

unless we go beyond the limit of education and find the origins and the solutions in the politics of society? How can we change the conditions which disrupt the classroom unless there is a social movement for transformation? Teachers who don't acknowledge the social roots of this problem disarm themselves from understanding their own predicament.

## Reading and Resistance: School-words versus Reality

**Paulo** When I think more about student resistance and the limits of education, I have the impression that one of the main difficulties is a dichotomy that exists in the educational experience in the States. I am here speaking about the dichotomy between *reading the words* and *reading the world*. I see this as one of the main obstacles here in America for practicing liberating education, trying to get a critical grasp of the objects under study. What do I mean by the dichotomy between reading the words and reading the world? My impression is that the world of American education, the school, is increasing the separation of the words we read and the world we live in. In such a dichotomy, the world of reading is only the world of the schooling process, a closed world, cut off from the world where we have experiences but do not read about those experiences. This schooling world where we read words that relate less and less to our concrete experiences outside has become more and more specialized in the bad sense of this word. In reading words, school becomes a special place that teaches us to read only school-words, not reality-words. The *other* world, the world of *facts*, the world of *life*, the world in which events are very alive, the world of struggles, the world of discrimination and economic crisis (all these things are there!) do not make contact with students in school through the words that school asks students to read. You can think of this dichotomy as one kind of 'culture of silence' imposed on students. School reading is silent about the world of experience and the world of experience is silenced, without its own critical texts.

**Ira** Dialogical education bridges the gap. It connects reading words with reading reality, so the two can speak to each other. It gives student reality a voice in school at last, changing the abstract intellectual idiom of the classroom.

**Paulo** Exactly! The school command of words only wants students to describe things but not to understand them. Then, the more you separate description from understanding, the more you control the consciousness of the students. They are kept only at the surface level

of reality and do not go beneath it, into a deep critical understanding of what makes their reality what it is.

This kind of critical consciousness in the students would be an ideological challenge to the dominant class. The more this dichotomy between reading words and reading reality is exercised in school, the more we are convinced that our task here in the school or college is only to work on concepts, to work only on texts that speak about concepts. But, to the extent that we are being trained in a strong dichotomy between the *word-world* and the *real-world*, working on concepts written in a text has to mean dichotomizing text from context. And then, more and more we become specialists in reading words without being preoccupied with connecting the reading with a better understanding of the world. In the last analysis, we separate the theoretical context from the concrete context. A dichotomized pedagogy like this reduces the power of intellectual study to help in transforming reality.

If we look at it closely, this dichotomy can become very funny. It makes us more able to *play* with theories, some of them even good ones. For example, this is what explains how some very good Marxists have never drunk coffee in the house of a worker! They are very good Marxist theorists, who never had even a small experience in a slum. They are Marxists who know, nevertheless, about discrimination, because they walk the streets, and inside the university they also perceive racism. They are *experts* in Marx. However, because of their isolation from everyday life, Marx experts are not *Marxists*. They can even say that they know Marx but they hate him, because Marx is only a text for specialists who discuss concepts. Do you see? (Laughing) It is very interesting how we can create this kind of intellectual in the dichotomy between reading words and reading reality.

What happens, then, when a young teacher meets for the first time the hypothesis of changing his or her behavior in the classroom? What happens when the young teacher meets the possibility of changing her or his teaching practice? Maybe she or he read some text and thinks for the first time to become a critical educator, a new way of simultaneously reading the word and reading the world. What happens? He or she comes to the classroom with a new conviction, but this new teacher was already shaped into the dichotomy between text and context. Then, it is hard to overcome the old dichotomy and integrate words and world. The teacher has a hard time giving witness in overcoming the rupture of intellectual study from the experience of the world. Dialectically connecting the two which have been separated so far and for so long is opposite to the teacher's official training.