EMPOWERING EDUCATION

Critical Teaching for
Social Change

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They remain too unhappy with education or too distracted by jobs, commuting, other courses, money problems, family life, or relationships to focus on learning.

Over the years, the classes that resist and those that open up have kept me asking what kind of learning process can empower students to perform at their best. Many teachers want a learning community in class that inspires students whose creative and critical powers are largely untouched. A democratic society needs the creativity and intelligence of its people. The students need a challenging education of high quality that empowers them as thinkers, communicators, and citizens. Conditions in school and society now limit their development. Why? How can that be changed? What helps students become critical thinkers and strong users of language? What education can develop them as active students and as citizens concerned with public life? How can I promote critical and democratic development among students who have learned to expect little from intellectual work and from politics? These are the questions underlying this book.

Education Is Politics
An Agenda for Empowerment

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Schooling and the Politics of Socialization

What kind of educational system do we have? What kind do we need? How do we get from one to the other?

Can education develop students as critical thinkers, skilled workers, and active citizens? Can it promote democracy and serve all students equitably?

These big questions preoccupy many people because schooling is a vast undertaking and mass experience in society, involving tens of millions of people, huge outlays of money, and diverse forces contending over curriculum and funding. All this activity converges in schools, programs, and colleges, where each generation is socialized into the life of the nation.

About the role of education in socializing students, Bettelheim said near the end of his life, "If I were a primary-grade teacher, I would devote my time to problems of socialization. The most important thing children learn is not the three R's. It's socialization" (quoted in Meier 1990, 6).

He urged teachers to encourage students to question their experience in school: "You must arouse children's curiosity and make them think about school. For example, it's very important to begin the school year with a discussion of why we go to school. Why does the government force us to go to school? This would set a questioning tone and show the children that you trust them and that they are intelligent enough, at their own level, to investigate and come up with answers" (Meier 1990, 7). A school year that begins by questioning school could be a remarkably democratic and critical learning experience for students.

Bettelheim's concern for the critical habits of students also preoccupied Piaget, who emphasized the restraint and imposition in the socializing function of schools:

To educate is to adapt the child to an adult social environment. . . . The child is called upon to receive from outside the already perfected products of adult knowledge and morality; the educational relationship consists of pressure on the one side and receptiveness on the other. From such a point of view, even the most individual kinds of tasks performed by students (writing an essay, making a translation, solving a problem) partake less of the genuine activity of spontaneous and individual research than of . . . copying an external model; the students' inmost morality remains fundamentally directed toward obedience rather than autonomy. (1979, 137–38)

Piaget urged a reciprocal relationship between teachers and students, where respect for the teacher coexisted with cooperative and student-centered pedagogy. "If the aim of intellectual training is to form the intelligence rather than to stock the memory," Piaget wrote, "and to produce intellectual explorers rather than mere erudition, then traditional education is manifestly guilty of a grave deficiency" (1979, 51). The deficiency is the curriculum in schools, which he saw as a one-way transmission of rules and knowledge from teacher to students, stifling their curiosity.

People are naturally curious. They are born learners. Education can either develop or stifle their inclination to ask why and to learn. A curriculum that avoids questioning school and society is not, as is commonly supposed, politically neutral. It cuts off the students' development as critical thinkers about their world. If the students' task is to memorize rules and existing knowledge, without questioning the subject matter or the learning process, their potential for critical thought and action will be restricted.

In a curriculum that encourages student questioning, the teacher avoids a unilateral transfer of knowledge. She or he helps students develop their intellectual and emotional powers to examine their learning in school, their everyday experience, and the conditions in society. Empowered students make meaning and act from reflection, instead of memorizing facts and values handed to them.

This kind of critical education is not more political than the curriculum which emphasizes taking in and fitting in. *Not* encouraging students to question knowledge, society, and experience tacitly endorses and supports the status quo. A curriculum that does not challenge the standard syllabus and conditions in society informs students that knowledge and the world are fixed and are fine the way they are, with no role for students to play in transforming them, and no need for change. As Freire (1985a) said, education that tries to be neutral supports the dominant ideology in society.

No curriculum can be neutral. All forms of education are political

because they can enable or inhibit the questioning habits of students, thus developing or disabling their critical relation to knowledge, schooling, and society. Education can socialize students into critical thought or into dependence on authority, that is, into autonomous habits of mind or into passive habits of following authorities, waiting to be told what to do and what things mean.

From another point of view, the politics of education have been discussed by Apple (1979, 1982, 1988), who emphasized two aspects of teaching which make it *not* neutral:

First, there is an increasing accumulation of evidence that the institution of schooling itself is not a neutral enterprise in terms of its economic outcomes. . . . While schools may in fact serve the interests of many individuals, empirically they also seem to act as powerful agents in the economic and cultural reproduction of class relations. . . . [Second], the knowledge that now gets into schools is already a choice from a much larger universe of possible social knowledge and principles. . . . Social and economic values, hence, are already embedded in the design of the institutions we work in, in the "formal corpus of school knowledge" we preserve in our modes of teaching, and in our principles, standards, and forms of evaluation. (1979, 8–9)

The contents included and excluded in curriculum are political choices while the unequal outcomes of education are not neutral either. But even though the subject matter and the learning process are political choices and experiences, Apple also observed that there was no simple socialization of students into the existing order and no automatic reproduction of society through the classroom. Education is complex and contradictory.

Questioning the Status Quo: The Politics of Empowerment

Education can be described in many ways. One way, suggested above, is to say that education is a contested terrain where people are socialized and the future of society is at stake. On the one hand, education is a socializing activity organized, funded, and regulated by authorities who set a curriculum managed (or changed) in the classroom by teachers. On the other hand, education is a social experience for tens of millions of students who come to class with their own dreams and agendas, sometimes cooperating with and sometimes resisting the intentions of the school and the teacher.

The teacher is the person who mediates the relationship between outside authorities, formal knowledge, and individual students in the classroom. Through day-to-day lessons, teaching links the students' development to the values, powers, and debates in society. The syllabus

deployed by the teacher gives students a prolonged encounter with structured knowledge and social authority. However, it is the students who decide to what extent they will take part in the syllabus and allow it to form them. Many students do not like the knowledge, process, or roles set out for them in class. In reaction, they drop out or withdraw into passivity or silence in the classroom. Some become self-educated; some sabotage the curriculum by misbehaving.

To socialize students, education tries to teach them the shape of knowledge and current society, the meaning of past events, the possibilities for the future, and their place in the world they live in. In forming the students' conception of self and the world, teachers can present knowledge in several ways, as a celebration of the existing society, as a falsely neutral avoidance of problems rooted in the system, or as a critical inquiry into power and knowledge as they relate to student experience.

In making these choices, many teachers are unhappy with the limits of the traditional curriculum and do what they can to teach creatively and critically. Whether they deviate from or follow the official syllabus, teachers make numerous decisions—themes, texts, tests, seating arrangements, rules for speaking, grading systems, learning process, and so on. Through these practical choices, the politics of the classroom are defined, as critical or uncritical, democratic or authoritarian.

In class, as Apple suggested and as Giroux (1983) and Banks (1991) have also argued, the choice of subject matter cannot be neutral. Whose history and literature is taught and whose ignored? Which groups are included and which left out of the reading list or text? From whose point of view is the past and present examined? Which themes are emphasized and which not? Is the curriculum balanced and multicultural, giving equal attention to men, women, minorities, and nonelite groups, or is it traditionally male-oriented and Eurocentric? Do students read about Columbus from the point of view of the Arawak people he conquered or only from the point of view of the Europeans he led into conquest? Do science classes investigate the biochemistry of the students' lives, like the nutritional value of the school lunch or the potential toxins in the local air, water, and land, or do they only talk abstractly about photosynthesis?

Politics reside not only in subject matter but in the discourse of the classroom, in the way teachers and students speak to each other. The rules for talking are a key mechanism for empowering or disempowering students. How much open discussion is there in class? How much one-way "teacher-talk"? Is there mutual dialogue between teacher and students or one-way transfers of information from teacher to students?

What do teachers say about the subject matter? Do students feel free to disagree with the teacher? Do students respond to each other's remarks? Do they act like involved participants or like alienated observers in the exchange of comments in the classroom? Are students asked to think critically about the material and to see knowledge as a field of contending interpretations, or are they fed knowledge as an official consensus? Do students work cooperatively, or is the class a competitive exchange favoring the most assertive people?

In addition, the way classrooms, schools, colleges, and programs are governed is political. Is there a negotiated curriculum in class, or is a unilateral authority exercised by the teacher? Is there student, teacher, and parent co-governance of the institution or an administrative monopoly on power?

School funding is another political dimension of education, because more money has always been invested in the education of upper-class children and elite collegians than has been spent on students from lower-income homes and in community colleges. Moreover, testing policies are political choices, whether to use student-centered, multicultural, and portfolio assessments, or to use teacher-centered tests or standardized exams in which women and minorities have traditionally scored lower than men and whites.

In sum, the subject matter, the learning process, the classroom discourse, the cafeteria menu, the governance structure, and the environment of school teach students what kind of people to be and what kind of society to build as they learn math, history, biology, literature, nursing, or accounting. Education is more than facts and skills. It is a socializing experience that helps make the people who make society. Historically, it has underserved the mass of students passing through its gates. Can school become empowering? What educational values can develop people as citizens who think critically and act democratically?

Values for Empowerment

Empowering education, as I define it here, is a critical-democratic pedagogy for self and social change. It is a student-centered program for multicultural democracy in school and society. It approaches individual growth as an active, cooperative, and social process, because the self and society create each other. Human beings do not invent themselves in a vacuum, and society cannot be made unless people create it together. The goals of this pedagogy are to relate personal growth to public life, by developing strong skills, academic knowledge, habits of inquiry, and critical curiosity about society, power, inequality, and change.

The pedagogy described in this book is student-centered but is not

permissive or self-centered. Empowerment here does not mean students can do whatever they like in the classroom. Neither can the teacher do whatever she or he likes. The learning process is negotiated, requiring leadership by the teacher and mutual teacher-student authority. In addition, empowerment as I describe it here is not individualistic. The empowering class does not teach students to seek self-centered gain while ignoring public welfare.

Students in empowering classes should be expected to develop skills and knowledge as well as high expectations for themselves, their education, and their futures. They have a right to earn good wages doing meaningful work in a healthy society at peace with itself and the world. Their skills should be welcomed by democratic workplaces in an equitable economy where it becomes easier each year to make ends meet. To build this kind of society, empowering education invites students to become skilled workers and thinking citizens who are also change agents and social critics. Giroux (1988) described this as educating students "to fight for a quality of life in which all human beings benefit." He went on to say, "Schools need to be defended, as an important public service that educates students to be critical citizens who can think, challenge, take risks, and believe that their actions will make a difference in the larger society" (214).

Further, McLaren (1989) discussed this pedagogy as "the process through which students learn to critically appropriate knowledge existing outside their immediate experience in order to broaden their understanding of themselves, the world, and the possibilities for transforming the taken-for-granted assumptions about the way we live" (186). Banks (1991) defined empowerment in terms of transforming self and society: "A curriculum designed to empower students must be transformative in nature and help students to develop the knowledge, skills, and values needed to become social critics who can make reflective decisions and implement their decisions in effective personal, social, political, and economic action" (131).

The teacher leads and directs this curriculum, but does so democratically with the participation of the students, balancing the need for structure with the need for openness. The teacher brings lesson plans, learning methods, personal experience, and academic knowledge to class but negotiates the curriculum with the students and begins with their language, themes, and understandings. To be democratic implies orienting subject matter to student culture—their interests, needs, speech, and perceptions—while creating a negotiable openness in class where the students' input jointly creates the learning process. To be critical in such a democratic curriculum means to examine all subjects

and the learning process with systematic depth; to connect student individuality to larger historical and social issues; to encourage students to examine how their experience relates to academic knowledge, to power, and to inequality in society; and to approach received wisdom and the status quo with questions.

For this empowering pedagogy, I will propose an agenda of values, each to be discussed in detail, which describe it as:
• Participatory
• Affective
• Problem-posing
• Situated
• Multicultural
• Dialogic
• Desocializing
• Democratic
• Researching
• Interdisciplinary
• Activist

A Door to Empowerment: Participation

In elaborating these items, I start with the participatory value because this is an interactive pedagogy from the first day of class. Participation is the most important place to begin because student involvement is low in traditional classrooms and because action is essential to gain knowledge and develop intelligence. Piaget insisted on the relation of action to knowing: "Knowledge is derived from action. . . . To know an object is to act upon it and to transform it. . . . To know is therefore to assimilate reality into structures of transformation and these are the structures that intelligence constructs as a direct extension of our actions" (1979, 28–29). With a Deweyan emphasis, Piaget reiterated that we learn by doing and by thinking about our experience.

People begin life as motivated learners, not as passive beings. Children naturally join the world around them. They learn by interacting, by experimenting, and by using play to internalize the meaning of words and experience. Language intrigues children; they have needs they want met; they busy the older people in their lives with questions and requests for show me, tell me. But year by year their dynamic learning erodes in passive classrooms not organized around their cultural backgrounds, conditions, or interests. Their curiosity and social instincts decline, until many become nonparticipants. It is not the fault of students if their learning habits wither inside the passive syllabus dominant in education.

Participatory classes respect and rescue the curiosity of students. As Dewey argued, participation in school and society is crucial to learning and to democracy:

There is, I think, no point in the philosophy of progressive education which is sounder than its emphasis upon the importance of the participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes which direct his activities in the learning process, just as there is no defect in traditional education greater than its failure to secure the active cooperation of the pupil in construction of the purposes involved in his studying. (1963, 67)

Dewey emphasized participation as the point at which democracy and learning meet in the classroom. For him, participation was an educational and political means for students to gain knowledge and to develop as citizens. Only by active learning could students develop scientific method and democratic habits rather than becoming passive pupils waiting to be told what things mean and what to do.

Politically, for Dewey, participation is democratic when students construct purposes and meanings. This is essential behavior for citizens in a free society. Dewey defined a slave as someone who carried out the intentions of another person, who was prevented from framing her or his own intentions. To be a thinking citizen in a democracy, Dewey maintained, a person had to take part in making meaning, articulating purposes, carrying out plans, and evaluating results.

Dewey's connecting of participation with democracy underscored the political nature of all forms of education. Rote learning and skills drills in traditional classrooms do more than bore and miseducate students; they also inhibit their civic and emotional developments. Students learn to be passive or cynical in classes that transfer facts, skills, or values without meaningful connection to their needs, interests, or community cultures. To teach skills and information without relating them to society and to the students' contexts turns education into an authoritarian transfer of official words, a process that severely limits student development as democratic citizens.

Free public schooling and low-cost mass higher education are often celebrated as triumphs of democracy. Why, then, does the traditional curriculum in these institutions tilt toward authority rather than to freedom, participation, and mutuality? Silberman (1970) blamed it on "mindlessness," on the thoughtless functioning of a bureaucratic education system. But more than carelessness and bureaucracy are at work here. Clark (1960, 1978) spoke of a "cooling-out process" in mass colleges that depresses the aspirations of non-elite students in an economy with limited rewards. In an unequal society, there is simply not enough

to go around, and the bulk of students are encouraged to settle for less while blame is transferred from the college to them. Examining the economic system closely, Bowles and Gintis (1976) identified a "correspondence principle" between authoritarianism and inequality in the economy and in education. To them, schooling supports existing power and divisions in society by sorting students into a small elite destined for the top and a large mass destined for the middle and the bottom—an educational policy also studied carefully by Spring (1989) and by Oakes (1985). I would add that nonparticipatory education corresponds to the exclusion of ordinary people from policy-making in society at large. Students come of age in a society where average people do not participate in governance, in framing major purposes, in making policy, or in having a strong voice in media and public affairs. Banks do not hold elections on their investments or credit policies. Bosses and supervisors are appointed by owners and higher management; they cannot be voted in or out by the staffs below them. Hospitals are governed by appointed bureaucrats, not by delegates accountable to the clientele. General elections have become an alienating process that discourages people from voting, while politicians depend on the wealthy's contributions to finance their media campaigns. Expensive campaigns and restrictive electoral laws discourage new political organizations and thus protect the power of the two established parties. The mass media have become international conglomerates, detached from the communities they publish for or broadcast to.

About the weakness of democratic power in society, Apple comments: "To many people, the very idea of regaining any real control over social institutions and personal development is abstract and 'nonsensical.' In general . . . many people do see society's economic, social, and educational institutions as basically self-directing, with little need for their participation and with little necessity for them to communicate and argue over the ends and means of these same institutions" (1979, 163). In this social setting, passive curricula help prepare students for life in undemocratic institutions. Students do not practice democratic habits in co-governing their classrooms, schools, or colleges. There, they learn that unilateral authority is the normal way things are done in society. They are introduced in school to the reality of management holding dominant, unelected power. At the same time, they are told that they live in freedom and democracy.

While principals, teachers, and textbooks may lecture students on freedom, nonparticipatory classrooms prepare them for the authoritarian work world and political system they will join. In postsecondary education, nonparticipatory classes confirm the undemocratic experi-

ences of adults in school and society. Teacher-centered curricula in the classroom and administration-centered power in the school or college reflect the reality of other social institutions. Traditional schools thus prepare students to fit into an education and a society not run for them or by them but rather set up for and run by elites.

Many students do not accept these limits, which is why teachers often face resistance in the classroom. Many teachers also refuse to be undemocratic educators, which limits the extent to which the official syllabus and authority can be imposed on students. In this conflicted setting, the empowering educator transforms the teacher's unilateral authority. She or he offers a participatory process to students with little experience in democratic learning, in institutions generally hostile to challenges to authority.

Participation challenges the experience of education as something done to students. This is key to the passivity and resistance produced by the traditional syllabus: education is experienced by students as something done to them, not something they do. They see it as alien and controlling. To reverse this passive experience of learning, education for empowerment is not something done by teachers to students for their own good but is something students codevelop for themselves, led by a critical and democratic teacher. Participation from the first day of class is needed to establish the interactive goals of this pedagogy, to shake students out of their learned withdrawal from intellectual and civic life.

That learned withdrawal evolves in traditional schooling as students spend thousands of hours hearing lectures, instructions, rules, interpretations, information, announcements, grade reports, exhortations, and warnings. Many withdraw from intellectual work because they are told so much and asked to think and do so little. Rote drills drain their enthusiasm for intellectual life, as do short-answer exams and standardized tests. These familiar methods disable their intellects in a process I call endullment, the dulling of students' minds as a result of their nonparticipation.

Resisting Endullment: The "Performance Strike"

In school and society, the lack of meaningful participation alienates workers, teachers, and students. This alienation lowers their productivity in class and on the job. I think of this lowered productivity as a performance strike, an unorganized mass refusal to perform well, an informal and unacknowledged strike.

Nonparticipatory institutions depress the performance levels of people working in them. Mass education has become notorious for the low motivation of many students (and the burnout of many teachers).

Large numbers of students are refusing to perform at high levels, demoralizing the teachers who work with them. At times, performance strikes become organized resistance to authority, with leadership and articulate demands. But most often the students' refusal to perform appears as low motivation, low test scores and achievement, and a "discipline problem." These manifestations of the performance strike keep authority at bay in class. They are ways to refuse cooperation with a system that invests unequally in students and denies them participation in curriculum and governance.

In classrooms where participation is meager, the low performance of students is routinely misjudged as low achievement. But the actual cognitive levels of students are hard to measure in teacher-centered classrooms where students participate minimally. An accurate picture of what students know and can do is possible only when students really want to perform at their best. In a participatory process, where students codevelop the course, teachers can learn better the actual cognitive levels of students from which to design forward development. Until students experience lively participation, mutual authority, and meaningful work, they will display depressed skills and knowledge, as well as negative emotions. Teachers will be measuring and reacting to an artificially low picture of student abilities.

This is where the affective value of empowerment, second on the agenda defined above, crosses paths with the first value of participation. Participation provides students with active experiences in class, through which they develop knowledge that is reflective understanding, not mere memorization. Further, participation sends a hopeful message to students about their present and future; it encourages their achievement by encouraging their aspirations. They are treated as responsible, capable human beings who should expect to do a lot and do it well, an affective feature of the empowering classroom that I will have more to say about shortly.

A participatory pedagogy, designed from cooperative exercises, critical thought, student experience, and negotiated authority in class, can help students feel they are in sufficient command of the learning process to perform at their peak. From Dewey to Piaget to Freire, many educators have asserted that learning works best when it is an active, creative process (Bissex 1980; Smith 1983; Wertsch 1985). The National Institute of Education (1984) cited student involvement as the most important reform needed in undergraduate education: "There is now a good deal of research evidence to suggest that the more time and effort students invest in the learning process and the more intensely they engage in their own education, the greater will be their growth and

achievement, their satisfaction with their educational experiences, and their persistence in college, and the more likely they are to continue their learning" (17). The NIE urged faculty to use more "active modes of teaching" instead of the familiar lecture method. In another report, the Association of American Colleges (1985) also focused on student participation in learning, departing from the conservative demands for more testing and traditional content that dominated the 1980s: "The prevailing spirit of pedagogy should reduce the possibilities for passivity in students and authoritarianism in faculties. Students should undertake a variety of pedagogical approaches—seminars, lectures, research, field study, tutorials, theses" (26). This study identified key interdisciplinary themes rather than narrow content as the foundation for undergraduate study, thus challenging the drift in the 1980s toward transferring more official information to students.

To take participation into an empowering terrain, I would add that the more involved the student, the more he or she wrestles with meaning in the study, exercises his or her critical voice in a debate with peers, and expresses his or her values in a public arena, where they can be examined and related to conditions in society. This is what Giroux (1988) emphasized as the "public sphere" of education, or education as an activity that could invigorate the life of a democracy if it became critical and empowering. When education is a participatory sphere of public life, meaning and purpose are constructed mutually, not imposed from the top down as orthodoxies. The participatory classroom is a "free speech" classroom in the best sense, because it invites all expressions from all the students. An empowering class thrives on a lively exchange of thoughts and feelings. The way students speak, feel, and think about any subject is the starting point for a critical study of themselves, their society, and their academic subjects.

Participatory learning also opens the possibility of transforming the students'·powers of thought. For Freire, "transformation is possible because consciousness is not a mirror of reality, not a mere reflection, but is *reflexive and reflective* of reality" (Shor and Freire 1987, 13). When we participate in critical classes, we can go beyond merely repeating what we know or what we have been taught. We can reflect on reality and on our received values, words, and interpretations in ways that illuminate meanings we hadn't perceived before. This reflection can transform our thought and behavior, which in turn have the power to alter reality itself if enough people reconstruct their knowledge and take action. Freire explained the process: "As conscious human beings, we can discover *how* we are conditioned by the dominant ideology. We can gain distance on our moment of existence. . . . We can struggle to become

free precisely because we can know we are not free! That is why we can think of transformation" (Shor and Freire 1987, 13). Human beings are capable of overcoming limits if they can openly examine them. The participatory class offers that possibility.

Integrating Cognitive and Affective Learning

As I have said, participation involves affective as well as cognitive development. Empowering education is not only rationalistic, as Peter Elbow (1986) argued in a critique of Freire's work. Contrary to Elbow's reading, critical learning in this model is emotional as well as rational. Critical thought is simultaneously a cognitive and affective activity. But if empowering education involves both intellectual and emotional elements, so does traditional, teacher-centered education. In its own way, the standard syllabus is also jointly rational and emotional. This is true because education is a social experience, as Dewey (1963) understood it, not a moment of disembodied intellect. Learning cannot be reduced to a purely intellectual activity. It is more than a mental operation and more than the facts or ideas transmitted by books or lectures. Education is a complex experience of one kind or another. As an experience of human beings in a specific community at a certain moment in history and in their lives, it is a social interaction involving both thought and feeling.

The difference between empowering and traditional pedagogy has to do with the positive or negative feelings students can develop for the learning process. In traditional classrooms, negative emotions are provoked in students by teacher-centered politics. Unilateral teacher authority in a passive curriculum arouses in many students a variety of negative emotions: self-doubt, hostility, resentment, boredom, indignation, cynicism, disrespect, frustration, the desire to escape. These student affects are commonly generated when an official culture and language are imposed from the top down, ignoring the students' themes, languages, conditions, and diverse cultures. Their consequent negative feelings interfere with learning and lead to strong anti-intellectualism in countless students as well as to alienation from civic life.

The competitive practices and emotions dominating traditional education also interfere with the cognitive development of many students. Sapon-Shevin and Schniedewind (1991) point to this affective and cognitive impact of competition on students:

The typical classroom is framed by competition, marked by struggle between students (and often between teacher and students), and riddled by indicators of comparative achievement and worth. Star charts on the wall announce who has

been successful at learning multiplication tables, only children with "neat" handwriting have their papers posted for display. . . . Competition encourages people to survey other people's differences for potential weak spots. . . . We learn to ascribe winner or loser status based on certain perceived overt characteristics, such as boys are better at math. . . . The interpersonal outcomes of competition—rivalry, envy, and contempt—all encourage blaming the loser and justifying their "deserved" fate. (164–65)

They conclude that "this competitive orientation leads to isolation and alienation" among students, encouraging a handful of "winners" while depressing the performance of the many, especially female students and minorities, who withdraw from the aggressive affect of the classroom.

In class, then, teacher-centered competitive pedagogy can interfere with the positive feelings many students need to learn. The authoritarian traditional curriculum itself generates bad feelings which lead many students to resist or sabotage the lessons.

In contrast, an empowering educator seeks a positive relationship between feeling and thought. He or she begins this search by offering a participatory curriculum. In a participatory class where authority is mutual, some of the positive affects which support student learning include cooperativeness, curiosity, humor, hope, responsibility, respect, attentiveness, openness, and concern about society. There are, of course, conflicts in empowering classrooms, chiefly among students with different values and needs, and between students and the teacher in the negotiation of meaning and requirements. In addition, the participatory class can also provoke anxiety and defensiveness in some students because it is an unfamiliar program for collaborative learning and for the critique of received values and taken-for-granted knowledge.

I will have more to say on student resistance to empowering classes in a later chapter, because the positive affect sought by critical teachers is not a simple objective. For now, I want to suggest that conflicts cannot be prevented and cannot always be negotiated successfully even in a participatory classroom. But a democratic and cooperative process provides the best chance for the constructive resolution of conflict between teachers and students, as Schniedewind and Davidson (1987) and Sapon-Shevin and Schniedewind (1991) have argued in their reviews of classroom research and in their models for cooperative learning. In a participatory, collaborative class, conflicts and complaints can be expressed openly and negotiated mutually, which increases the possibility of solving them or at least maintaining a working relationship in the group. In teacher-centered classes, student alienation is provoked and

then driven underground, where it becomes a subterranean source of acting out. The traditional learning process lacks a mutual dialogue through which all sides can negotiate their positions. This bottling up of bad feelings undermines the transfer of knowledge in the official syllabus.

The affective atmosphere of a participatory classroom also aims for a productive relationship between patience and impatience. On the one hand, the critical teacher has to balance restraint and intervention. She or he must lead the class energetically while patiently enabling students to develop their thoughts, agendas, and abilities for leading. The teacher has to offer questions, comments, structure, and academic knowledge while patiently listening to students' criticisms and initiatives as they codevelop the syllabus. The patient critical teacher is also impatient to propel students' development so that they take more responsibility for their learning. This tension between patience and impatience also suggests an evolving willingness in students and teachers to study deliberately while desiring to act critically on the knowledge gained. As Freire pointed out, the "patiently impatient" student or teacher does not act unilaterally or impulsively. But neither does she or he reflect forever. Patience and impatience are part of the challenge of gaining critical knowledge and using it to transform learning and society. Put simply, it takes impatience with the way things are to motivate people to make changes, but then it takes patience to study and to develop the projects through which constructive learning and change are made.

Further, regarding the affective side of empowering pedagogy, in Freire's conversations with Myles Horton, the legendary founder of the Highlander School in Tennessee, both men insisted on the relationship of play and joy to critical thought and social change. Here they are talking about the labor workshops at Highlander in the 1930s, which included role-playing about workplace grievances and about organizing strikes:

Myles: We tried to involve everybody in singing and doing drama and dancing and laughing and telling stories because that's a part of their life. It's more of a holistic approach to education, not just a bunch of unrelated segments. The way people live was more important than any class or subject that we were dealing with. . . . They had that learning experience, making decisions, living in an unsegregated fashion, enjoying their senses other than their minds. . . .
Paulo: No matter where this kind of educator works, the great difficulty (or the great adventure!) is how to make education something which, in being serious, rigorous, methodical, and having a process, also creates happiness and joy. . . .

Then for me one of the problems we have as educators in our line is how never, never to lose this complexity of our action. . . . I cannot understand a school which makes children sad about going to school. This school is bad. But I also don't accept a school in which the kids spend all the time just playing. This school is also bad. The good school is that one in which in studying I also get the pleasure of playing. (Horton and Freire 1990, 168–72)

The denial of positive feelings begins in the traditional curriculum, not in critical programs oriented for empowerment. This state of bad feeling was confirmed by John Goodlad (1984) in an eight-year study of schools in the United States. Goodlad found many problems, among them a remarkable lack of positive emotions in the classroom. Twenty-five years earlier, Jerome Bruner (1959) had toured American classrooms, where he found a similar lack of passion for learning.

In traditional classes, affective and cognitive life are in an unproductive conflict. Students learn that education is something to put up with, to tolerate as best they can, to obey, or to resist. Their role is to answer questions, not to question answers. In passive settings, they have despairing and angry feelings about education, about social change, and about themselves. They feel imposed on by schooling. They expect to be lectured at and bored by an irrelevant curriculum. They wait to be told what to do and what things mean. Some follow instructions; others go around them; some manipulate the teacher; still others undermine the class. In such an environment, many students become cynical, identifying intellectual life with dullness and indignity.

To help move students away from passivity and cynicism, a powerful signal has to be sent from the very start, a signal that learning is participatory, involving humor, hope, and curiosity. A strong participatory and affective opening broadcasts optimistic feelings about the students' potential and about the future: students are people whose voices are worth listening to, whose minds can carry the weight of serious intellectual work, whose thought and feeling can entertain transforming self and society.

Student Participation and Positive Affect: The Teacher's Role

The teacher plays a key role in the critical classroom. Student participation and positive emotions are influenced by the teacher's commitment to both. One limit to this commitment comes from the teacher's development in traditional schools where passive, competitive, and authoritarian methods dominated. As students, teachers learned early and often that to be a teacher means talking a lot and being in charge. Prior school experiences leave teachers with what Giroux (1983) called "sedi-

mented" histories and Britzman (1986) "institutional biographies"— the values layered into professional behavior from years of traditional education. The heart of the problem is that teachers are taught to lecture and give orders. These old habits have been overcome by many creative and democratic teachers now practicing in the classroom, but the change is not easy.

To help myself and the students develop participatory habits, I begin teaching from the students' situation and from their understanding of the subject matter, in line with Bettelheim's suggestion that students should start out by questioning the material and the process of schooling. I often ask students to tell me in writing why they took the class, what they want from it, and what suggestions they have for running it or improving their education at the college. In a Utopian literature class I teach, a student once suggested that there should be no required attendance in our class or in others. She argued that attending class in her other courses had been a waste of time because she was able to do the work on her own. Instead of responding immediately, I posed her ideas back to the class, to see what other students thought. Some agreed with her strenuously, saying that they should not have to come to class if they could do the work on their own. I then asked, "Is there nothing special to be gained by students and teachers meeting in class to talk over ideas? How often in life do you set aside time just for intellectual growth?" They were not impressed. They reported being bored and silenced by didactic lectures in classes where teachers raced to cover the material and ignored their questions. They were convinced that if they could copy a friend's class notes, read the textbook, and talk to each other on the phone, they would get just as good an education as they got by coming to class. Their alienation from the traditional learning process surfaced early and became the starting theme for negotiating our own class. I argued for required attendance because I was, as I told them, committed to a mutual learning community, a concept I briefly explained, but I offered them the right at any moment to complain, object, protest, and announce that they were bored, impatient, angry, or unhappy with the process. I said that when they felt bad about the class, they should speak up, explain why, and suggest a change in the day's work or the syllabus, which we would then discuss. After debate, students accepted my proposal for required attendance but built into it allowable absences and lateness. In the following months, they asserted their protest rights a few times and stopped class dialogue that bored them. They also complained to me outside class individually and in a special "after-class" group I set up to discuss the work of the session, to

evaluate the learning under way, and to make changes for the next class. I will have more to say in a later chapter about this special group, as a means to democratize authority, but I can report here that it stimulated an unusual amount of participation.

In the first session of an introduction to journalism class, to encourage immediate participation and questioning I routinely ask students to define what "news" means to them and to write down questions they have about the news. Their definitions and questions launch our class discussion, not a lecture by me. I record their questions and statements, collate them, and then re-present them for students to decide which are the most important. Here are some key questions chosen by one class as their starting issues for class discussion:

- Is there a body that regulates the ethics of newspapers? Why isn't the media more accountable for its actions? How can one be certain that the news is accurate?
- Why are the owners of news media allowed to set the tone and make their papers or stations slanted?
- If it's true that news media lean to the left or the right wing, isn't it likely that those presenting the dominant opinion are the more successful? If so, how do opposing views survive?
- What can journalism teach me if I don't go into the field?
- Is TV news driven by entertainment values? Is that happening more as people go directly into TV without having training in print?

Their questions provided some wonderful launching pads for our study. Instead of answering their questions in brief lectures, I posed them one by one, so that students could participate more, answer their peer's questions as best they could, practice thinking out loud, and display what they already knew—all this before I provided any academic response. The syllabus was built upward from student responses instead of downward from my comments. This political change of direction in the making of a democratic curriculum is a way to authorize students as co-developers of their education. With some authority, they can feel co-ownership of the process, which in turn will reduce their resistance.

In another class, a literature course on the American Dream, I began by asking students to write their definitions of the American Dream and a short essay on whether they believed in it or not. The class held divided views on this issue and debated their differences. Their compositions became the initial texts for class discussion and for entry into literary works. Again, I did not begin by lecturing on the subject, for I did not want to pre-empt their participation or thinking by giving them a definition of the American Dream. Further, I avoided communicating

my own affect in relation to the theme. By keeping my emotion and intellect low-profile, I tried to avoid provoking their desire to copy my words and values for a good grade. After they had established their own positions, I joined in the discussion with mine.

In short, their words and their ideas are the points from which the class begins a critical journey forward. For me to provide lectures first would risk provoking passivity or hostility in students. It would also cheat me and the students from making contact in class with student subjectivity—their real language, feelings, and understandings. The participatory opening draws out students' knowledge, literacy, and affect toward academic work. I need exposure to these factors as the base on which to structure the subject matter. In traditional classrooms, teachers routinely begin by defining the subject matter and the proper feeling to have about the material rather than by asking students to define their sense of it and feeling about it, and building from there.

Overall, it would be hard to exaggerate the crucial role participation plays in the teacher's attempt to encourage positive feelings toward learning. In participatory, cooperative classrooms, the walls between teacher and students have a chance to become lower. Freire referred to the separation of teachers and students as the first obstacle to learning. To bring them together, teachers can identify themes and words important to students and ask them to be coinvestigators of that material with the teacher. Freire (1970) argued the case for coinvestigation: "Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teachers cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. . . . They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow" (67). Participation and affective growth are not, of course, brought about by lecturing students on the value of participation and good feelings. The class hour itself is structured so that students reflect on meaningful questions and influence the direction of the syllabus.

While a participatory classroom cannot transform society by itself, it can offer students a critical education of high quality, an experience of democratic learning, and positive feelings toward intellectual life. That experience may spread through many classrooms if enough teachers undertake it as a project in a single institution. In turn, if participatory approaches become a leading response to student alienation and teacher burnout, the progressive impact of democratic learning may be felt broadly in education, and eventually outside education, by orienting students to democratic transformation of society by their active citizenship. The more widespread the practice of participatory empowerment in classrooms and schools, the greater will be the challenge to

unilateral authority in and out of educational institutions. As teachers see other teachers and students experimenting, more may be encouraged to test participatory empowerment in their own classrooms, and in the process promote the positive emotions that students need in order to embrace critical and democratic learning as the politics of their education.

Problem-Posing
Situated and Multicultural Learning

2

The Teacher as Problem-Poser

To build an empowering program, the participatory and affective values discussed in the last chapter are foundations for teacher-student cooperation. Another means to engage students in critical and mutual learning can be found in the third value on the agenda, problem-posing. In this chapter, I will survey some aspects of problem-posing and will later offer a detailed model for using it in the classroom.

Problem-posing has roots in the work of Dewey and Piaget, who urged active, inquiring education, through which students constructed meaning in successive phases and developed scientific habits of mind. They favored student-centered curricula oriented to the making of knowledge rather than to the memorizing of facts. Many educators have agreed with this dynamic approach, including Freire, who evolved from it his method of "problem-posing dialogue." In a Freirean model for critical learning, the teacher is often defined as a problem-poser who leads a critical dialogue in class, and problem-posing is a synonym for the pedagogy itself.

As a pedagogy and social philosophy, problem-posing focuses on power relations in the classroom, in the institution, in the formation of standard canons of knowledge, and in society at large. It considers the social and cultural context of education, asking how student subjectivity and economic conditions affect the learning process. Student culture as well as inequality and democracy are central issues to problem-posing educators when they make syllabi and examine the climate for learning.

Freire (1970) used his well-known metaphor of "banking education" to contrast the politics of traditional methods with problem-posing. Banking educators treat students' minds as empty accounts into which they make deposits of information, through didactic lectures and from commercial texts. The material deposited in students is drawn from the "central bank of knowledge." The central bank in any society is a meta-