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Parallel Oppressions: Culturally-Enforced Limitations on the Individual's Humanity

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Abstract

This paper is a philosophical piece with snippets of empirical data designed to provide a picture of what is currently done in schools versus what is possible. I suggest that what is often done in schools can be very literally de-human-izing. I present several arguments that address the potential our schools have, not only for educating our students in a way Paulo Freire would respect, but also for respecting our teachers' humanity. A primarily theoretical paper, I include examples from my current research that attempt to paint a picture of unfortunate teacher-society and teacher-student interactions. My hope is that this paper will not only present ideas about what is problematic in our current school culture, but also how the hopeful, freeing, and empowering work we do for some students should also be delivered to teachers.

Keywords: Authoritarian Schools, Relational Ethics, Humanity

Introduction

A fifth grade teacher, Amy, is teaching a lesson on grammar. She goes over a worksheet on sentence structure. Amy reminds students, "*Where were you?"* would make sense, but not "*Where was you?"* On another occasion, she asks students, "Are we going to put '*She swimming in the pool*'?" Many students reply *No*, though in a classroom of predominantly Black students, the answer to that question might have been a resounding *Yes*. However, by 5th grade, these students knew the expected answer, and what their White teacher expected was certainly not, "*She swimming in the pool*."

Most speakers of Standard English think that AAVE [African-American Vernacular English] is just a badly spoken version of their language, marred by a lot of ignorant mistakes in grammar and pronunciation, or worse than that, an unimportant and mostly abusive repertoire of street slang used by an ignorant urban underclass (Pullam, 1999, 39-40).

Many of Amy's Black students spoke AAVE. Amy's inability to accept, value, and discuss her students' use of AAVE as a legitimate language placed limitations on and devalued on the development of her students' humanity and intellect as Black children.

Yet before we condemn Amy's behavior too harshly, we must look further. Where has Amy learned that language has a *correct* form? Are there those who would raise concerns if Amy's students wrote, "I is so smart," on their standardized tests, or even on a writing assignment hung on the school walls? It is important to also consider that there are culturally enforced limitations imposed by those who suggest there is a *proper* grammar, and those who believe in schooling as unidirectional, leading only from the teacher to the student. I argue that traditional schooling itself, in its most unfortunate form, is still a technical, banking form of education (Freire, 2012) that also limits the *teacher's* growing human intellect. This means we consider traditional schooling itself to be its own culture, one that imprisons both the student and the teacher, and has parallels in terms of the dehumanizing nature of its origins and practices.

This is a form of schooling that requires answers above arguments, settles on tests to decide students' and teachers' progress, and as Freire (2012) told us, *dehumanizes* both parties. We quite literally see the de-*human*-ization of the student whose home culture is devalued in a traditional classroom, and the de-*human*-ization of the teacher whose ability to think originally and creatively is squashed by the need to comply with societal expectations and high-stakes tests.

Let us imagine an alternate reality in our schools. Let us imagine a reality where both the student's and teacher's humanity were respected and encouraged; where what was "right" was regularly questioned in the classroom; where the work of Freire (2012), van Manen (1986, 1991, 2008), Buber (1955, 1970), Ayres (2004), and many other notable scholars was enacted with the goal of respecting the whole of the human being rather than the oversimplified intellectual growth represented by an accumulation of knowledge.

This paper is a philosophical piece with snippets of empirical data shared to give an elaborate picture of what is currently done versus what is possible. I begin with a review of theorists, old and new, who suggest that what is often implemented in our schools is very literally de-human-izing, especially as it relates to human nature, culture, and emotion. After developing the theoretical perspective, I present several arguments that address what enormous potential our schools have, not only for educating our students in a way Freire would respect, but also for respecting our teachers' humanity at the same time. While this is a primarily theoretical paper, I have many examples from my current research that paint a picture of unfortunate teacher-society and teacher-student interactions, but also the potential for meaningful human engagement.

Theoretical Perspectives

While not an exhaustive review of the applicable literature, the theorists and researchers described below will certainly argue the importance of the human aspect in our K-12 students' and teachers' lives. It will introduce what others have described when it comes to our responsibility to other people (young students and teachers), how we consider ethics within relationships, and the role of thinking and questioning in our current school culture. All three

of these areas are largely tied to school and district culture both for the students and the teachers.

First, however, we should consider how schooling itself is a culture. By this I do not mean to talk about the culture and climate of a particular school or district, but the fact that our institution of schooling and K-12 education has a reified set of beliefs and practices that are passed along from administration to teachers and from mentors to protégés. Culture as described by Geertz (1973) is, as he refers to Max Weber, the webs of significance man has spun. To analyze this culture, we do not look for strict definitions or something quantifiable, but we search for meaning. We are not trying to ask necessarily where certain behaviors or symbolic actions came from, but we try to figure out why these things are so important. "Culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly—that is, thickly—described" (p. 14).

Giroux (1997) and Ayres (2004) are far from the only scholars who have cautioned educators at all levels against authoritarian schooling. Giroux argued that just acknowledging that the teacher is an authority over his or her students implies the political aspect of schools in general. Teacher educators, school administrators, and district personnel do the same when making decisions in positions of power over teachers who may have none, and if they do, do not necessarily know how to wield it.

It is with these thoughts in mind that I proceed with the following perspectives and arguments. Schooling is generally a culture, a context, where there are particular behaviors that are allowable and those that are not. Meaning making takes place in the lounge, on the bulletin boards, with every sign that is approved and posted and those that are denied, with the language spoken on the daily announcements, and on what time can be spent in each classroom. Can students speak in the hallways? Disagree with their teacher? Visit the principal for lunch? What families feel welcome to come to lunch and who is noticeably absent from parent-teacher conferences? What is allowed, supported, and believed about students becomes part of a school's culture, and what is allowed, supported, and believed about teaching and teachers becomes a part of *schooling*'s culture.

Responsibility to the Other

When I was preparing to meet my first class of 10 year old's as a 21 year old new teacher, I remember visiting my parents' house and heading to our laundry room to chat with my mother. I was filled with nervous energy and had little to no idea what I would do on my first day of school, even though I had graduated from a top notch teacher preparation program. I could not imagine that anyone thought I was prepared to engage my students in each and every subject area, settle classroom arguments, and administer the state tests. I have a vivid mental picture of standing next to my mother, folding towels, asking her desperately, "How can I *not* be a liability to the school and to the students? I have no idea what I'm doing!"

The teacher who wants to help the pupil to realize his best potentialities must intend him as this particular person, both in his potentiality and in his actuality. More precisely, he must not know him as a mere sum of qualities, aspirations, and inhibitions; he must apprehend him, and affirm him, as a whole. But this he can only do if he encounters him as a partner in a bipolar situation. And to give his influence unity and meaning, he must live through this situation in all its aspects not only from his own point of view but also from that of his partner. He must practice the kind of realization that I call embracing. It is essential that he should awaken the I-You relationship in the pupil, too, who should intend and affirm his educator as this particular person; and yet the educational relationship could not endure if the pupil also practiced the art of embracing by living through the shared situation from the educator's point of view. (Buber, 1970, p. 178)

An overly long quote to be sure, this passage from Buber's work highlights a number of important factors in the education of the teacher and student. First of all, there is the responsibility of the teacher to acknowledge that the one being educated is "this particular person." The individual in our care is neither a different person nor an incomplete person whose holes must be plugged with content and skills. They are, in their "potentiality and actuality," *this* person.

As well, the teacher needs to encounter the other, the student, as a partner. A partner does more than design and facilitate the learning of another, he or she involves the student in the design of the learning experiences, from the content to the process to the final product. In an ideal situation, partners work with each other, not for each other. They consider each other and their point of view in the design of all activities.

Van Manen (2000) noted, as the teacher, "I cannot help but feel responsible even before I want to feel responsible" (p. 320). When students look to us as their teachers, they are appealing to us. At times this is merely a questioning look, at other times a direct question, but they look to us for a response. It is worth noting that the words *response*, *responsibility* and *responsive* are closely related. Students worry that they will be ignored when they need attention; that the work will be too difficult, too easy, or too much; that they'll be embarrassed in front of their peers. And educators are called upon to respond to all of these situations before, during, and after they arise in classrooms. When we do so, we cannot be objective in our response. We are human beings, and we call upon this humanness to provide a response that meets at least some of the students' needs. If we attempt to be objective, we lose this awareness of our and their humanity, and our students become problems as opposed to children.

Van Manen and Freire both present a non-traditional way of conceptualizing the word *pedagogy*. Traditionally, the term pedagogy is used to describe teaching tools—strategies used in the classroom, ways to reach instructional goals in certain subjects, educational methods, etc. (Merriam-Webster, 2019) However, the term pedagogy has roots in the Greek words *pais* (child) and *ago* (to lead)—essentially, our pedagogy is the way we *lead a child*. Van Manen (1986, 1991) described pedagogy as a way of being with children. When we consider pedagogy in this way, it presents a new, non-technical view of teaching. Rather than teaching "tools," I

am considering my choices in the classroom as ways to direct my ways of being with my students.

Ayres (2004) said similarly, "Teachers live this tension with intense urgency—we meet our students as we are and as they are, right here and right now, finite but incomplete; we enlarge and expand and engage their minds and fire their hearts…" (p. xiv). Teaching is a tension, an intense profession, and one we must live with urgency; after all, our students face us *now*. Not in a minute, after we've had a chance to consider all of our options, but now, and while the individual confronts us, so do 20-30 of their peers. We are also living and working within the tension of the wider schooling culture and the individual and relational, which presents equal urgency.

Many of our schools are not yet set up to allow for human responses to children. This does not mean that teachers refrain from interacting with students in sensitive, human ways; of course they do, on a daily basis. However, the structure and culture of schooling as an institution does not always acknowledge the importance of students and teachers as human beings with multiple needs.

Relational Ethics

I taught 5th grade near the end of my K-5 teaching experiences. Because I had moved from 4th grade to 5th grade that year, I was able to loop with a third of my students. This meant that I began on the first day of school with 10 students I knew well, who had already spent a year with me and I with them. That was also a year I began in August with approximately 30 students, and later in the year this number rose to 34 as did the other 5th grade class. By the rules of our negotiated agreement, I was then to either be provided a teaching assistant to help with the large number of students, or the other 5th grade teacher and I would provide names of several of our students who would leave our classrooms and make up a new classroom with a newly hired teacher.

Let me be absolutely clear: This contract rule was designed to protect the teacher and the students from overcrowded classrooms. However, as one might imagine, selecting students for removal to another classroom was no less than heartbreaking for me and for these students. I chose the minimum number of students I could move to another room, leaving me with a still-large class. Telling my students who was to leave brought tears, questions, and tantrums from students who depended on their relationship with the teacher; a relationship I was dissolving. How could I possibly answer the questions, "Why do any of us have to leave?" "Why did you pick me?" "Who is the new teacher?" with answers that were any more than pat responses designed more to mollify them than really get at the heart of the issue: the traditional overcrowding of classrooms in public schools and the inevitability of weak decisions made too late to be of any good to the students.

Relational ethics (Austin, 2008) is the way one approaches ethics within a relationship. It is about how people choose to live together; in the case of education, how the student-teacher

relationship is created and maintained. When situations arise in the classroom, the answer to the question, "What should I do?" is multi-faceted and complex.

Buber (1955) had more than a bit to share about the importance of the young child, especially the potential of children when they face us within their "phenomenon of uniqueness" (p. 83). In order to develop their potential, Buber believed that the child needs to enter into a mutual, dialogic relationship in order to see and be received by the world as whole and complete people. As we can see in the long quote above, this *embracing* Buber requires of us enables the teacher to experience herself and the other at the same time. Noddings (2013) also spoke of this when she discussed the way the one-caring accepts as nearly as possible the reality of the cared-for. Van Manen's (1986) connection to this idea of ethics within the teacher-student relationship suggests that a teacher has a particular type of interest in the child that is different than that of the parent. This interest is with the child as a human being, engaged in formative growth.

Teacher-Student Reflection, Introspection, and Questioning

As a doctoral student, I taught undergraduate classes on general methods and social studies in the elementary classroom. When the edTPA (AACTE, 2019) entered our preservice program, many of us received in-house training on how to best support our students completing the portfolio, which was required for licensure. Because so many of us had a difficult time not turning our methods classes into edTPA preparatory classes, we began to have a number of collegial discussions that later led to a self-study on our practices (Cronenberg et al., 2016). A discussion I cannot forget took place between myself and a professor who mentored us through the self-reflection, where she asked how much we had talked about the neo-liberal aspects of the edTPA with our students when helping them understand the requirements and rubrics. Did we talk about the issues involved with Pearson, a corporation essentially tasked with licensing teachers over those of us at the university who knew the students well? I was embarrassed to say that no, I did not talk about this with my students. They were under enough stress just completing the portfolio, I argued weakly, I did not want to bring up issues that would make them angry about the process.

Ayres (2004) wrote that our K-12 schools focus too much on skills and too little on liberation. This is true. Yet our schools of teacher education tend toward the same with our preservice teachers, as do our practices in professional development with inservice teachers. With the best of intentions, we discuss the "preparation" of teachers as if there is such a thing, to prepare one adequately for the exhausting, exhilarating, confusing work with too many students and too few hours in a day. I have done many wince-worthy things as an instructor in my elementary and college classrooms, but one of the best things I ever did with my preservice teachers was to admit early in the semester that they should not expect my pedagogy class to teach them all they needed to know about teaching. What they were learning from me was truly just the beginning, and if I were to do my job well, the class should raise as many questions than it answered.

The 18th century philosopher Imanual Kant challenged people to "dare to know." He and his contemporaries, part of what has been called the Enlightenment Project, suggested that a good education would be determined by understanding, inquiry, and moral reasoning (Kant, 1784).

> Nothing is required for this enlightenment, however, except freedom; and the freedom in question is the least harmful of all, namely, the freedom to use reason publicly in all matters. But on all sides I hear: "Do not argue!" The officer says, "Do not argue, drill!" The tax man says, "Do not argue, pay!" The pastor says, "Do not argue, believe!" (para. 5)

It is not hard to imagine a typical 21st century classroom that depends on acquiescence and compliance sadly resembling what Kant was challenging in 1784. My own son was terrified to correct one of his elementary teachers when she made a small error on the blackboard one day. "You can correct a teacher," I told him. He looked at me in horror. Most classrooms I have seen do not suggest to students that they can disagree with a teacher, argue points with one another, or challenge school or district administration. Ayres (2004) described a young student who was deeply disturbed by a fireman's dismissal of the need for female firefighters in the city. He suggested to her that she write a letter to the mayor stating her case, a simple move that respected the child's passionate need to debate while not requiring time or preparation on his part.

I posit that we do not teach teachers *that they are able to do this*. Even before my students enter their paid teaching profession, most of them are terrified to include books with homosexual couples in their classroom libraries. One student told me, "I might have it in my library, but I wouldn't read it aloud in my class." Her comment told me that she would take a fairly passive step to put it in the library with 100 other books, but she wouldn't present it to students, because that presentation would mean she sanctioned that type of family, that belief system, that openness that she was deeply uncomfortable with.

"Education cannot be neutral—it is always put to use in favor of something and in opposition to something else" (Ayres, 2004, p. 31). I have taught preservice teachers that everything they do is political, whether they intend it to be or not. What you include in your library but do not present to students, how you correct a distracting behavior, how you handle a lunchtime argument, all of these quietly but clearly state what you believe about your students. As well, when teacher educators focus on certain approaches to classroom management, lesson planning, and assessment, it bleeds the humanity out of the classroom. Preservice teachers ask again and again for how-to advice. How do I handle a student who won't do their homework? What if they talk too much when I'm trying to teach? If a fight starts in class, what do I do? These are all situations that have happened to me in more than one elementary classroom, yet I would be doing a disservice to my preservice teachers if I told them that the way I handled things was *the way to do it*. The way I did it was one way, but I do not believe in the overwhelming "rightness" of anything I did. So many actions taken in the company of other humans can be questioned. These classroom actions are yet one more thing to reflect on; there are a number of *wrong* actions in teaching (causing students humiliation, actively engaging in cultural appropriation, etc.) but there are innumerable variations and shades of grey in the *right*.

As well as being political, everything we do in the classroom has a moral, human aspect. While the above examples are very public and very noticeable, sometimes these moral, human interactions are minute. They are the sighs that escape from a teacher when being asked, "What do we do now?" for the millionth time. It includes an eye roll when the same student raises her hand again and again. These actions speak to young students. You are valuable and worthy of my attention, or you are annoying and a problem. You are human like me and we do things that frustrate each other at times, or you are an object that gets in the way of my stellar instruction.

I have rarely seen issues like this on a teacher education course syllabus. Yet the moral and political aspects of teaching are innumerable during the average classroom day, so in our teacher preparation programs, shouldn't there be sanctioned, planned-for times when we discuss these? When White teacher education students have questions about classroom management in diverse schools, how can the question not also raise issues about our identity and power as White teachers, how necessary it is to reflect on our teaching practices and whether or not students see themselves in our instruction and materials, and how many management strategies result in a lack of faith and trust between the teacher and student?

Human Potential: Three Arguments

"Teachers can teach toward freedom, and teachers can conversely represent and practice a kind of 'unfreedom' – subjugation, repression, agents of dependence and subservience" (Ayres, x, 2004). An attempt has been made here to highlight the ways teachers and teaching can represent a type of cultural subjugation, a type Freire would suggest can and should be overcome by a very different kind of instruction. The arguments I would like to present here relate to *potential*. This includes the potential for the education of the young student, the development of and allowances made to K-12 teachers, and the ways education can reconsider humanity an essential goal.

Engaging and Responding to the Other

An aspect of Martin Buber's work I find most appealing and descriptive of the work of the good teacher is his description of the I-It and I-Thou (I-You) relationship. When we are engaged with another in an I-It relationship, the other is more of an object than an equal partner in dialogue. When I interact with another person in an I-It relationship, I interact with them as a thing, much as Ayres (2004) describes our tendency to "thingify" (p. 35) human beings. This is related to our tendency to label the young people we work for and the teachers we work with. Students are "gifted," "LD," or "behavior disordered." Teachers are "new," "adventurous," or "traditional." The fact that some of these labels are generally considered to be positive is not the point. The point is that the repeated use of these labels begins to blur and then erase one's humanity. It distances us from one another.

An I-Thou relationship is different. Buber (1970) said that this term, "can be spoken only with one's whole being" (p. 62). We are now encountering one another as whole beings. I speak to

you as a three-dimensional creature who has quirks, worries, thoughts, feelings, schedules, experiences, etc. We experience one another as complex works-in-progress.

What does this have to do with the potential for learning in K-12 classrooms and in teacher preservice and inservice settings? The engagement and response with one another allows ideas to be exchanged from one to the other. I have mentioned above how Ayres encouraged his young student to take action in a situation that disturbed her. This required little to no classroom time, it respected her need to act, and was almost certainly a way toward a deepened understanding of how to live in a democracy. Within teacher preservice and inservice development, it is worth the time spent to allow teachers to talk with one another not only about their lesson plans and assessments, but also their worries, excitement, and troubling situations. It was fairly recent in my teaching career when "teacher talk" became a legitimate and valued form of professional development.

What about engaging and responding with others outside the classroom? This should and often does take place via social media with community members, in an auditorium with school board members, and in the newspapers in editorial columns. If teachers can avoid being taught to "get along," as one of my research participants put it, we enrich our dialogue and participation with one another. A teacher in a different study of mine described the way she and her principal appeared to disagree fundamentally on what "doing what's best for kids" really meant. Because this teacher continued to raise the issue with her principal, she "felt like everybody was really mad at [her]." This idea of engaging in respectful, civil dialogue with one another at varied levels is one that needs more attention in preservice and inservice teacher development.

Relationships: More than a Means to an Instructional End

After the horrifying spate of school shootings the 21st century, people have begun to wonder if bullying is the cause of such disturbed behavior. Once consequence of this type of thinking is to suggest that students be much nicer to one another, and to welcome students to your social group if you think they are being marginalized or ignored (Ducharme, 2018). This initiative has been lauded in many circles; after all, who can deny that students should be nicer to one another? However, there is a disturbing aspect to the connection of these two initiatives: stopping gun violence and being nicer to one another. Yes, students should be nice to one another. Yes, of course, students should attend school without fearing for their lives. It is the way some connect one to the other that is problematic: Being nice should not be a means to an end. I should be kind to my fellow man. But I shouldn't be kind to my fellow man *in order to not* be gunned down in my classroom.

This same connection can be made when it comes to the relationships we have with students. Many authors (Baker, 2006; Boynton & Boynton, 2005) state that we should establish relationships with students, because our instruction is so much better when we know our students as whole and complete human beings. I agree to a degree. It is the "because" I would argue with: The relationship is not a means to an instructional end. The relationship should be there because there is inherent value to getting to know a child as a human being. It is

problematic, not to mention a little harsh, to think that my child is friendly with his teacher because his teacher only wants to know what books to provide. Yes, she should provide books that meet his needs. And yes, she should get to know him as a person. But to consider the latter a means to the former is a mite disturbing.

What should teachers do, then, since our primary purpose is described as instructional? I argue that we acknowledge, describe, appreciate, and encourage the relational in our classroom. We cannot shy away from the idea that to know a child in all of his or her messy humanness is a worthy goal and one that is equal to our instruction, it is not merely the way of instruction. The same is true of our work with teachers. The idea that teachers should encounter one another in a human relationship for support, commiseration, and instructional strategies is not a new one, but it is one whose tone may need to be shifted. Mentoring programs are well documented (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011) as ways to support new teachers, but at times those who work with new teachers state that they are the ones who really grow. The adults who find this most valuable have met each other in an I-Thou relationship; they see each other as human; not to be judged and picked apart under a microscope, but to be supported and to learn from one another as human beings.

Creating Safety Throughout Controversy

The 2016 elections were so heated and so polarizing that a number of teachers decided to avoid teaching about them in their classrooms (Hess, 2016). Social studies itself has decreased in importance over the years, in part because of the reading and math focus of No Child Left Behind's high stakes assessments, but also because teachers tend to believe it has less value than other subjects (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010). Yet the importance of discussions about elections and civic engagement in general, especially elections like those of 2000 and 2016 cannot be overstated. "If we want young people to build knowledge about democracy—both conceptually and in practice—then it is imperative that we help students develop a rich understanding of elections: what they are, why we have them, and how to participate in them" (Hess, 2016, p. 254).

Hess goes on to recommend that, far from avoiding controversy in the schools, classrooms are the perfect place to discuss controversial issue such as heated, divisive political speech and opinions. Schools have the potential to teach about these issues in a setting that is naturally diverse; many public schools mirror the diversity of the surrounding community, and Hess believes that it is more powerful to teach these types of issues in a setting, "where differences already exist" (p. 254).

Social studies cannot be adequately taught without addressing controversial issues. People are not neutral, blank slates. Preparing individuals for a democratic society means that our schools encourage students to develop their own thoughts and enter the world, with other humans, with these thoughts and substantiated opinions. This requires student dispositions such as an awareness that others will have opinions, critical reflection of sources, an ability to argue in a civil manner, and the requirement that you support your opinion with evidence. Yet teaching

this way presents a danger to the teacher in our current school culture. Some elementary teachers feel that they have inadequate preparation to teach certain topics in their social studies classroom (Al Badri, 2016). Others are not sure how to discuss these issues without exposing their own thoughts and feelings (Richardson, 2017). Yet more are not sure that their administrators will support them if a parent were to complain (Abu-Hamdan & Khader, 2014).

However, what is missing from this conversation is the potential to dismantle the teacher-student/administrator-teacher power structure. If the classroom were set up so that teacher and students were on a more level playing field, and the students felt like the teacher's position did not necessarily need to become theirs, it is possible that the classroom would be a more democratic, equitable culture, where opinions could be shared equally without one being more important and valid than another. If administrative culture was structured so that teachers could communicate that their classes were entering into political debates and conversations about respectful, civil discourse, administrators could act in a supportive manner as opposed to someone in a position of power and authority.

This does happen. It happens in a variety of ways as administrators listen to teachers in their building, build a culture of reflective professional development, and maintain a focus on instruction. In a study on high-quality administrative practices (Blase & Blase, 1999), teachers described their principals who shared stories of their own experiences to help solve problems. Sharing in such a way not only helps teachers reflect on activities in their classrooms, but it puts the administrator and the teacher on an equal plane; we have both been in this position, felt this way, and had to find a solution. This can be contrasted with an authoritative principal who simply recommends or orders a teacher to take a particular action, which does not respect their need to develop reflective, empowered thought. Another teacher in this study described that because *she did not fear* negative evaluation, she was more willing to take risks. The value of this type of interaction is huge; the fact that one, this teacher might have felt the emotion of fear from their principal in another setting, and two, that her teaching became more adventurous because of this continued trust.

Discussion

"Humanization and dehumanization—these quarreling twins define the landscapes of learning, and they make animating the living, ethical heart of teaching hard, grinding, often contentious, and sometimes courageous, work" (Ayres, 2004, p. 16). It is important to state now that in 24 years of K-12 and higher education, I have never met a teacher or administrator who would ever consider themselves or most of their colleagues an *oppressor*, nor they have anything but the best interests of their colleagues, employees, and students at heart. Yet it is my belief, and was certainly Freire's, that this is part of the culture of oppression in which we are all schooled, both formally and informally. Freire described how the oppressed tended to become *sub-oppressors*. "The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped" (p. 45). This certainly does not absolve educators of the responsibility to resist an authoritative power structure in their districts or their schools, but it does imply a sense of responsibility for the oppressors—those

who have a role in creating this schooling culture (including legislators, state boards of education, and others who make decisions about schools without developing a dialogue with those who have direct contact with teachers and students).

What all of this implies for us is radical, but gentle, change. One of my favorite schools to visit has a motto on their website, "Learning is serious delight!" I have seen this delight in action, alongside hard work, controversial conversation, patience tested, and difficult decisions made between teachers and students. To re-humanize teaching and our schools requires that we reconsider that our educational world is filled with people, and these people should enter into as many I-Thou relationships as possible. Our educational settings are filled with human actions and interactions, which is quite a bit messier and less predictable than the I-It interactions, in which I can tell you what to do and you comply.

Freire (2012) said, "Action is human only when it is not merely an occupation, but also a preoccupation, that is, when it is not dichotomized from reflection" (p. 53). This requires our students and teachers to not only have the opportunity to reflect upon meaningful work, controversy, and how we live and work with one another, but to consciously think about our roles and responsibilities in our interactions. Those who have been oppressed must develop this pedagogy, this way of being with one another, which means that students help design their instructional goals, and teachers also plan their own professional growth. This humanizing pedagogy means an acknowledgement that students and teachers know things, bring this knowledge to school, and can make decisions, together, toward their own development.

When I mention above that this change should be radical, but gentle, I refer readers to a book by Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (2012), now in its fourth edition, that deservedly made the rounds in many college classes and professional development sessions, *Best Practice: Bringing Standards to Life in America's Classrooms*. Filled with vignettes from actual schools where these recommended practices were observed and documented, this book does not tell teachers they are doing a horrible job if they are still using Strategy X or Lesson Y in their classrooms. The authors recommend an increase/decrease approach to change in the classroom. Decrease reliance on scripted curriculum. Decrease solitary seatwork and round robin reading. Increase writing during reading instruction. Increase interest-based reading choices. This is an excellent and realistic approach to change, especially change that is so entrenched in cultural expectations. It is possible to use the ideas presented in this paper to decrease schools' reliance on scripted curriculum at the same time teachers increase their critical analysis of curricular materials with their students. What have the writers left out? Why do you think these materials are so popular? Who benefits off of the widespread sale of these materials? Ideas like this respect what teachers and students are already doing, while questioning the status quo and the culture of oppression they have been steeped in for so long.

Conclusion

To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness.

What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places — and there are so many — where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction. And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory (Zinn, 2007, p. 270).

It is my hope that this paper has presented some ideas on which to reflect, ideas about what is problematic about our current authoritarian school culture, how what we recommend for students in terms of freedom and empowerment should also be delivered to teachers, and how controversy should be welcomed rather than avoided. These things that I describe are happening in pockets of opportunity in many areas of the country, and I have been fortunate to witness, research, and support teachers in these efforts. What Freire, van Manen, Ayres, and others mentioned here would wish for, of course, is that *all* of our students and teachers were offered opportunities for meaningful dialogue and shared decision making.

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