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Service-Learning in Two Keys: Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy in Relation to John Dewey's Pragmatism*

Thomas Deans
Kansas State University

This article compares the educational and philosophical theories of John Dewey and Paulo Freire, articulating how each deals with two key relationships: action to reflection, and individual to society. While Dewey and Freire largely overlap in their theories of experiential learning, they depart on the larger ideological purposes of education, with Freire more inviting of critical reflection on race, class, and power. After a discussion of each theorist, the author illustrates the implications of Deweyan and Freirean philosophical frameworks for service-learning pedagogy, using two college writing courses as examples.

In the ongoing process of constructing a philosophical and theoretical framework for service-learning, John Dewey has been cast, more than any other figure, in the role of founding father. As evident in the pages of this journal and elsewhere, many find in Dewey's philosophy both a precursor to and exemplar for the theory and practice of service-learning (Jacoby, 1996; Giles & Eyster, 1994; Hatcher, 1998; Morton & Saltmarsh, 1998; Saltmarsh, 1996). Dewey is such a compelling figure because his pragmatic philosophy ties knowledge to experience, his progressive political vision connects individuals to society, his student-centered educational theory combines reflection with action, and his ethical writings emphasize democracy and community. The most widely known academic of his day, Dewey is a uniquely American intellectual who deserves the attention he has garnered from service-learning advocates. Moreover, a claim to Deweyan lineage serves a legitimizing purpose. Because his work holds sway in several disciplines, his imprimatur lends academic credibility to service-learning research and pedagogy.

Thus, continued attention by service-learning practitioners to the work of Dewey is for the best. Our focus on Dewey, however, should not eclipse other potential exemplars. One such candidate is Paulo Freire, whose critical pedagogy has proven an enduring influence on late 20th century educators and who has been characterized by Stanley Aronowitz (1993) as "the Latin John Dewey" (p. 10), stressing the overlap in the educational

approaches of Dewey and Freire and their analogous roles as public, engaged intellectuals.

Freire, a Brazilian literacy educator, came from outside the American tradition, his ideas shaped by his third-world context. In some service-learning scholarship, one finds references to his breakthrough book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), which articulates a compelling educational theory premised on a critical understanding of the dynamics of political power and of the dialectical relationship between the word (language or text) and the world (cultural context). Influenced by neo-Marxism, liberation theology, and phenomenology, as well as by his own literacy work with indigenous peoples, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* emphasizes the need to critique oppressive structures evident both within schools and throughout society. It also underscores the potential for personal and political transformation through dialogue, articulates the action-reflection dialectic of "praxis," and encourages the development of "critical consciousness." While Freire's theoretical outlook evolved between the publication of his early books in the 1960s and his death in 1997, his work has always been animated by a liberatory and hopeful spirit.

In this essay, I compare the philosophical and theoretical approaches of Dewey and Freire, illuminating each in light of the other. From this comparison emerges a key question: How does service-learning in a Deweyan/pragmatic vein differ, in theory and practice, from service-learning in a Freirean/critical pedagogy vein?

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Deans

Dewey's Pragmatic Experimentalism and Service-Learning

In current educational theories one can hear the echoes of earlier educational movements, with none more important for service-learning than progressive education. Moreover, no single voice is more significant than that of the guiding spirit and chief philosopher of progressivism, John Dewey. Dewey's writings on pragmatic philosophy and progressive education have long been invoked to undergird the theory and practice of active, experiential, and student-centered education (ranging from elementary school to college, and from project-based learning to internship programs).¹ Dewey is also an apt thinker to call on to contextualize service-learning not only because of his deliberations on experiential learning but also because he connects these matters, through his social philosophy, to the issues of reflective activity, citizenship, community and democracy. In other words, Dewey comprehensively thinks through not only *learning* but *service* too, and the nature of their dialectical relationship.

Another reason Dewey's voice resonates with service-learning enthusiasts may have something to do with the social context out of which Dewey spoke. Alan Ryan (1995) marks telling parallels between Dewey's time and our own.

[T]he 1990s are turning out to be astonishingly like the 1890s. Not in the sense that exactly the same anxieties strike us on exactly the same occasions. But Dewey was moved to write about individual unease and social and political failures in a context that resembles our own in crucial ways. Dewey's America was one in which the problems of the inner city were appalling. In the early 1890s homelessness in Chicago sometimes reached 20 percent; unemployment frequently hit one in four of the working population...Social conflict was everywhere: Strikes were physically fought out with a violence we have not seen for sixty years. The upper classes were apparently indifferent to the fate of the poor and even to the fate of the working near poor. In the cities the response of the better-offs was to remove themselves to the suburbs...and in the courts it was to make it impossible for unions to strike...Nor was it clear what any individual person should or could do about all this. (p. 24)

Even though Dewey's writings "breathe an air of crisis," is it "important to see how insistent he was that the crisis was also an opportunity or, if you like, how insistent he was that opportunity was there if we were prepared to take it and that an activist philosophy was implicit in the American mind and desperately needed" (p. 24). Ryan's remarks suggest one

reason why Dewey's work, in addition to its compelling theoretical claims, resonates with contemporary service-learning practitioners.²

I gather my commentary on Dewey around his exploration of two basic relationships: knowledge to action, and the individual to society. Much of Dewey's pragmatic philosophy is devoted to bridging such dualisms, to revealing the vital "continuities" and interactions between such terms.³ He reconciles the knowledge/action dualism by articulating a theory of *experimentalism*; and he reconciles the individual/society dualism by ever returning to principles of civic *participation* and *democracy*. These two strains of thought provide scaffolding for theory-building in service-learning.

Action-Reflection in Deweyan Thought

At the level of the individual, Dewey puts experience and experimentalism, as well as the recursive relation of knowledge and action, at the center of his theory of learning. Unpacking the relationship of action to reflection, he writes:

The nature of experience can be understood only by noting that it includes an active and a passive element particularly combined. On the active hand, experience is trying—a meaning which is made explicit in the connected term experiment. On the passive, it is undergoing. When we experience something we act upon it, we do something with it; then we suffer or undergo the consequences...The connection of these two phases of experience measures the fruitfulness or value of the experience...Two conclusions important for education follow. (1) Experience is primarily an active-passive affair; it is not primarily cognitive. But (2) the measure of value of an experience lies in the perception of relationships or continuities to which it leads up. (1980, p. 147)

Active element and passive element. Trying and undergoing. Doing and reflecting. Education, for Dewey, is a form of growth through *active experimentation* and *reflective thought*.

Throughout his writings in both philosophy and education, Dewey also insists that the means can never be divorced from the ends. How one learns is intimately connected to what one learns. Since Dewey wants learners to become active participants in the world, he promotes an active and participatory theory of learning and pedagogy. He articulates the process of sound, experiential "reflective inquiry" as having five phases: 1) perplexity, confusion, doubt in response to a situation whose character is yet to be determined; 2) a conjectural anticipation, tentative interpretation of the given elements; 3) a careful survey of all attainable consideration

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Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy in Relation to John Dewey's Pragmatism

which will define and clarify the problem at hand; 4) a consequent elaboration of the tentative hypothesis to make it more precise and more consistent; and 5) the development of a firmer hypothesis upon which to act (and which itself remains open to further testing and revision) [1980, p. 157; qtd. in Saltmarsh, 1996, p. 18].

For Dewey, learning and knowing emerges from the situation, from the "forked road of doubt," and is realized through action. Knowledge is born of *inquiry*, a recursive relation to experience through which thought is intertwined with action—reflection in and on action—and proceeds from doubt, to the resolution of doubt, to the generation of new doubt. According to Dewey, "[Subject matter] becomes an object of study—that is, of inquiry and reflection—when it figures as a factor to be reckoned with in the completion of a course of events in which one is engaged and by whose outcome one is affected" (1980, p. 41). And although learning emerges from experience, "the belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative" (1938, p. 25). Dewey's primary requisite for a *quality* experience is that it "live fruitfully and creatively in future experiences" (p. 28).

Consequently, Dewey believes that "educational institutions should be equipped so as to give students an opportunity for acquiring and testing ideas and information in active pursuits typifying social situations" (1980, p. 169). For Dewey this means developing a problem-posing and problem-solving curriculum. Moreover, whereas many classrooms emphasize competition among students to learn the same material, Dewey emphasizes the diversity of knowledge and interests that individuals bring to the classroom (although he is relatively quiet on cultural or ethnic diversity), and how such a range of student capabilities and interests can be celebrated and utilized rather than downplayed and homogenized. He suggests that the student wants to "work out something specifically his own, which he may contribute to the common stock, while he, in turn, participates in the productions of others... The child is born with a natural desire to give out, to do, and that means to serve" (1964a, p. 118-20). Certainly service-learning projects present the potential for providing such active, cooperative, and experiential contexts for service. In fact, they take Dewey's call for student learning through "active pursuits typifying social situations" one step further by presenting *genuine* social situations as scenes for doing and learning.

*The Individual/Society Relation
in Deweyan Thought*

Dewey recognizes the radical interconnectedness of individual cognition and social context. His writings are preoccupied with this relation and with collapsing the dualisms that separate the self from society. He is a philosopher of social action rather than of detached knowledge and, therefore, never fails to put his theories of individual learning within the larger context of how individuals should relate to society. For Dewey, education is ultimately social in its aims: "Unless education has some frame of reference it is bound to be aimless, lacking a unified objective... There exists in this country such a unified frame. It is called democracy" (1987, p. 415).

Dewey insists that "the conception of education as a social process and function has no definite meaning until we define the kind of society we have in mind" (1980, p. 103). When he writes of society, Dewey assumes a democratic society, and his conception of a democracy is elemental to understanding how individuals and education should ideally function within it. While most definitions of democracy hinge on political factors—government structures, individual civil rights, or a social contract—Dewey's definition emphasizes cultural factors—civic participation, communication and communal living. As Dewey explains in *The Public and its Problems* (1927), democracy is "not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the very idea of community itself" (1927, p. 148). Later, in *Democracy and Education*, he reinforces this concept:

A democracy is more than a form of government, it is primarily a mode of associated living, a conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate is an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept me from perceiving the full import of their activity. (1980, p. 93)

As Alan Ryan (1995) remarks, "The ideal [for Dewey] was to transform the great society into the great community" (p. 219); and as Cornel West (1989) notes, "the pragmatist tradition has been the distinctive philosophical tradition to make democracy not just a mode of governance but a way of being in the world" (p. 117).¹

Since Dewey's conception of democracy rests on social interaction, it makes sense for his theory of education to follow. Making an explicit connection between knowledge and democracy, Dewey notes

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Deans

that "since democracy stands in principle for free exchange, for social continuity, it must develop a theory of knowledge which sees in knowledge the method by which one experience is made available in giving direction and meaning to another" (1980, p. 355). Democratic education for him is to be seen "as a freeing of individual capacity in a progressive growth directed to social aims" (p. 58). Toward this end, he proposes to teachers that "the introduction of every method which appeals to the child's active powers, to his capacities for construction, production, and creation, marks an opportunity to shift the center of ethical gravity from an absorption which is selfish to a service which is social" (1964a, p. 120). In other words, Dewey favors any opportunity through which we can redirect curriculum from lessons that quiz individual accumulation of knowledge to projects that draw on individual talents within collaborative efforts that intervene in social settings, whether classrooms or local communities.

Dewey also concludes that "the only way to prepare for social life is to engage in social life" (1964a, p. 116). Likewise, the radical interaction and "continuity" between the individual and society is a cornerstone of Dewey's social, political, and ultimately educational philosophy. He writes:

Perhaps the greatest need for a philosophy of education at the present time is the urgent need that exists for making clear in idea and effective in practice that its end is social, and that the criterion to be applied in estimating the value of practices that exist in schools is also social. It is true that the aim of education is development of the individuals to the utmost of their potentialities. But this statement in isolation leaves unanswered the question as to what is the measure of development. A society of free individuals in which all, through their own work, contribute to the liberation and enrichment of the lives of others, is the only environment in which any individual can really grow normally to his full stature. An environment in which some are practically enslaved, degraded, limited, will always react to create conditions that prevent the full development of those who fancy they enjoy complete freedom and unhindered growth. (1964b, p. 12)

Dewey's emphasis here on the social ends of education—even as he celebrates individual freedom—constitutes a compelling warrant for introducing service-learning into our classrooms.

Still, we must read Dewey's words within the historical context of early to mid-century progressivism, and doing so reveals a contradiction in his seemingly unbridled enthusiasm for personal freedom. Some scholars read the liberal and democratic

emphases in Progressive Era thinking as reflecting an intellectual movement that prioritized the need for transforming diverse cultures, languages and ideologies into one vision of the social good grounded in white, middle class values (Adler-Kassner, 1998). Indeed, Dewey's energies are focused on promoting a shared set of civic values, an all-inclusive "democratic faith," a unified national community. He writes in *Democracy and Education* (1944) that one of his aims for education is that it develop a "cultivated imagination for what men have in common and a rebellion at whatever unnecessarily divides them" (p. 128). Consequently, we hear little about race, ethnicity or cultural difference in Dewey's writings, and Cornel West (1993a, 1993b) sees this unwillingness to broach matters of power and difference as pragmatism's most notable limitation.

However, Dewey's work is not entirely silent on matters of diversity and in his large body of writings one finds that he gives credence to the need for both centripetal forces that emphasize sameness as well as centrifugal forces that highlight difference. For example, in the essay "Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us" (1988) he underscores the need for "giving differences a chance to show themselves" (p. 226). Likewise, in "The Principle of Nationality" (1980a) Dewey asserts:

No matter how loudly any one proclaims his Americanism, if he assumes that any one racial strain, and one component culture, no matter how settled it was in our territory, or how effective it has proved in its own land, is to furnish a pattern to which all other strains and cultures are to conform, he is a traitor to an American nationalism. Our unity cannot be a homogenous thing...; it must be a unity created by drawing out and composing into a harmonious whole the best, the most characteristic which each contributing race and people has to offer. (pp. 288-89)

Such writings have lead some scholars to the conclusion that Dewey's pragmatism is consonant with contemporary views on diversity even if in his idealism Dewey avoided discussing the dynamics of power and dominance in American culture.⁵

In these competing readings of Dewey's stance on multiculturalism is evident his dialectical inclination: an emphasis on shaping a vital common national experience coupled with an affirmation of the importance of diversity. As we recognize the richness and usefulness of Dewey's thinking for service-learning, we must attend to alternate readings of pragmatism, and to compare the Deweyan approach to those of theorists who are particularly attentive to matters of power and oppression (such as Freire).

Throughout his work, Dewey states that a prima-

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Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy in Relation to John Dewey's Pragmatism

ry aim of schools should be to help students become "good citizens, in the broadest sense." The individual and the school must be continuous with society but also agents of service and transformation. Dewey argues for the value of vocational and "practical" education but insists that instruction not be subservient to business interests any more than it should be beholden to the "traditional education" which the progressive movement so vigorously opposed. He reflects:

The problem is not that of making the schools an adjunct to manufacture and commerce, but of utilizing the factors of industry to make school life more active, more full of immediate meaning, more connected with out-of-school experience. The problem is not easy of solution. There is a standing danger that education will perpetuate the older traditions of a select few, and effect its adjustment to newer economic conditions more or less on the basis of acquiescence in the untransformed, unrationalized, and unsocialized phases of our defective industrial regime... Education would then become an instrument of perpetuating unchanged the existing order of society, instead of operating as a means of its transformation... The desired transformation... signifies a society in which every person shall be occupied in something which makes the lives of others better worth living, and which accordingly makes the ties which bind persons together more perceptible. (1980, p. 326)

Such critique seems to echo neo-Marxist analyses of cultural institutions reproducing themselves and the inequitable power relations of society. Yet Dewey is more invested in reform, in "social reconstruction," than in revolutionary change. As Stanley Fish (1998) notes, "Pragmatism is the philosophy not of grand ambitions but of little steps" (p. 432).⁶ Dewey's approach to political action is defined by "mediation" and "gradualism" rather than by revolutionary ambitions (Saltmarsh, 1996, p. 20). He trusts individuals to act and reflect critically and incrementally within a capitalist system (through education, dialogue and service) toward the end of a more participatory democratic community characterized by largely middle-class values and sensibilities.

Teachers and administrators, Dewey suggests, are the most appropriate agents of change for democratic education because progressive educators facilitate schools more connected to civic life, students more active and reflective, and a society closer to Dewey's ideal of democracy as "a mode of associated living, a conjoint communicated experience." In this process, *service* becomes a key term for Dewey: "The growth of the child in the direction of social

capacity and service, his larger and more vital union with life, becomes the unifying aim [of education]; and discipline, culture, and information fall into places as phases of this growth" (1915, p. 92). Dewey insists that educators should play a central role in "saturating" the student with the "spirit of service" (1979, p. 20). Furthermore, "Interest in community welfare, an interest which is intellectual and practical, as well as emotional—an interest, that is to say, in perceiving whatever makes for social order and progress, and for carrying these principles into execution—is the ultimate ethical habit to which all the special school habits must be related if they are to be animated by the breath of moral life" (1964a, p. 118). Students must have the ability "to take their own active part in aggressive participation in bringing about a new social order" (1986, p. 128). Ideally, Dewey would have schools function as "genuine community centres," so that their influence would "[ramify] to take in the main interests of the community in such things as nutrition, health, recreation, etc." (1986, p. 185), which is, in fact, something that many service-learning projects already do.

Paulo Freire's Praxis in Service-Learning Practice

Along with John Dewey, Paulo Freire serves as a theoretical anchor for some service-learning advocates. Service-learning projects speak to Freire's belief that "the distance between the university (or what is done in it) and the popular classes should be shortened without losing rigor and seriousness, without neglecting the duty of teaching and researching" (1996, p. 133). As a self-described radical, Freire's goals are ambitious—no less than the political transformation of individuals and society through literacy education, critical reflection, and collective social action.

Dewey and Freire, who both label themselves progressives, share scorn for philosophies of education that rely on mechanistic, static, industrial or elitist metaphors. Instead, they build their philosophies around core concepts of experience, growth, inquiry, communication, mediation, problem posing/solving, consciousness-raising, ethical social action and transformation. Stanley Aronowitz (1993) compares Dewey and Freire by describing them as seminal philosophers of education and as among our few public, "engaged intellectuals" (p. 10). However, Aronowitz also fears that in academic disciplines and classroom practice both Dewey and Freire are too often watered down to promoters of depoliticized teaching methods (such as valuing student experience as a starting point for learning, or including more dialogue in the classroom). He reminds us

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Deans

that Dewey was a leader in the teacher union movement and that Freire's ideas were developed within the context of grassroots literacy work. Like Dewey, Freire discusses how individuals learn through the active, collaborative tackling of complex and experiential problems, and how individuals and schools should function in society to promote a more participatory, curious and critically aware citizenry. However, Freire's hopes for radical structural change are more politically oppositional and more attuned to both class conflict and cultural diversity than are Dewey's.

My reading of Freire confirms many parallels with Dewey—but it also discerns critical differences between the two educators and the implications of those differences for service-learning. Both Dewey and Freire are humanists who see the educational process as bringing action and reflection, theory and practice, means and ends, self and society into intimate and ultimately transformative dialectical relationships on both the cognitive and social levels. Dewey describes the ideal dialectic in terms of *continuity*, Freire as *dialogue*. Both imagine the educational process as a key mechanism in fostering an increasingly critical and active citizenry, with Dewey hanging his hopes on ever more interconnected civic participation and Freire focusing his on critique, "critical consciousness," and "praxis."

There are, certainly, important differences in the educational philosophies of Dewey and Freire. Among the most significant is Freire's emphasis on an anthropological approach to students, which accounts for culture, class and race—factors which Dewey largely sidesteps when speaking of students. Freire also, true to his Marxist influences, focuses on radical socio-economic change, which problematizes (and politicizes) the educational system and its place in the dominant (and largely oppressive) social order, while Dewey focuses on communication and problem-solving, assuming a largely benevolent social order in need of reform and revitalization rather than revolutionary restructuring. For Dewey, "philosophy was aimed at the enhancement of democratic education, and his conception of democracy was cultural, not political" (Saltmarsh, 1996, p. 19). In contrast, Freire's conception of democracy, while attentive to culture, foregrounds matters of political power. Whereas for Dewey education prepares and motivates participation in the polis, for Freire education is politics (deepened by the belief that most formal education serves dominant political interests).

This difference in ideological orientation is due in large part to the dramatically different cultural contexts out of which the two philosophers emerged. Dewey cultivated his philosophy from within the

American university and his own middle-class sensibility. And while Freire also worked within a university setting for most of his life, his philosophy was profoundly influenced by his third-world context and his work in grass roots adult literacy circles with the marginalized and dispossessed. Thus Freire views nearly everything, especially education, through the lens of political power. While both are progressive, only Freire can be considered radical.

Action-Reflection in Freirean Thought

Freire (1970) defines his key term praxis as "action-reflection." He explains, "Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interconnection that if one is sacrificed—even in part—the other immediately suffers" (p. 75). The sacrifice of action leads to verbalism, vacant words; the sacrifice of reflection leads to activism, uncritical behavior. "Either dichotomy, by creating unauthentic forms of existence, creates also unauthentic forms of thought, which reinforce the original dichotomy" (1970, p. 76). Freire does not even permit temporal separation of the terms (i.e., finish acting, then reflect); praxis must be a concurrent, recursive, ongoing process of action-reflection: "Authentic reflection clarifies future action, which in its given time will have to be open to renewed reflection" (Freire, 1985, p. 156). As with Dewey, the truly educative experience motivates further inquiry. When he revisits *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) over twenty years later in *Pedagogy of Hope* (1994), Freire further underscores the recursivity of "action-reflection" by using "action-reflection-action" (p. 53).

When it comes to individual cognition, Freire sees knowing as a constructive, experiential process and locates learning as emerging from "the situation." He writes: "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" (1970, p. 67). This "intermediation," or one of its Freirean corollaries (dialogue, dialectic, communion, action-reflection, praxis) serves as a centerpiece for Freire's learning theory. As with Dewey's "split road of doubt" as the starting place for learning, Freire locates learning in one's creative response to a situation, the relation of the individual to the material problem. Analyzing his adult literacy approach, Freire (1985) reflects, "To be an act of knowing...the adult literacy process must engage the learners in the constant problematizing of their existential situations" (p. 56). However, while Dewey and Freire both emphasize the value of starting from the "existential situations"

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Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy in Relation to John Dewey's Pragmatism

of students, their understanding of what constitutes that existential situation differs with respect to how they understand culture. As Moacir Gadotti (1994) explains, "For Dewey, culture is simplified as it doesn't involve the social, racial and ethnic elements while for Paulo Freire it has an anthropological connotation as the educational action always takes place in the culture of the pupil" (p. 117).

A Freirean "act of knowing" hinges on "inquiry" (a term also central to Dewey, and used in much the same sense). Freire (1970) explains, "For apart from inquiry, apart from praxis, men cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (p. 58). As an alternative to his famous analogy of the banking approach to education (in which teachers and students treat knowledge like a static commodity to be accumulated like capital), Freire imagines learning as involving (in his own words) "action, critical reflection, curiosity, demanding inquiry, uneasiness, uncertainty—all these virtues are indispensable to the cognitive subject, the person who learns!" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 8). Ira Shor (1993) lists the basic descriptors of Freirean pedagogy as participatory, situated (in student thought and language), critical, democratic, dialogic, desocializing, multi-cultural, research-oriented, activist and affective (pp. 33-34).

In a recent work on higher education, Freire insists: "We must expect [college] curricula to stimulate curiosity, a critical spirit and democratic participation" (Freire, Escobar, Fernandez, & Guevara-Niebla, 1994, p. 69). Freire's understanding of the relation of knowledge to action suggests learning situations that are collaborative, active, community-oriented, and grounded in the culture of the student.

*The Individual/Society Relation
in Freirean Thought*

Freire wishes for no less than a revolution, and for him, the "revolutionary process is eminently educational in character" (1970, p. 133).⁷ While some may take this, especially in his early works, to imply that Freire believes systematic education to be the "the lever for revolutionary transformation," his more recent writings revise this claim.⁸ Freire believes that formal education alone is not the lever of transformation because he believes that systematic schooling is almost always a conservative enterprise. He explains:

But my optimistic position is nowadays more clearly defined as the following: I am absolutely convinced that the main task of systematic education is the reproduction of the ideology of the dominant class, that of reproducing the con-

ditions for the preservation of their power, but precisely because the relationship between systematic education, as a subsystem, and the social system is one of opposition and mutual contradiction. Therefore, when talking about reproduction as the task of the dominant class, there is the possibility of counter-acting the task of reproducing the dominant ideology...[W]e clearly perceive a permanent movement, very dynamic and contradictory, between the task of reproduction and that of counteracting the reproduction. These two tasks are dialectic: one is the task of the system, the other is ours; therefore, it is determined by the system but not requested by it. (Freire, Escobar, Fernandez, & Guevara-Niebla, 1994, p. 31)

This "dynamic and contradictory" situation leaves the critical educator "swimming against the tide." Freire believes that "the university cannot be the vanguard of any revolution; it is not in the nature of the institution" (Freire, Escobar, Fernandez, & Guevara-Niebla, 1994, p. 62). Still, ever hopeful, he concludes that "there is a space, however small, in the practice of education, in the educative system as a subsystem; there is a minimum space that we must use to our advantage" (p. 34). It is this "minimum space" that critical pedagogies and service-learning projects in a Freirean spirit inhabit.

Because Freire "perceives a need to ground all knowledge to social life in human history, culture, and relations of power" (da Silva & McLaren, 1993, p. 52), social action begins through one's understanding of consciousness. According to Freire, "Consciousness is constituted in the dialectic of man's objectification of and action upon the world" (1985, p. 69), in the individual's grasp of his or her relation to society. He articulates three progressive levels of consciousness: *semi-intransitive*, *naïve transitive* and *critically transitive*. These range from immersion in the dominant mass consciousness of society (semi-transitive), through an emerging awareness of oneself and societal structures (naïve transitive), to a critical and historical problematization of society and one's relation to it (critical consciousness) [1985, p. 71-81]. Thus, *conscientization* is marked by "depth in the interpretation of problems; by the substitution of causal principles for magical explanations; by the testing of one's own findings and openness to revision...; by refusing to transfer responsibility; by rejecting passive positions; by soundness of argumentation; by the practice of dialogue rather than polemics...; by accepting what is valid in both old and new" (1973, p. 18). Clearly, this implies a literacy that demands more than functional reading and writing. Freire shuns the "functional literacy" often posited as the goal of literacy projects because it encourages students to

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Deans

progress no further than a naive transitive consciousness and serves dominant rather than liberatory interests (see Bizzell, 1993; Knoblauch & Brannon, 1993; Lanskshear, 1993). Critical literacy, toward the end of critical consciousness, should be the practice of the liberatory educator.

Ira Shor (1993) describes the four elemental qualities of critical consciousness as *power awareness* (understanding social history), *critical literacy* (analytically reading, writing and discussing social matters), *desocialization* (examining the internalized myths and values of mass culture), and *self-organization/self-education* (taking initiative in ongoing social change) [p. 32]. Although Freire had since 1987 given up using the term "critical consciousness" because he found it so loosely appropriated as to lose its meaning, most still associate the term with him. And while Freire may have surrendered the term (replacing it with others like "critical awareness," "the unveiling of reality," and "the moment of revelation of social reality"), he has not discarded the import of the concept to his educational philosophy.

In his early work, Freire puts critical consciousness at the center of his educational philosophy. Moving from *naive transitive consciousness* to *critical consciousness* implies an increasingly reflective, abstract, and critical grasp of one's social, historical, and class situatedness. It means coming into consciousness of one's relationship to the cultural and economic order. *Conscientization* is, as with Freire's understanding of individual cognition, a dialectical and dialogical process that grasps the dynamic relationship between objectivity and subjectivity, material conditions and individual consciousness. Freire's notion of critical consciousness goes beyond most understandings of "critical thinking" as discussed by American educators, who primarily focus on independent thinking and analytical reasoning. Freire demands more—a willingness to enter into dialogue with the dispossessed in society, unpack dominant myths embedded in our socialization, and comprehend power and class relations in ways similar to Marxist social theory (but correcting the Marxist neglect of individual subjectivity, personal agency and local culture).

Still, Freire does not want to just change minds; he wants to change material conditions. And he aims to change not only schools, but also larger cultural and economic structures of oppression. In his early works he suggests that critical consciousness can lead to social transformation, but later regrets that he had "spoken as if the unveiling of reality automatically made for its transformation" (1994, p. 103). In his recent works he suggests that while the "unveiling of reality" remains the central act of the critical

literacy process, concrete and collective action must follow in order to fully realize his vision. Freire recognizes that even "the most critical knowledge of reality, which we acquire through the unveiling of that reality, does not of itself alone effect a change in reality" (p. 30). Thus, service-learning projects, which pair critical consciousness aims with concrete social action, are a fitting manifestation of Freire's theory in practice. As Freire observes in a conversation with Ira Shor (1987), "For me, the best thing possible is to work in both places simultaneously, in the school and in the social movements outside the classroom" (p. 39).

However, Henry Giroux (1994) fears that "what has been increasingly lost in the North American and Western appropriation of Freire's work is the profound and radical nature of its theory and practice as an anti-colonial and postcolonial discourse" (p. 193). Giroux reminds us to keep in mind not only the third world as the crucible for Freire's thought but also his personal circumstances:

For Freire, the task of being an intellectual has always been forged within the trope of homelessness: between different zones of theoretical and cultural difference; between the borders of non-European and European cultures. In effect, Freire is a border intellectual, whose allegiances have not been to a specific class and culture as in Gramsci's notion of the organic intellectual; instead, Freire's writings embody a mode of discursive struggle and opposition that not only challenges the oppressive machinery of the State but is also sympathetic to the formation of new cultural subjects and movements engaged in the struggle over the modernist values of freedom, equality, and justice. (p. 195)

Therefore Freire's work cannot be simply appropriated by first-world educators as a simple recipe. First-world advocates of radical pedagogy can better grasp Freire within a postcolonial discourse that acknowledges his historical context and radical ambitions. As Freire (1985) himself notes, "My educational experiments in the Third World should not be transplanted; they should be created anew" (p. 190). Freire's theories do still resonate in an American context—with its class divisions, disparity of wealth, inequities of schooling, and eurocentrism—and the need to "create anew" projects for critical literacy and social transformation remains pressing.

Although a supporter of revolutionary change and class struggle, Freire is not a doctrinaire Marxist, as he puts faith in individual agency and incremental change. Yet still, unlike Dewey, his explicit goals include a revolutionary restructuring of the political and economic status quo. While Dewey wanted to

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Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy in Relation to John Dewey's Pragmatism

significantly reform and democratize the dominant culture and its institutions (particularly schools), his political ideology persistently recommended that those in the margins surrender to the mainstream—to common values and a common “democratic faith.” Such an ameliorative stance runs counter to Freire’s insistence that dominant cultures are by definition oppressive and that their traditional institutions (particularly schools) are almost always instruments of oppression, even though critical teachers can create counter-oppressive spaces for genuine learning and dialogue within such institutions.

In concert with the skepticism demanded by desocialization and critical analysis of power relations, there is an idealistic, even utopian strain to critical pedagogy. Tomaz de Silva and Peter McLaren (1993) remark that “critical pedagogy must serve as a form of critique and also a referent of hope” and suggest that it can be likened to a kind of “social dreaming” (p. 69). Henry Giroux (1985) refers to “a pedagogy of possibility.” Freire himself speaks of hope, love, utopias, and dreams—but not naive utopias and dreams. He clarifies: “This is a Utopianism as a dialectical relationship between denouncing the present and announcing the future. To anticipate tomorrow by dreaming today” (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 187).

Some service-learning practitioners will prefer Freire’s emphasis on political democracy and revolutionary socio-economic transformation to Dewey’s emphasis on cultural democracy and incremental social reconstruction. Freire’s announcement of utopian possibilities facilitates a critique of the present and underwrites an oppositional political agenda. Dewey’s pragmatist faith in reformist outcomes stands in contrast to Freire’s utopian faith in revolutionary outcomes—each a powerful version of hope.

Implications for Teaching

Both Dewey and Freire insist that theory and practice should interpenetrate each other. Therefore, a question emerges: Which pedagogical practices are invited by a Deweyan orientation in contrast to those suggested by a Freirean orientation?

Because my own disciplinary home is English and, more specifically, rhetoric and composition studies, I will note briefly how Deweyan and Freirean theory apply differently to college composition, the most widely taught course in American higher education. College writing instruction has become an active site for service-learning and even a brief survey of service-learning in composition reveals a striking variety of approaches (Adler-Kassner, Crooks & Watters, 1997; Deans, forthcoming).

For example, take two excellent—but very differ-

ent—service-learning writing courses, one at the University of Massachusetts (UMass) which resonates with a Deweyan educational philosophy and one at Bentley College which resonates with a Freirean educational philosophy. The UMass course falls under a category of service-learning composition initiatives that I have elsewhere (Deans, forthcoming) labeled “writing for the community,” and the Bentley course falls under what I have labeled “writing about the community.” A brief description and analysis of each course illustrates how they diverge on several key theoretical and practical matters, one aligning primarily with Deweyan pragmatism and the other primarily with Freirean critical pedagogy.

The course at UMass that I studied through observations, interviews, and analyses of course materials was *Writing in Sport Management*, an upper division Writing Across the Curriculum class for sports studies majors. The instructor, Laurie Gullion, explained why she opted to include service-learning in her course: “The biggest goal that I have is that students have an exposure to a real client relationship where they’re tailoring their writing to an exceedingly clear audience.” To that end, she arranged for students to undertake team writing projects for local recreational organizations. (Projects included first-aid brochures, coaching manuals, and grant proposals).

This service-learning writing initiative, and others like it, emphasize “real world writing” or writing for audiences outside the academy. Some such “writing for the community” courses are designed for upper division writing classes and others are designed for first year composition courses. In either case, the centerpiece of the class is usually a team writing project for a local non-profit agency, and the overriding goal tends to be completing a professional document for the non-profit agency. In addition to the brochures, manuals, and grant proposals composed by the UMass students, projects in “writing for the community” courses often include newsletter articles, press releases, research reports, web pages, and other purpose-driven documents needed by local organizations (For examples, see Bacon, 1997; Deans & Meyer-Goncalves, 1998; Dorman & Dorman, 1997; Heilker, 1997; Huckin, 1997). The character of the projects, almost like mini-internships at non-profits, resonate with Dewey’s advocacy for experiential education and his contention that teachers should utilize “the factors of industry to make school life more active, more full of immediate meaning, more connected with out of school experience” (1980, p. 326). But while the projects require replicating industry practices as students meet contemporary professional standards and use

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Deans

technology such as desktop publishing, they also tend to spur student motivation because students gain a sense of accomplishment by contributing to understaffed community organizations that serve the social good. As one student in the UMass course remarked:

Doing work for community [agencies] that need it—that's probably what makes it [the service-learning writing project] different...Laurie [the instructor] saw that and said, "Look, this is a great opportunity for students to apply themselves and learn what they have to learn," and it's almost like, yeah, you can look at it and say, "Ahh, I have to do this now, and I don't want to. Why can't I just get by with it." But it gives you a sense of reality. And at the same time, all those communities benefit from it. It's kind of like a plus/plus, win/win situation....I think if you overall as a person can help the community, it's an overall plus.

In addition to the out-of-school connections and the motivational gains, agency projects also tend to foster genuine and sustained collaboration among students (in their project teams), another key to Deweyan educational theory.

The writing that the student project team does for the non-profit constitutes both a service for the community partner and a medium for learning about writing and rhetoric. This approach to community writing changes the traditional composition classroom in three major ways: it adds workplace and public genres to traditional essay genres; it shifts the motivation for writing from chasing traditional teacher and grading expectations to meeting the professional standards articulated by the community partner; and it changes the teacher-student relationship because the classroom instructor is no longer the sole authority in creating or assessing assignments. Moreover, the hands-on, "real world" agency projects in such courses tend to be extremely consuming. Gullion writes in a self-assessment of her course:

The students wrote that they felt rewarded by producing a useful written piece needed by an organization, they took their writing seriously because a real client was editing it, and they liked performing community service. However, they also experienced frustration and uncertainty in leaving the comfort of the classroom for a real-world situation (which I obviously see as more valuable than they did!) and in juggling the off-campus demands of their projects in light of athletic and work schedules.

From a Deweyan perspective, this intensive, collaborative project-based education places students in

the ideal starting place for learning—an experiential situation that requires grappling with some uncertainty ("the forked road of doubt") but which is guided by a clear social purpose (meeting the needs of the client). As noted earlier, for Dewey subject matter becomes an object of inquiry and reflection "when it figures as a factor to be reckoned with in the completion of a course of events in which one is engaged and by whose outcome one is affected" (1980, p. 41). Gullion's expectations of and hopes for her students largely match those proposed by Dewey.

With respect to ideology, "writing for the community" pedagogies are usually reformist rather than radical, and they are conducted in a spirit of cooperation rather than critique. Students actively participate in democratic civic life by working cooperatively within the established structures of non-profit agencies. With the UMass course, as with most courses of its kind, the agency projects demanded so much time and energy that reflection was focused primarily on the writing and collaborative processes themselves. While journals and occasional class discussions encouraged students to also reflect on community needs and express their personal responses to service, opportunities for critical reflection on the root causes of social injustice and for sustained critique of larger social structures like class and race were lost to the main activity of completing quality agency projects.

In contrast, Bruce Herzberg's writing courses at Bentley College take an altogether different approach to service-learning in composition. In his two course freshman sequence, *Expository Writing I: Summary and Synthesis* and *Expository Writing II: Research and Rhetoric*, as is the case with many "writing about the community" courses, Herzberg devoted the bulk of class time and energy to teaching academic writing in tandem with critiquing broad social forces like class, gender, or race. In most "writing about the community" courses, students engage in traditional community service (often tutoring youth or working at a homeless shelter), and then draw on that lived experience in their writing of academic essays. The emphasis is generally on personal reflection, social analysis, and/or cultural critique, but how these are weighted depends on the instructor (For examples, see Herzberg, 1994; McGuinness, 1995; Novak & Goodman, 1997).

Herzberg's composition courses at Bentley, which I also researched on site and through Herzberg's own writings, reveal a Freirean orientation in both their design and execution. Among many composition theorists, there is already a strong tradition of using Freirean theory to undergird the practice of college writing instruction (Berlin, 1991; Bizzell,

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Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy in Relation to John Dewey's Pragmatism

1992; Shor, 1987; Villanueva, 1997). Generally, compositionists draw on Freire as a model of how to redirect the goals of the writing classroom from functional literacy (with an emphasis on grammar and usage) toward critical literacy (with an emphasis on the critique of dominant cultural practices). Freirean teachers, most of whom practice their critical pedagogy without any service-learning component, generally adopt traditional academic genres like the journal and the academic essay as vehicles for critical social analysis.

The first-year service-learning composition courses taught by Herzberg were conducted in a Freirean spirit. Students performed tutoring of youth as their service (not writing itself as a service), and then brought that tutoring experience back to the class like a text to be reflected upon and analyzed. Herzberg's teaching goals pair academic literacy with critical literacy. He remarks in an essay based on his own service-learning courses, "I don't believe that questions about social structures, ideology and social justice are automatically raised by community service. From my own experience, I am quite sure they are not" (1994, p. 59). Therefore, his pedagogy raises these questions.

Facilitating critical literacy entails helping learners to comprehend the social forces—among them class, gender, race, ideology—that shape both the culture and the lives of individuals. Herzberg gives most attention to class issues. In an interview he explained this preference: "I think here [at Bentley] it is very hard for my students to talk about class. So if there is an essential cultural concern, I think for me it begins with class." Through critical readings of Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary* (1989) and Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* (1992), as well as class discussion, directed writing assignments, and final research projects, he unpacks the social dimensions of literacy and schooling from a largely neo-Marxist perspective. "What I hope to focus on here," he writes, "is how difficult my students find it to transcend their own deeply ingrained belief in individualism and meritocracy in their analysis of the reasons for the illiteracy they see" (1994, p. 61). This is, essentially, performing what Freire terms "desocialization," a key component of critical literacy. And while there is, as Herzberg writes, "...no guarantee that students will go beyond the individual and symptomatic" assessment of social issues (1994, p. 59), they at least seriously and deliberately inquire into the social dimensions of literacy, schooling, and the topic each chooses for a final research paper.

As I observed Herzberg's course in session one morning, the class was discussing observations from one of their first sessions at a local elementary

school. Sitting in a circle, students shared reflections from their journal writing. One student described his work with a Pakistani youngster with communication problems. Another commented on seeing an all African-American kindergarten class—far from his own experience in rural New Hampshire. He also remarked on the orderliness of the class, in response to which Herzberg prompted the class to make a connection to Mike Rose's discussion of urban schooling in *Lives on the Boundary*. Other students shared reflections on special education classes they observed, describing the "busy-work" handouts the children were assigned, and the yawning and fidgeting of the kids.

Herzberg prompted the students to compare their own grade school experiences with what they observed at the elementary school. This discussion wandered through topics of student aggression, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), tracking, discipline, a music class that seemed pointless. Herzberg flagged some topics—remediation, tracking, ADD—as ones that students might want to take up later as major research projects. He also steered students away from simply blaming teachers for the shortcomings they observed, suggesting that broader factors such as large class size and school funding were also factors. Such discussions constitute the beginning stages of exploring what Freire would call a generative theme, in this case schooling.

On the surface, students seemed to be touching on a collection of matter-of-fact observations of American school life. By the end of the following semester the same students, having tutored weekly at the elementary school and participated in further academic writing instruction, were undertaking major research projects that analyzed pressing social issues and critiqued social institutions. As Herzberg (1994) explains, drawing partly on C.H. Knoblauch's (1990) language, such a pedagogy can encourage students in developing a "social imagination."

The effort to reach into the composition class with a curriculum aimed at democracy and social justice is an attempt to make schools function...as radically democratic institutions, with the goal not only of making individual students more successful but also of making better citizens, citizens in the strongest sense of those who take responsibility for communal welfare... Students will not critically question a world that seems natural, inevitable, given; instead they will strategize about their position in it. Developing a social imagination makes it possible not only to question and analyze the world but also to imagine transforming it. (p. 67)

Critical teachers are generally skeptical of the power of everyday experience or community service

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Deans

alone to foster critical consciousness. The outreach experience must be incorporated into a larger project of sustained reading, analysis, dialogue, and radical critique. Thus, while both the Bentley and University of Massachusetts courses included meaningful reflection, the *kinds* of reflection differed enormously: reflection on the writing process and on community needs (UMass) in contrast to critique of the broader social forces that create injustice (Bentley). Furthermore, the kinds of texts generated in each writing course differed enormously: collaborative workplace documents for non-profit agencies (UMass) in contrast to individual critical essays for the instructor (Bentley).

We must recognize that differences in Dewey's pragmatist philosophy and Freire's neo-Marxist theory are more than academic. Students in both the UMass and the Bentley courses learned a great deal about writing and social action. But they learned different things. And most students in both courses reported their service-learning experiences as both personally and intellectually rewarding. But the distinctly different theoretical stances adopted by their instructors led to different kinds of student rewards. Evident in the "writing for the community" pedagogy (UMass) are Dewey's preferences for connecting school to workplace, designing cooperative projects, and participating actively in reformist civic organizations. Evident in the "writing about the community" approach (Bentley) are Freire's preferences for analyzing forces of power and oppression, attending to the cultural situatedness of learners, and developing intellectual habits of radical critical consciousness.

Conclusion

A unified theory of service-learning built around John Dewey's work is tempting for the sense of order and stability it could offer. However, we should resist the impulse to recruit service-learning practitioners into a single philosophical, theoretical, or pedagogical framework. Rather, service-learning will be better served if teacher-scholars develop, over time, a pantheon of exemplars. Alongside Dewey, Paulo Freire stands as one such exemplar.

I have no interest in proclaiming either Dewey or Freire as more just or more worthy than the other. Both offer sound theoretical frameworks for service-learning. They overlap on several key characteristics essential to any philosophy of service-learning: an anti-foundationalist epistemology; an affirmation of the centrality of experience in learning; an articulation of the intimate relationship between action, reflection, and learning; an emphasis on dialogue; and an abiding hope for social change through education combined with community action. Yet

because Deweyan pragmatism and Freirean critical pedagogy differ in ideological register, most will find one or the other more compelling. Service-learning practitioners should then, proceeding in critical self-awareness, align their philosophical preferences with their grounded teaching practices.

Notes

¹ See, for example, Kolb (1984); and comment on Kolb in McEwen (1996), p. 68-72.

² Ryan's remarks also might point to one reason behind the current revival of pragmatic philosophy in the academy at large. See, for example, Dickstein (1998). See also Rorty (1998) and Westbrook (1991).

³ Fishman & McCarthy (1998) also emphasize Dewey's preoccupation with reconciling dualisms. Fishman identifies four primary Deweyan dualisms: concerning morality, individual/group; concerning art, creativity/appreciation; concerning day-to-day practice, impulse/reflection; and concerning education, student/curriculum.

⁴ For further discussion of Dewey's understanding of democracy, see Bernstein, 1998; Campbell, 1995, p. 140-265; Kloppenberg, 1998; Westbrook, 1991.

⁵ For example, Kloppenberg (1998) writes: "Dewey harbored not secret desire to bring all diversity to an end under the shelter of a snug but stifling consensus: to the contrary, a democracy without difference was a contradiction in terms, because he believed passionately that all individuals, in their uniqueness, make different contributions to democratic life. The richer the mix, the richer the culture that results from the interaction" (p. 102). See also Westbrook.

⁶ Fish's understanding of pragmatism, however, is devoid of the explicit democratic political aspirations evident in Dewey's work. Fish insists that nothing definite or substantial—or even democratic—necessarily flows from a pragmatist philosophical stance.

⁷ There is some disagreement over how to characterize Freire's work and how it has evolved since the early 1960s. Torres (1993) notes that Freire first started his literacy campaign in Brazil with a reformist rather than revolutionary approach; then his pedagogical theory became more revolutionary after the military takeover and Freire's exile. Aronowitz (1993) notes a more recent pendulum-like "shift from revolutionary to democratic discourse" due to global changes of the 1980s and 90s (p. 20).

⁸ This echoes Dewey's speculation that "I do not suppose that education alone can solve it [socio-economic inequity]" (1991, p. 316).

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