CHAPTER 2

A careful analysis of the teacher-student relationship at any level, inside or outside the school, reveals its fundamentally narrating character. This relationship involves a narrating subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students). The contents, whether values or empirical dimensions of reality, tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified. Education is suffering from narration sickness.

The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students. His task is to "fill" the students with the contents of his narration—contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. Words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated, and alienating verbo-

The outstanding characteristic of this narrative education, then, is the sorriness of words, not their transforming power. "Four times four is sixteen; the capital of Pará is Belém." The student records, memorizes, and repeats these phrases without perceiving what four times four really means, or realizing the true significance of "capital" in the affirmation "the capital of Pará is Belém." That is, what Belém means for Pará and what Pará means for Brazil.

Narration (with the teacher as narrator) leads the students to
memories mechanically the narrated context. Worse yet, it turns them into “containers,” into “receptacles” to be “filled” by the teacher. The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are.

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositors and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communications and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the “banking” concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or catalogers of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the relentless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.

In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry. The teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposite; by considering their ignorance absolute, he justifies his own existence. The students, alienated like the slave in the Hegelian dialectic, accept their ignorance as justifying the teacher’s existence—but, unlike the slave, they never discover that they educate the teacher.

The notion d’avoir of libertarian education, on the other hand, lies in its drive towards reconciliation. Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students.
the critical faculties and is not content with a partial view of reality but always seeks out the ties which link one point to another and one problem to another.

Indeed, 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 in conjunction with a paternalistic social action apparatus, within which the oppressed receive the euphemistic title of "welfare recipients." They are treated as individual cases, as marginal persons who deviate from the general configuration of a "good, organized, and just" society. The oppressed are regarded as the pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these "incompetent and lazy" folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality. These marginal need to be "integrated," "incorporated" into the healthy society that they have "forsaken."

The truth is, however, that the oppressed are not "marginals," are not people living "outside" society. They have always been inside—inside the structure which made them "beings for others." The solution is not to "integrate" them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become "beings for themselves." Such transformation, of course, would undermine the oppressors' purposes, hence their utilization of the banking concept of education to avoid the threat of student conscientiation.

The banking approach to adult education, for example, will never propose to students that they critically consider reality. It will deal instead with such vital questions as whether Rogers gave green grass to the goat, and insist upon the importance of learning that, on the contrary, Rogers gave green grass to the rabbit. The "humanism" of the banking approach masks the effort to turn women and men into automations—the very negation of their ontological vocation to be more fully human.

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study right now. This view makes no distinction between being ac-
cessible to consciousness and entering consciousness. The distinc-
tion, however, is essential: the objects which surround me are simply
accessible to my consciousness, not located within it. I am aware of
them, but they are not inside me.

It follows logically from the banking notion of consciousness that the
educator's role is to regulate the way the world "enters into" the
students. The teacher's task is to organize a process which already
occurs spontaneously, to "fill" the students by making deposits of
information which he or she considers to constitute true knowledge.2
And since people "receive" the world as passive entities, education
should make them more passive still, and adapt them to the world.
The educated individual is the adapted person, because she or he is
better "fit" for the world. Translated into practice, this concept is
well suited to the purposes of the oppressors, whose tranquility rests
on how well people fit the world the oppressors have created, and
how little they question it.

The more completely the majority adapt to the purposes which
the dominant minority prescribe for them (thereby depriving them
of the right to their own purposes), the more easily the minority can
continue to prevail. The theory and practice of banking education
serve this end quite efficiently. Verbalistic lessons, reading require-
ments, the methods for evaluating "knowledge," the distance be-
tween the teacher and the taught, the criteria for promotion:
everything in this ready-to-wear approach serves to obviate thinking.

The bank-clerk educator does not realize that there is no true
security in his hypertrophied role, that one must seek to live with
others in solidarity. One cannot impose oneself, nor even merely

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2. This concept corresponds to what Sartre calls the "digestive" or "autotrophie" concept of education, in which knowledge is "fed" by the teacher to the students to "fill them out." See Jean-Paul Sartre, "L'idee fondamentale de la phénomene-

3. For example, some professors specify in their reading lists that a book should be read from pages 10 to 15—and do this to "help" their students.

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PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED

co-exist with one's students. Solidarity requires true communica-
tion, and the concept by which such an educator is guided fears and
proscribes communication.

Yet only through communication can human life hold meaning.
The teacher's thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of
the students' thinking. The teacher cannot think for her students,
nor can she impose her thought on them. Authentic thinking, think-
ing that is concerned about reality, does not take place in ivory
tower isolation, but only in communication. If it is true that thought
has meaning only when generated by action upon the world, the
subordination of students to teachers becomes impossible.

Because banking education begins with a false understanding of
men and women as objects, it cannot promote the development of
what Fromm calls "biosophy," but instead produces its opposite:
"necrophily.

While life is characterized by growth in a structured, functional
manner, the necrophilous person lives all that does not grow, all
that is mechanical. The necrophilous person is driven by the
desire to transform the organic into the inorganic, to approach
life mechanically, as if all living persons were things. . . . Mem-
ory, rather than experience; having, rather than being, is what
counts. The necrophilous person can relate to an object—a
flower or a person—only if he possesses it; hence a threat to his
possession is a threat to himself, if he loses possession he loses
contact with the world. . . . He loses control, and in the act of
controlling he kills life.4

Oppression—overwhelming control—is necrophilous; it is nour-
ished by love of death, not life. The banking concept of education,
which serves the interests of oppression, is also necrophilous. Based
on a mechanistic, static, naturalistic, spatialized view of conscious-
ness, it transforms students into receiving objects. It attempts to
control thinking and action, leads women and men to adjust to the
world, and inhibits their creative power.

When their efforts to act responsibly are frustrated, when they find themselves unable to use their faculties, people suffer. "This suffering due to impotence is rooted in the very fact that the human equilibrium has been disturbed." But the inability to act which causes people's anguish also causes them to reject their impotence, by attempting

... to restore [their] capacity to act. But can [they], and how?

One way is to submit to and identify with a person or group holding power. By this symbolic participation in another person's life, [men have] the illusion of acting, when in reality [they] only submit to and become a part of those who act."

Popular manifestations perhaps best exemplify this type of behavior by the oppressed, who, by identifying with charismatic leaders, come to feel that they themselves are active and effective. The rebellion they express as they emerge in the historical process is motivated by that desire to act effectively. The dominant elites consider the remedy to be more domination and repression, carried out in the name of freedom, order, and social peace (that is, the peace of the elites). Thus they can condemn—logically, from their point of view—"the violence of a strike by workers and [can] call upon the state in the same breath to use violence in putting down the strike." 5

Education as the exercise of domination stimulates the credulity of students, with the ideological intent (often not perceived by educators) of indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression. This accusation is not made in the naïve hope that the dominant elites will thereby simply abandon the practice. Its objective is to call the attention of true humanists to the fact that they cannot use banking educational methods in the pursuit of liberation, for they would only negate that very pursuit. Nor may a revolutionary society inherit these methods from an oppressor society. The revolutionary society which practices banking education is either misguided or

"unjust uttering of people. In either event, it is threatened by the specter of reaction.

Unfortunately, those who espouse the cause of liberation are themselves surrounded and influenced by the climate which generates the banking concept, and often do not perceive its true significance or its dehumanizing power. Paradoxically, then, they utilize this same instrument of alienation in what they consider an effort to liberate. Indeed, some "revolutionaries" brand as "innocents," "dreamers," or even "reactionaries" those who would challenge this educational practice. But one does not liberate people by alienating them. Authentic liberation—the process of humanization—is not another deposit to be made in men. Liberation is a process: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it. Those truly committed to the cause of liberation can accept neither the mechanistic concept of consciousness as an empty vessel to be filled, nor the use of banking methods of domination (propaganda, slogans—deposits) in the name of liberation.

Those truly committed to liberation must reject the banking concept in its entirety, adopting instead a concept of women and men as conscious beings, and consciousness as consciousness intent upon the world. They must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world. "Problem-posing" education, responding to the essence of consciousness—intentionality—rejects communiqués and embodies 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 Japanese "split"—consciousness as consciousness of consciousness.

Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transfers of information. It is a learning situation in which the cognizable object (far from being the end of the cognitive act) intermediates the cognitive actors—teacher on the one hand and students on the other. Accordingly, the practice of problem-posing education entails at the outset that the teacher-student contradiction be resolved. Dialogical relations—indispensable to the capacity of cognitive

5. Ibid., p. 31.
6. Ibid.
actors to cooperate in perceiving the same cogizable object—are otherwise impossible.

Indeed, problem-posing education, which breaks with the vertical patterns characteristic of banking education, can fulfill its function as the practice of freedom only if it can overcome the above contradiction. Through dialogue, the teacher of the students and the students of the teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. In this process, arguments based on "authority" are no longer valid, in order to function, authority must be on the side of freedom, not against it. Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cogizable objects which in banking education are "owned" by the teacher.

The banking concept (with its tendency to dichotomize everything) distinguishes two stages in the action of the educator. During the first, he cognizes a cogizable object while he prepares his lessons in his study or his laboratory; during the second, he expounds to his students about that object. The students are not called upon to know, but to memorize the content narrated by the teacher. Nor do the students practice any act of cognition, since the object towards which that act should be directed is the property of the teacher rather than a medium evoking the critical reflection of both teacher and students. Hence in the name of the "preservation of culture and knowledge" we have a system which achieves neither true knowledge nor true culture.

The problem-posing method does not dichotomize the activity of the teacher-student: she is not "cognitive" at one point and "narrative" at another. She is always "cognitive," whether preparing a project or engaging in dialogue with the students. He does not regard cogizable objects as his private property, but as the object of reflection by himself and the students. In this way, the problem-posing educator constantly re-forms his reflections in the reflection of the students. The students—no longer docile listeners—are new 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. The role of the problem-posing educator is to create, together with the students, the conditions under which knowledge at the level of the doxa is superseded by true knowledge, at the level of the logos.

Whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the submission of consciousness; the latter strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality.

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. Because they apprehend the challenge as interrelated to other problems within a total context, not as a theoretical question, the resulting comprehension tends to be increasingly critical and thus constantly less alienated. Their response to the challenge evokes new challenges, followed by new understandings; and gradually the students come to regard themselves as committed.

Education as the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination—denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from people. Authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without people, but people in their relations with the world. In these relations consciousness and world are simultaneous: consciousness neither precedes the world nor follows it.

La conscience et le monde sont donnés d'un même coup: extérieur par essence à la conscience, le monde est, par essence relatif à elle.9

9. S. Barthe, op. cit., p. 32.
In one of our culture circles in Chile, the group was discussing (based on a "qualification") the anthropological concept of culture. In the midst of the discussion, a peasant who by banking standards was completely ignorant said: "Now I see that without man there is no world." When the educator responded: "Let's say, for the sake of argument, that all the men on earth were to die, but that the earth itself remained, together with trees, birds, animals, rivers, seas, the stars ... wouldn't all this be a world?" "Oh no," the peasant replied emphatically. "There would be no one to say, 'This is a world'."

The peasant wished to express the idea that there would be lacking the consciousness of the world which necessarily implies the world of consciousness. I cannot exist without a non-I. In turn, the non-I depends on that existence. The world which brings consciousness into existence becomes the world of that consciousness. Hence, the previously cited affirmation of Sartre: "La conscience et le monde sont d' uns même coup."

As women and men, simultaneously reflecting on themselves and on the world, increase the scope of their perception, they begin to direct their observations towards previously inconceivable phenomena:

In perception properly so-called, as an explicit awareness [Gewahr], I am turned towards the object, to the paper, for instance. I apprehend it as being this here and now. The apprehension is a singling out, every object having a background in experience. Around and about the paper lie books, pencils, inkwell, and so forth, and these are in a certain sense are also "perceived", perceptually there, in the "field of intention"; but whilst I was turned towards the paper there was no turning in their direction, nor any apprehending of them, not even in a secondary sense. They appeared and yet were not singled out, were not pointed on their own account. Every perception of a thing has such a zone of background intuitions or background awareness, if "intuiting" already includes the stage of being turned towards, and this also is a "conscious experience", or more briefly

PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED - 83

a "consciousness of" all that in point of fact lies in the co-perceived objective background.9

That which had existed objectively had but had not been perceived in its deeper implications (if indeed it was perceived at all) begins to "stand out," assuming the character of a problem and therefore of challenge. Thus, men and women begin to single out elements from their "background awareness" and to reflect upon them. These elements are now objects of their consideration, and, as such, objects of their action and cognition.

In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves, they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. Although the dialectical relations of women and men with the world exist independently of how these relations are perceived (or whether or not they are perceived at all), it is also true that the form of action they adopt is to a large extent a function of how they perceive themselves in the world. Hence, the teacher-student and the student-teachers reflect simultaneously on themselves and the world without dichotomizing this reflection from action, and thus establish an authentic form of thought and action.

Once again, the two educational concepts and practices under analysis come into conflict. Banking education (for obvious reasons) attempts, by mythicizing reality, to conceal certain facts which explain the way human beings exist in the world; problem-posing education sets itself the task of demystifying. Banking education resists dialogue; problem-posing education regards dialogue as indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality. Banking education treats students as objects of assistance; problem-posing education makes them critical thinkers. Banking education inhibits creativity and domesticates (although it cannot completely destroy) the intentionality of consciousness by isolating consciousness from

9. See chapter 3.—Translator's note

the world, thereby denying people their ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human. Problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of persons as beings who are autopoietic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation. In such a way, people practice, as immobilizing and fixing forces, fail to acknowledge men and women as historical beings: problem-posing theory and practice take the people's historicity as their starting point.

Problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality. Indeed, in contrast to other animals who are unfinished, but not historical, people know themselves to be unfinished, they are aware of their incompleteness. In this incompleteness and awareness lie the very roots of education as an essentially human manifestation. The unfinished character of human beings and the transformational character of reality necessitate that education be an ongoing activity.

Education is thus constantly remade in the praxis. In order to be, it must become. Its "duration" (in the Bergsonian meaning of the word) is found in the interplay of the opposites permanence and change. The banking method emphasizes permanence and becomes reactionary; problem-posing education—which accepts neither a "well-behaved" present nor a predetermined future—roots itself in the dynamic present and becomes revolutionary.

Problem-posing education is revolutionary futurity. Hence it is prophetic (and, as such, hopeful). Hence, it corresponds to the historical nature of human kind. Hence, it affirms women and men as beings who transform themselves, who move forward and look ahead, for whom immobility represents a fatal threat, for whom looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future. Hence, it identifies with the movement which engages people as beings aware of their incompleteness—an historical movement which has its point of departure, its Subjects and its objective.
more, egotistically, a form of dehumanization. Not that it is not fundamental to have in order to be human. Precisely because it is necessary, the men's huming must not be allowed to constitute an obstacle to others' having, must not consolidate the power of the former to crush the latter.

Problem-posing education, as a humanist and liberating praxis, posits as fundamental that the people subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation. To that end, it enables teachers and students to become subjects of the educational process by overcoming authoritarianism and alienating intellectualism; it also enables people to overcome their false perception of reality. The world—no longer something to be described with deceptive words—becomes the object of that transforming action by men and women which results in their humanization.

Problem-posing education does not and cannot serve the interests of the oppressor. No oppressive order could permit the oppressed to begin to question: Why? While only a revolutionary society can carry out this education in systematic terms, the revolutionary leaders need not take full power before they can employ the method. In the revolutionary process, the 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.

Chapter 3

As we attempt to analyze dialogue as a human phenomenon, we discover something which is the essence of dialogue itself: the word. But the word is more than just an instrument which makes dialogue possible; accordingly, we must seek its constitutive elements. Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed—even in part—the other immediately suffers. 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.2

An unauthentic word, one which is unable to transform reality, results when dichotomy is imposed upon its constitutive elements. When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well, and the word is changed into idle chatter, into verbiage, into an alienated and alienating "blab." It becomes an empty word, one which cannot denote the world, for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action.

1. Action = word, work = praxis
2. Sacrifice of action = verbiage
3. Sacrifice of reflection = activity

Some of these reflections emerged as a result of conversations with Professor Ernesto Maria Fiore.