ Lankshear, "Functional Literacy," 112-113.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 111 [italics in original].
- ⁴² Allen and Rossatto, "Privileged Students," 165.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 169.
- ⁴⁵ Freire, *Oppressed*, 48.
- ⁴⁶ Allen and Rossatto, "Privileged Students," 163.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 175.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ Freire, *Oppressed*, 118.
- ⁵⁰ Rivage-Seul, "in the Classroom," 101.
- ⁵¹ Ibid.
- ⁵² Peter McLaren, "Paulo Freire and the Academy A Challenge from the U.S. Left," *Cultural Critique*, no. 33 (1996): 171, <http://www.jstor.org/>.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 170.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., 171.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.
- ⁵⁶ Allen and Rossatto, "Privileged Students," 171.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., 175.

⁵⁸ Pepi Leistyna, "Neoliberal Non-sense," in *Critical Pedagogy: Where Are We Now?*, ed. Peter McLaren and Joe L Kincheloe (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 118-119.

⁵⁹ Freire, *Oppressed*, 123.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 123-124.

⁶¹ Ibid., 124.

⁶² Shor, "Education Is Politics," 31.

⁶³ Lankshear, "Functional Literacy," 112 [italics in original].

⁶⁴ Shor, "Education Is Politics," 31.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Freire, *Oppressed*, 121-122.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 122.

⁶⁸ Freire in Escobar and others, *on Higher Education*, 33.

⁶⁹ Allen and Rossatto, "Privileged Students," 175.

⁷⁰ Freire, *Oppressed*, 49.

⁷¹ Allen and Rossatto, "Privileged Students," 172.

⁷² Freire, *Oppressed*, 45.

CHAPTER VI
CRITICAL PEDAGOGY, THE COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF HIGHER
EDUCATION, AND THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION
IN THE UNITED STATES

In the previous chapter, I addressed six principles that I believe instructors interested in implementing Freirean problem-posing education in higher education in the United States can turn to for guidance. I also offered an example of how these six principles might function in a hypothetical college composition classroom. I believe that these principles not only offer a different version of education than that proposed by mainstream sources, like the Commission on the Future of Higher Education, but also different from that occurring in higher education currently. I believe implementing Freirean pedagogy in higher education in the US is necessary because, as addressed in the Introduction and Chapter II, the current system suffers from several troubling deficits, particularly (1) the way in which traditionally underprivileged individuals are systematically excluded from higher education due to the exorbitant expense of attending an institution of higher learning as well as consistent under service in secondary and primary education and (2) the deficits in student learning for those who do gain access to US colleges and universities. Troublingly, the current system not only exhibits these deficits but, at least in the case of the exclusion of underprivileged individuals, perpetuates these problems. As addressed in the Introduction and Chapter II, the current system of higher education significantly contributes to social stratification because of the way in which it excludes underprivileged individuals, thereby perpetuating cycles of oppression that keep individuals from the lower-class and racial and ethnic minorities on

the low end of the socioeconomic spectrum while granting “social mobility” to individuals from the middle- and upper-classes.

In response to these deficits, mainstream sources, like the CFHE, propose a variety of reforms, including measures to promote access to higher education for traditionally underserved groups as well as to promote student learning. While it is heartening that these sources want to address these issues, their faith in the principles of free-market capitalism contradict their implicit, underlying humanitarian aims to promote greater equality. Distressingly, as discussed in Chapter II, their desire to promote greater equality and to empower individuals, especially those from traditionally underprivileged groups, by even further restructuring higher education around market principles through strict accountability measures not only fails to achieve their goals but, in fact, will further exacerbate the problems they attempt to address. In regards to student learning, the strict accountability they recommend will undoubtedly represent the extension into higher education of something near to the measures required by the No Child Left Behind Act. Beyond the fact that these measures have already largely failed in primary and secondary education, as addressed in Chapter II, the theory behind strict accountability measures is problematic. According to Freire’s discussion of the banking system of education, the pedagogy required to teach too strictly to the tests required for accountability measures will fail to educate students successfully. Instead, it will unduly restrict curriculum to the specific things tested for. Worse, it will inhibit learning in these narrow categories because it will not ask students to actively engage in real thinking and learning but rather require them to mimic the action of teachers demonstrated in the classroom. Furthermore, the ‘functional’ model that the CFHE proposes, at best, creates graduates

that are ‘fit’ to ‘function’ in the current society. Such an approach cannot address the deficits the CFHE notices in access because, rather than changing the structures of society that create these deficits, the ‘functional’ approach reinforces the current structures, which can only further perpetuate deficits in access to higher education, employment, and services available to individuals from traditionally underserved and underprivileged groups.

In order to truly address the deficits noticed by the CFHE and many other sources, I proposed at the end of Chapter II that we look to Freire’s discussion of problem-posing education as a potential pedagogy that could successfully address deficits in access and learning. In Chapter III, I discussed Freire’s personal, political, and philosophical background as well as his philosophy and practice of liberatory education. As opposed to the mainstream approach offered by the CFHE, Freire’s liberatory pedagogy does not take the current structures of society for granted nor seeks to create individuals fit to these structures. Instead, Freire’s liberatory pedagogy seeks to help individuals—specifically, the oppressed—to develop critical consciousness of their situations that would allow them to understand the structures of oppression that effect their existential and political conditions as well as how to conceive of action to change these structures. In order to help the oppressed develop critical consciousness, Freire suggests engaging with them in a critical examination of the reality that they share with the oppressors. This involves posing that reality to them as a problem and dialoguing about it with them in a way that reveals contradictions in thinking and action in themselves, in society, and in others. As Freire often works with illiterate peasants and laborers, his pedagogy focuses on developing critical consciousness in the context of a literacy course in which students

learn basic literacy. Because of his focus on basic literacy in the severely economically depressed Two-Thirds World, some of his discussions of pedagogy seem a far cry from something that could apply to higher education in the United States or address our concerns.

As I addressed in Chapter IV, however, while to some extent this is a valid objection, there are also clear reasons why we need critical pedagogy in our context. Many students in higher education in the US are oppressor-students and, furthermore, are unaware of this and believe themselves to be ‘normal.’ Because the students believe themselves to be ‘normal,’ they think and act in ways that radically contradict with their self conception as generally nice, good people who have worked hard for their privilege and status. They do not realize the levels to which systems of oppression have consistently contributed to their privilege at the expense of others. Furthermore, and perhaps more significantly for oppressor-students themselves, because their privilege prevents them from conceiving of the oppressive structures at work in society, they do not see the extent to which they are dehumanized by the same structures that perpetuate their privilege. While we should not allow a concern for the dehumanized oppressor to cloud the fact that the oppressed suffer much worse dehumanization, the dehumanization of the oppressor is a significant phenomenon that seems to have real consequences for oppressor-students and other individuals with oppressor status in the United States, as evidenced through widespread dissatisfaction with education, employment, and other social structures, such as our political system. Therefore, though the oppressors cannot overcome systems of oppression without the oppressed themselves, the oppressors not only have an interest in ending these structures out of humanitarian concerns for the

oppressed, but they also have an interest in ending structures of oppression out of a concern for their own dehumanization. Therefore, because the task of overcoming systems of oppression is mutually beneficial, it seems that implementing in higher education in the United States a form of pedagogy aimed at this task would be an essential move for the future of the country.

In the interest of carrying out this project, I offer, in Chapter V, a discussion of some practical principles that I believe educators can turn to in the attempt to implement problem-posing education in college-level classrooms in the US. These principles include: (1) thematize the course material by connecting it to the existential and political lives of the students; (2) investigate the thematic elements of this material through dialogic discussion; (3) seek coherence in explanations and analyses of the themes present in the material; (4) respect the historicity of themes and the structures of oppression they reveal; (5) introduce interpretations from the underside; and (6) challenge students' sense of comfort with, and reinforce student resistance to, the status quo. In implementing these principles, I would encourage instructors to consider ways to adapt them to their courses and to their students. Rigidly adhering to principles or particular practices is directly contrary to Freire's philosophy of a dynamic classroom. Implementing these principles at the classroom level represents the first stage of Freire's liberatory praxis in which educators undertake "educational projects" with their students in the attempt to develop critical consciousness. As students begin to develop critical consciousness, they will begin to conceive of ways to change their oppressive and dehumanizing realities because critical consciousness not only allows people to

understand their reality and how it became as it is but also allows them to conceive of ways to change it.

Implementing this form of critical consciousness raising education through problem-posing practices is an essential endeavor because, as discussed in the Introduction and Chapter II, the current system of higher education in the US and the society it reflects need changing. Implementing the reforms suggested by the CFHE, which only further strengthen the reliance on the market model that causes the problems they notice, will not remedy the issues in higher education in the US. While certain measures, like increased scholarship programs for traditionally underprivileged individuals, will help in the short run, they will not be sufficient to cause the long-term lasting changes that the CFHE seems to desire when it writes:

We want a world-class higher-education system that creates new knowledge, contributes to economic prosperity and global competitiveness, and empowers citizens; we want a system that is accessible to all Americans, throughout their lives... We want a higher-education system that gives Americans the workplace skills they need to adapt to a rapidly changing economy; we want post secondary institutions that adapt to a world altered by technology, changing demographics and globalization, in which the higher-education landscape includes new providers and new paradigms, from nonprofit universities to distance learning.¹

From claims such as these, it is clear that the CFHE envisions a higher education system that is accessible to all individuals across socioeconomic lines and that is oriented towards the future in a lasting, long-term project to improve the ability of graduates to 'function' in the current society. While it is difficult to argue that including more

individuals from traditionally underprivileged groups in the current system of higher education is a bad idea, as mentioned above, it is not a lasting solution.

Instead, including more individuals from traditionally underprivileged groups should occur as part of a broader approach towards changing the system. The presence of more traditionally underprivileged individuals would add to the diversity of perspectives which a problem-posing educator could draw out in classroom discussion oriented towards critical consciousness raising dialogue. Furthermore, unlike traditional forms of education, problem-posing education would not be hampered by deficits in preparation in primary and secondary education. In fact, a problem-posing educator could make use of these ‘deficits’ as a way of further opening up classroom dialogue. Because certain individuals may have been underserved in their primary and secondary education, which resulted in the ‘deficits’ in their learning, they would have different experiences and different perspectives on the learning process and the topics addressed. These could serve as valuable resources for examining the ways in which particular forms of knowledge or particular subjects function in society and relate to structures of oppression.

While, to some extent, the presence of individuals from more traditionally underprivileged groups would result in the problematic potential to rely on these individuals to represent what I have termed ‘interpretations from the underside,’ problem-posing educators should firmly resist this potential. Making these traditionally underprivileged individuals responsible for representing a particular interpretation from the underside seems to fall victim to the tendency to treat dogmatically those individuals and their interpretations. Such an approach would reflect the similar danger present in the more general inclusion of interpretations from the underside, as discussed in Chapter

V. Instead of a representative approach to the perspectives of traditionally underprivileged individuals, problem-posing educators should include these individuals and their perspectives as another voice in dialogic course design and classroom dialogue. Doing so would allow the inclusion of these perspectives but would not rely on them as particular representations. Furthermore, this would allow class dialogue to open up a discussion of how the perspectives of all students, both oppressor-students and those from more traditionally underprivileged groups, reflect, contain, or have been influenced by the variety of oppressive power structures that function in our society, giving further insight into these structures.

As students, both the oppressor-students that already largely dominate the population in higher education in the US and traditionally underprivileged students granted access through scholarship programs, begin to develop critical consciousness and an understanding of the structures of oppression that dehumanize the oppressors and oppressed alike, their conception of these structures should influence their future action, according to Freire's belief that "true reflection... leads to action."² Critically conscious graduates will hopefully support measures and political action that will combat structures of oppression that result in inequalities at home and abroad. These will include, but will not be limited to, changes that will allow greater participation in higher education on the part of traditionally underprivileged and underserved groups. It is in this way, by changing the system, that critical pedagogy can address the concerns with access expressed by the CFHE and others.

While critical pedagogy will not address the CFHE's concerns with accountability in the same way that the CFHE desires to address them—namely, through testing and

reporting—critical pedagogy opens up a way for a more accurate and meaningful form of accountability to take place. In his discussion of “The Myth of Higher-Education Accountability,” Kevin Carey claims:

The clearest evidence that higher-education accountability has mostly come to naught lies with the institutions themselves. They’re organized and run the same way they have been for over a century. Student outcomes are stable at best; while six-year graduation rates have crept up slightly since the 1970s, they still hover at two-thirds overall and are significantly lower for low-income and minority students.³

In other words, if the reforms implemented in institutions of higher education in the US were successful, they would show results, and thus far, they have not. The CFHE itself is concerned with accountability because it believes that colleges and universities are not showing sufficient results when it comes to student learning. It writes, “[students] care—as we do—about results.”⁴ Therefore, it seems that the clearest indication that reforms are working would be change to the system, would be results. While implementing reforms designed to promote critical consciousness raising education would not show results in terms of performance on high-stakes mandatory tests, we would know that the reforms were working if we saw changes in society and the structure of higher education within society—if we saw improvements in access and student learning, again, not demonstrated through performance on meaningless tests but through students’ ability to make use of that education in real-life situations, in their lives, in their workplaces, and in their political and social actions. As graduates begin to participate in liberatory praxis and work to change the dehumanizing structures of oppression functioning in society, we

would expect to see changes and may eventually enter the second stage of liberatory education, in which society has become revolutionary.

Entering the stage of revolutionary society does not mean that we will no longer face limit-situations or that we will not need to continue the vocation to become more fully human. As Freire's discussion suggests, this vocation is ongoing. Recall that when he addresses the second stage of critical pedagogy, he claims that it will function "in the process of permanent liberation."⁵ Learning is an ongoing process, for Freire, and our humanizing vocation requires us to constantly relearn what we think we know as we overcome limit-situations that will continue to present themselves. As Ira Shor explains, "Knowing, to Freire, means being an active subject who questions and transforms. To learn is to re-create the way we see ourselves, our education, and our society."⁶ To know means to possess critical consciousness and participate in the reflection and action of praxis essential to human beings. This is a very different definition of education and knowledge than seems to prevail in our current society and is certainly different from the view of education and knowledge held by mainstream educators, who, as we saw in Chapter II, seem to want to define knowledge and education in terms of testable learning outcomes designed to help students 'function' in the current society, not change it. Therefore, as we move further and further into the revolutionary society, the structure of higher education in the US will continuously morph and adapt to that society.

As mentioned in Chapter V, suggesting how exactly higher education will function in a revolutionary society is problematic at best because it will be up to the individuals living in that society to create and re-create higher education as they see fit. It is even difficult to suggest whether or not it will become more 'Freirean' because the

pedagogy he discusses is designed for a society in which structures of oppression have not yet been overcome. Regardless of what form it takes, we can assume that it will remain faithful to Freire's underlying ontology regarding human praxis, that humans are "beings of the *praxis*"⁷ and, if free from oppressive and dehumanizing systems, will constantly think and act in accordance with the historical vocation to become more fully human.

While much of this may seem hopelessly naïve in the face of the massively oppressing forces that function in society, as previously discussed, we must not give in to the fatalism that characterizes oppressive reality. In answer to a question posed to him after delivering his paper "The End of Utopia," in which the questioner asked about the implementation of a new, revolutionary society, Herbert Marcuse replied, "for new, revolutionary needs to develop, the mechanisms that reproduce the old needs must be abolished. In order for the mechanisms to be abolished, there must first be a need to abolish them. That is the circle in which we are placed, and I do not know how to get out of it."⁸ This seems to capture the hopeless fatalism that characterizes oppressive reality. It also seems that it is for this reason that Freire suggests revolutionary action is pedagogical. In order for revolutionary needs to develop, we must learn them. We must learn how "the mechanisms that reproduce old needs," or the current needs, influence us, and we must conceive of other possibilities. This seems to be precisely the process of critical consciousness raising education, to help not only to give rise to new needs but to also establish an understanding of the contradictory nature of old needs.

In response to Marcuse's dilemma, I would reply that education marks the way out of the circle. For this reason, I have hope. In fact, as Freire constantly reminds us,

we must have hope because “hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it.”⁹ In other words, we must have hope in the possibility of a better future and work in the interest of bringing this about. Only by taking up this hope and enacting pedagogical practices that accord with it can we achieve what Giroux believes to be “one of pedagogy’s most fundamental goals: to teach students to believe that democracy is desirable and possible.”¹⁰ It is in deference to this hope and this goal that I have undertaken this project and attempted to offer some suggestions about how dedicated educators can take up this hope and work in pursuit of a better future, not only for higher education in the US and the lucky few who get to participate in it, but for everyone domestically and abroad who suffer from the dehumanization of the oppressive structures that prop up free market capitalism.

§1: Notes

¹ U.S. Department of Education, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, (Washington, D.C., 2006), xi.

² Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2009), 66.

³ Kevin Carey, "Truth without Action: The Myth of Higher-Education Accountability," *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* 39, no. 5 (2007): 29, <http://www.ebscohost.com/>.

⁴ U.S. Department of Education, *A Test of Leadership*, xi.

⁵ Freire, *Oppressed*, 54 [italics removed].

⁶ Ira Shor, "Education Is Politics: Paulo Freire's Critical pedagogy," in *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, ed. Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard (New York: Routledge, 1993), 26.

⁷ Freire, *Oppressed*, 125 [italics in original].

⁸ Herbert Marcuse, "The End of Utopia," *Five Lectures* (Boston: Beacon, 1970), <http://www.marcuse.org/herbert/pubs/60spubs/67endutopia/67EndUtopiaProbViol.htm>.

⁹ Freire, *Oppressed*, 91.

¹⁰ Henry A Giroux, "Democracy, Education, and the Politics of Critical Pedagogy," introduction to *Critical Pedagogy: Where Are We Now?*, ed. Peter McLaren and Joe L Kincheloe (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 3.

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