Although my main interest in this book is to look at the kind of knowledge that is indispensable to educators who consider themselves to be critical progressives, such knowledge may be indispensable to educators who regard themselves as conservatives. I refer here to the kind of knowledge that belongs inherently to educative practice itself, whatever the political persuasion of the educator.

As the chapters unfold, the reader can make up his or her own mind as to whether the knowledge I discuss is part of progressive or conservative educative practice or is an intrinsic requirement of educational practice itself, independent of political or ideological coloring. In previous writings, I have referred to various aspects of this kind of knowledge, though not in any systematic way. Even so, it seems to me legitimate to continue this kind of reflection in the context of teacher preparation and in critical educational practice.

Let us take, for example, the practice of cooking. Cooking presupposes certain kinds of knowledge regarding the use of the cooking stove. How to light it. How to turn the heat up and down. How to deal with the possibility of fire. How to balance the ingredients in a harmonious and pleasing synthesis. With practice newcomers to the kitchen will confirm some of the things they already know, correct others that they do not know so well, and gradually open up the way to become cooks. The practice of sailing requires some fundamental
knowledge about the control of the boat, the parts of which it is made, and the function of each of them. It requires, in addition, a capacity to measure and interpret the strength and direction of the winds, to gauge the interaction between the wind and sail, and to position the sails themselves. It requires, too, some knowledge of the motor and the relationship between it and the sails. And, in the practice of sailing, all these kinds of knowledge are either confirmed, modified, or amplified.

Critical reflection on practice is a requirement of the relationship between theory and practice. Otherwise theory becomes simply “blah, blah, blah,” and practice, pure activism.

But let me return to what interests me here. I want to focus on and discuss some of the kinds of knowledge that are fundamental to what I call critical (or progressive) educative practice and that, for that reason, ought to be considered essential in the teacher preparation program. Essential in their comprehension and lucid clarity. The very first of these types of knowledge, indispensable from the beginning to the teacher (that is, to the teacher who considers him- or herself to be an agent in the production of knowledge), is that to teach is not to transfer knowledge but to create the possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge.

If, during the time of my education, which in any case should be ongoing, I begin believing that my teacher is the “subject” in relation to whom I consider myself to be the “object” (if, in other words, he/she is the subject who forms me, and I, the object shaped by him or her), then I put myself in the passive role of one who receives quantities of accumulated knowledge, transferred to me by a “subject” who “knows.” Living and understanding my educational process in this way, I, as “object,” will become in my turn a false subject, responsible for the reproduction of further objects. It is essential therefore, from the very beginning of the process, that the following principle be clear: namely, that although the teachers or the students are not the same, the person in charge of education is being formed or re-formed as he/she teaches, and the person who is being taught forms him/herself in this process. In this sense teaching is not about transferring knowledge or contents. Nor is it an act whereby a creator-subject gives shape, style, or soul to an indecisive and complacent body. There is, in fact, no teaching without learning. One requires the other. And the subject of each, despite their obvious differences, cannot be educated to the status of object. Whoever teaches learns in the act of teaching, and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning.

From the grammatical point of view, the verb to teach is a “transitive-relative” verb, that is, a verb that requires a direct object (something) and an indirect object (to someone). In this sense, to teach is teaching something to someone. But to teach is much more than a transitive-relative verb. And this is clear not only from the context of democratic thought in which I place myself but also from an essentially metaphysical point of view in which my comprehension of the cognitive process is grounded. In other words, simply “to teach” is not possible in the context of human historical unfinishedness. Socially and historically, women and men discovered that it was the process of learning that makes (and makes) teaching possible. Learning in social contexts throughout the ages, people discovered that it was possible to develop ways, paths, and methods of teaching. To learn, then, logically precedes to teach. In other words, to teach is part of the very fabric of learning. This is true to such an extent that I do not hesitate to say that there is no valid teaching from which there does not emerge something learned and through which the learner does not become capable of recreating and remaking what has been thought. In essence, teaching that does not emerge from the experience of learning cannot be learned by anyone.

When we live our lives with the authenticity demanded by the practice of teaching that is also learning and learning that is also teaching, we are participating in a total experience that is simultaneously
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directive, political, ideological, gnostic, pedagogical, aesthetic, and ethical. In this experience the beautiful, the decent, and the serious form a circle with hands joined.

At times, in moments of silence when I seem to be lost, floating, almost disconnected, I reflect on the way that women and men are and have become “programmed for learning,” in the words of François Jacob. In other words, the process of learning, through which historically we have discovered that teaching is a task not only inherent to the learning process but is also characterized by it, can set off in the learner an ever-increasing creative curiosity. What I’m really saying is this: The more critically one exercises one’s capacity for learning, the greater is one’s capacity for constructing and developing what I call “epistemological curiosity,” without which it is not possible to obtain a complete grasp of the object of our knowledge.

This understanding of epistemological curiosity brings us, on the one hand, to a critique and a refusal of the “banking system” of education, and, on the other hand, to an understanding that, even when submitted to this system that is a deformation of the creativity of both learners and teachers, the learners are not necessarily fated to stagnate. Not because of the “teaching” they have received but because of the very process of learning itself, learners can circumvent and outmaneuver the authoritarianism and the epistemological error of this “banking system.”

What is essential is that learners, though subjected to the praxis of the “banking system,” maintain alive the flame of resistance that sharpens their curiosity and stimulates their capacity for risk, for adventure, so as to immunize themselves against the banking system. In this sense, the creative force of the learning process, which encompasses comparison, repetition, observation, indomitable doubt, and curiosity not easily satisfied, overcomes the negative effects of false teaching. This capacity to go beyond the factors of conditioning is one of the obvious advantages of the human person. Of course, this capacity does not mean that it is a matter of indifference to us whether we become a “banking system” educator or one whose role is essentially to “problematize,” to use the critical faculty.

Methodological Rigor

The educator with a democratic vision or posture cannot avoid in his teaching praxis insisting on the critical capacity, curiosity, and autonomy of the learner. One of the essential tasks of the teaching process is to introduce the learners to the methodological exactitude with which they should approach the learning process, through which the objects of learning are knowable. And this methodological exactitude has nothing to do with the discourse of the “banking system,” something that merely touches the surface of the object or its contents. It's exactly in this sense that to teach cannot be reduced to a superficial or externalized contact with the object or its content but extends to the production of the conditions in which critical learning is possible. These conditions imply and demand the presence of teaching and learning simultaneously in the context of a rigorous methodological curiosity anxious to explore the limits of creativity, persistent in the search, and courageously humble in the adventure. In these conditions, those who are engaged in critical learning know that their teachers are continuously in the process of acquiring new knowledge and that this new knowledge cannot simply be transferred to them, the learners. At the same time, in the context of true learning, the learners will be engaged in a continuous transformation through which they become authentic subjects of the construction and reconstruction of what is being taught, side by side with the teacher, who is equally subject to the same process. Only in this way can we speak authentically of knowledge that is taught, in which the taught is grasped in its very essence and, therefore, learned by those who are learning.
Thus it becomes clear that the role of the educator is one of a tranquil possession of certitude in regard to the teaching not only of contents but also of "correct thinking." Therefore, it becomes obvious that she/he will never develop a truly "critical" perspective as a teacher by indulging in mechanical memorization or the rhythmic repetition of phrases and ideas at the expense of creative challenge. Intellectuals who memorize everything, reading for hours on end, slaves to the text, fearful of taking a risk, speaking as if they were reciting from memory, fail to make any concrete connections between what they have read and what is happening in the world, the country, or the local community. They repeat what has been read with precision but rarely teach anything of personal value. They speak correctly about dialectical thought but think mechanistically. Such teachers inhabit an idealized world, a world of mere data, disconnected from the one most people inhabit.

It's not possible to read critically if one treats reading as if it were a similar operation to buying in bulk. What's the point of boasting of having read twenty books—twenty books! Really reading involves a kind of relationship with the text, which offers itself to me and to which I give myself and through the fundamental comprehension of which I undergo the process of becoming a subject. While reading, I'm not just a captive of the mind of the text as if it were simply a product of its author. This is a vitiated form of reading that has nothing to do with thinking or teaching correctly.

In fact, the person who thinks "correctly," even if at times she/he thinks wrongly, is the only one capable of teaching "correct" thinking. For one of the necessary requirements for correct thinking is a capacity for not being overly convinced of one's own certitudes. Taking into account the need for a rigorous ethical purity totally distinct from Puritanism (in other words, an ethical purity that generates beauty), correct thinking is in this sense irreconcilable with self-conceited arrogance.

The teacher who thinks "correctly" transmits to the students the beauty of our way of existing in the world as historical beings, capable of intervening in and knowing this world. Historical as we are, our knowledge of the world has historicity. It transmits, in addition, that our knowing and our knowledge are the fruit of historicity. And that knowledge, when newly produced, replaces what was new but is now old and ready to be surpassed by the coming of a new dawn. Therefore, it is as necessary to be immersed in existing knowledge as it is to be open and capable of producing something that does not yet exist. And these two moments of the epistemological process are accounted for in teaching, learning, and doing research. The one moment, in which knowledge that already exists is taught and learned, and the other, in which the production of what is not yet known is the object of research. Thus, the teaching-learning process, together with the work of research, is essential and an inseparable aspect of the gnostic cycle.

Research

Once again, there is no such thing as teaching without research and research without teaching. One inhabits the body of the other. As I teach, I continue to search and re-search. I teach because I search, because I question, and because I submit myself to questioning. I research because I notice things, take cognizance of them. And in so doing, I intervene. And intervening, I educate and educate myself. I do research so as to know what I do not yet know and to communicate and proclaim what I discover.

To think correctly, in critical terms, is a requirement imposed by the rhythms of the gnostic circle on our curiosity, which, as it becomes more methodologically rigorous, progresses from ingenuity to what I have called "epistemological curiosity." Ingenuous curiosity, from which there results, without doubt, a certain kind of knowledge
(even though not methodologically rigorous) is what characterizes "common sense" knowing. It is knowledge extracted from pure experience. To think correctly, from the teacher's point of view, implies respect for "common sense" knowing as it progresses from "common sense" to its higher stage. It also implies respect and stimulus for the creative capacity of the learner. It further implies a commitment on the part of educators and teachers that respects the critical consciousness of the learner, in the knowledge that the ingenuous consciousness of the learner will not be overcome automatically.

Respect for What Students Know

For this reason, thinking correctly puts the responsibility on the teacher, or, more correctly, on the school, not only to respect the kinds of knowledge that exist especially among the popular classes—knowledge socially constructed in communitarian praxis—but also (as I've been saying for thirty years) to discuss with the students the logic of these kinds of knowledge in relation to their contents.

Why not, for example, take advantage of the students' experience of life in those parts of the city neglected by the authorities to discuss the problems of pollution in the rivers and the question of poverty and the risks to health from the rubbish heaps in such areas? Why are there no rubbish heaps in the heart of the rich areas of the city? This question is considered "in bad taste." Pure demagogy. Almost subversive, say the defenders of democracy.

Why not discuss with the students the concrete reality of their lives and that aggressive reality in which violence is permanent and where people are much more familiar with death than with life? Why not establish an "intimate" connection between knowledge considered basic to any school curriculum and knowledge that is the fruit of the lived experience of these students as individuals? Why not discuss the implications, political and ideological, of the neglect of the poor areas of the city by the constituted authorities? Are there class-related ethical questions that need to be looked at here? A pragmatic reactionary educator would probably say that there is no connection between one thing and the other. That the school is not the Party. That the function of the school is to teach and transfer contents—packages—to the students, which, once learned, will operate automatically.

A Capacity to Be Critical

It is my conviction that the difference and the distance between ingenuity and critical thinking, between knowledge resulting from pure experience and that resulting from rigorous methodological procedure, do not constitute a rupture but a sort of further stage in the knowing process. This further stage, which is a continuity rather than a rupture, happens when ingenuous curiosity, while remaining curious, becomes capable of self-criticism. In criticizing itself, ingenuous curiosity becomes "epistemological curiosity," as through greater methodological exactitude it appropriates the object of its knowing.

In truth, ingenuous, "unarmed" curiosity, which is associated with common sense knowledge, is the same curiosity that, as it develops its critical possibilities through a more rigorous methodological approximation of the known object, becomes epistemological curiosity. It changes in quality but not in essence. The curiosity of simple rural people with whom I have been in dialogue throughout my politico-pedagogical career, whether fatalist or rebellious in the face of the violence of injustice, is the same curiosity, in the sense of a kind of awe or wonder in the presence of the "not I," common to scientists or philosophers as they contemplate the world. Scientists and philosophers, however, overcome the ingenuous curiosity of simple folk and become "epistemologically" curious.

Curiosity as restless questioning, as movement toward the revelation of something hidden, as a question verbalized or not, as search
for clarity, as a moment of attention, suggestion, and vigilance, constitutes an integral part of the phenomenon of being alive. There could be no creativity without the curiosity that moves us and sets us patiently impatient before a world that we did not make, to add to it something of our own making.

In fact, human curiosity, as a phenomenon present to all vital experience, is in a permanent process of social and historical construction and reconstruction. It's precisely because ingenious curiosity does not automatically become critical that one of the essential tasks of progressive educational praxis is the promotion of a curiosity that is critical, bold, and adventurous. A type of curiosity that can defend us from the excess of a rationality that now inundates our highly technologized world. Which does not mean that we are to adopt a false humanist posture of denying the value of technology and science. On the contrary, it's a posture of balance that neither deifies nor demonizes technology. A posture that is from those who consider technology from a critically curious standpoint.

Ethics and Aesthetics

Further, the necessary process from ingenuous to critical curiosity should also be accompanied by a rigorous ethical formation side by side with an aesthetic appreciation. Beauty and decency, hand in hand. I am more and more convinced that educational praxis, while avoiding the trap of puritanical moralism, cannot avoid the task of becoming a clear witness to decency and purity. That is, it cannot avoid the task of being a permanent critique of the easy solutions that tempt us away from the true path that we need to construct and follow. As men and women inserted in and formed by a socio-historical context of relations, we become capable of comparing, evaluating, intervening, deciding, taking new directions, and thereby constituting ourselves as ethical beings. It is in our becoming that we constitute our being so. Because the condition of becoming is the condition of being. In addition, it is not possible to imagine the human condition disconnected from the ethical condition. Because to be disconnected from it or to regard it as irrelevant constitutes for us women and men a transgression. For this reason, to transform the experience of educating into a matter of simple technique is to impoverish what is fundamentally human in this experience: namely, its capacity to form the human person. If we have any serious regard for what it means to be human, the teaching of contents cannot be separated from the moral formation of the learners. To educate is essentially to form. To deify or demonize technology or science is an extremely negative way of thinking incorrectly. To act in front of students as if the truth belongs only to the teacher is not only preposterous but also false. To think correctly demands profundity and not superficiality in the comprehension and interpretation of the facts. It presupposes an openness that allows for the revision of conclusions; it recognizes not only the possibility of making a new choice or a new evaluation but also the right to do so. However, since there can be no "right thinking" disconnected from ethical principles, it is also clear that the demands of "right thinking" require that the possibility or the right to change be not simply rhetorical. In other words, to claim the right to change requires a coherence that makes a difference. There is no point in making such a claim and continuing as if nothing had changed.

Words Incarnated in Example

The teacher who really teaches, that is, who really works with contents within the context of methodological exactitude, will deny as false the hypocritical formula, "do as I say, not as I do." Whoever is engaged in "right thinking" knows only too well that words not given body (made flesh) have little or no value. Right thinking is right doing.
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What are serious students to think of a teacher who for two semesters spoke passionately about the necessity for popular movements to struggle for their autonomy and who today, denying that he has changed, indulges in pragmatic attacks against these same popular classes, attributing little or no value to their utopias, and who himself fully engaged in transferring his own knowledge to his students à la banking system. What can be said of the teacher who until recently, as a member of a leftist party, defended the necessity of education for the working classes and who now, resigned fatalistically to neoliberal pragmatism, is satisfied with the simple professional training of the unemployed, while considering that he is still “progressive” pedagogically and politically?

There is no right thinking that can be separated from a kind of coherent, lived practice that is capable of reformulating contents and paradigms instead of simply negating what is no longer regarded as relevant. It is absurd for teachers to imagine that they are engaged in right thinking and at the same time to relate to the student in a patronizing way.

The attitude, which is a way of being and not just an occasional phase, of the teacher engaged in right thinking demands a seriousness in the search for secure and solid bases for his/her positions. A teacher with such an attitude, while capable of disagreeing with an opponent, does not harbor rancor against that person in such a way that the rancor assumes proportions greater than the reasons for the original disagreement. Once, one such rancorous person forbade a student who was doing a dissertation on literacy and citizenship from reading any of my works. “He is old hat,” was the rigorously “neutral” way that he dismissed the “object” that was myself. “If you read his work you will end up the worse for it,” was his concluding remark to the student. That is no way to be engaged in right thinking and at the same time to relate to the student in a patronizing way.

Integral to right thinking is a generous heart, one that, while not denying the right to anger, can distinguish it from cynicism or unbalanced fury.

Proper to right thinking is a willingness to risk, to welcome the new, which cannot be rejected simply because it is new no more than the old can be rejected because chronologically it is no longer new. The old is capable of remaining new when it remains faithful through time to the experience of original and founding intuitions and inspirations.

It is equally part of right thinking to reject decidedly any and every form of discrimination. Preconceptions of race, class, or sex offend the essence of human dignity and constitute a radical negation of democracy. How far from these values we are when we tolerate the impunity of those who kill a street child; those who murder peasants who struggle for a minimum of justice; those who discriminate on the basis of color, burning churches where blacks pray because prayer is only white; those who treat women as inferior beings; and so on. I feel more pity than rage at the absurd arrogance of this kind of white supremacy, passing itself off to the world as democracy. In fact, this form of thinking and doing is far removed from the humility demanded by “right” thinking. Nor has it anything to do with the good sense that keeps our exaggerations in check and helps us avoid falling into the ridiculous and the senseless.

There are times when I fear that someone reading this, even if not yet totally converted to neoliberal pragmatism but perhaps somewhat contaminated by it, may think that there is no more place among us for the dreamer and the believer in Utopia. Yet what I have been saying up to now is not the stuff of inconsequential dreamers. It has to do with the very nature of men and women as makers and dreamers of history and not simply as casualties of an a priori vision of the world.

Given my understanding of human nature, I have no option but
to defend the position I have been defending all along. It's a demand about right thinking that I make on myself as I write this text. The demand, that is, that right thinking belongs intimately to right doing. In this sense, to teach right thinking is not something that is simply spoken of or an experience that is merely described. But something that is done and lived while it is being spoken of, as if the doing and living of it constituted a kind of irrefutable witness of its truth. To think correctly implies the existence of subjects whose thinking is mediated by objects that provoke and modify the thinking subject. Thinking correctly is, in other words, not an isolated act or something to draw near in isolation but an act of communication. For this reason, there is no right thinking without understanding, and this understanding, from a correct way of thinking point of view, is not something transferred but something that belongs essentially to the process of coparticipation. If, from the grammatical point of view, the verb to understand is "transitive," in relation to a correct way of thinking it is also a verb whose subject is always a coparticipant with the other. All understanding, if it is not mechanistically treated, that is, submitted to the alienating care that threatens the mind and that I have been designating as a "bureaucratized" mind, necessarily implies communicability. There is no knowing (that is, connecting one thing to another) something that is not at the same time a "communication" of the something known (unless, of course, the process of knowing has broken down). The act of a correct way of thinking does not "transfer," "deposit," "offer," or "donate" to the other as if the receiver were a passive object of facts, concepts, and intelligibility. To be coherent, the educator who thinks correctly, exercising as a human subject the incontestable practice of comprehension, challenges the learner with whom and to whom she/he communicates to produce her or his understanding of what is being communicated. There is no intelligibility that is not at the same time communication and intercommunication, and that is not grounded in dialogue.

For this reason, a correct way of thinking is dialogical and not polemical.

Critical Reflection on Practice

A correct way of thinking knows, for example, that the practice of critical teaching is not built as if thinking correctly were a mere given. However, it knows that without a correct way of thinking, there can be no critical practice. In other words, the practice of critical teaching, implicit in a correct way of thinking, involves a dynamic and dialectical movement between "doing" and "reflecting on doing." The knowledge produced by spontaneous or almost spontaneous teaching practice is ingenuous in the sense that it lacks the methodological rigor that characterizes the epistemological curiosity of a reflecting subject. Such knowledge is not what disciplined, correct thinking seeks. For this reason it is essential that during the experience of teaching preparation, the prospective teacher must realize that a correct way of thinking is not a gift from heaven, nor is it to be found in teachers' guide books, put there by illuminated intellectuals who occupy the center of power. On the contrary, a correct way of thinking that goes beyond the ingenuous must be produced by the learners in communion with the teacher responsible for their education. At the same time, it is necessary to insist that the matrix both of ingenuous and critical thinking is the same curiosity that characterizes all human vitality. In this sense, the untrained teachers in rural areas around Pernambuco, Brazil, or in any of the world's "remote" places, are as curious as the professor of philosophy of education in any university. All that is necessary is that, through reflection on a given practice, ingenuous curiosity perceive itself as such so as to advance to the critical stage.

For this reason, in the process of the ongoing education of teachers, the essential moment is that of critical reflection on one's practice.
Thinking critically about practice, of today or yesterday, makes possible the improvement of tomorrow's practice. Even theoretical discourse itself, necessary as it is to critical reflection, must be concrete enough to be clearly identifiable with practice. Its epistemological "distance" from practice as an object of analysis ought to be compensated for by an even greater proximity to the object of analysis, in terms of lived experience. The better this process is accomplished, the greater is the gain in intelligence and the greater the possibility of communicability in overcoming an ingenuous attitude toward knowledge. In addition, the more I acknowledge my own process and attitudes and perceive the reasons behind these, the more I am capable of changing and advancing from the stage of ingenuous curiosity to epistemological curiosity. It's really not possible for someone to imagine himself/herself as a subject in the process of becoming without having at the same time a disposition for change. And change of which she/he is not merely the victim but the subject.

It is an idealistic exaggeration, for example, to imagine that the objective threat that smoking poses to anyone's health and to my life is enough to make me stop smoking. Of course, the objective threat is contextually essential if I am to take any steps at all. But such a threat will only become a "subjective" decision to the degree that it generates new options that can provoke a break with past habits and an acceptance of new commitments: When I assume consciously the danger represented by smoking, I am then moved to reflect on its consequences and to engage in a decision-making process, leading to a break, an option, which becomes concretized, materially speaking, in the practice of "not smoking," a practice grounded on the risk to health and life implicit in smoking.

There is another fundamental element here too: the emotional one. In other words, in addition to the knowledge I have of the harm smoking does to me, I now have, through the consciousness I have acquired of this harm, a sense of legitimate anger. In addition, I have a sense of joy that I was able to be angry because it means that I can continue to live a while longer in the world. The kind of education that does not recognize the right to express appropriate anger against injustice, against disloyalty, against the negation of love, against exploitation, and against violence fails to see the educational role implicit in the expression of these feelings. One thinks of Christ's anger against the merchants in the temple. Of those who struggle for agrarian reform against the enemies of agrarian reform. Of the victims of violence and of discrimination based on class, race, and sex. Of those whose victimization cannot be vindicated because of the perpetrator's impunity. Of those who go hungry against those who not only eat well but also waste food, as if life belonged to them alone. However, it's important to stress the "appropriateness" of this anger; otherwise it simply degenerates into rage and even hatred.

Cultural Identity

It's interesting to take a close look at the verb "to assume," which is a transitive verb and can have as its object the person who assumes his or herself. For example, I can assume the risk inherent in smoking just as much as I can assume myself (what I am) as the subject and object of that assumption. When I say that in order to stop smoking it is essential that I assume that smoking constitutes a risk to my life, what I am really saying is that I have acquired a complete and clear picture of what smoking is and what its consequences are. A more radical sense of "to assume" is when I say: One of the most important tasks of critical educational practice is to make possible the conditions in which the learners, in their interaction with one another and with their teachers, engage in the experience of assuming themselves as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons; dreamers of possible utopias, capable of being angry because of a capacity to love. Capable of assuming themselves as
"subject" because of the capacity to recognize themselves as "object." All this, while bearing in mind that the assumption of oneself does not signify the exclusion of others. Because it is the otherness of the "not I" or the "you" that makes me assume the radicality of the "I." There's another question that cannot be overlooked either, namely, the question of cultural identity in relation to both individuals and classes among the learners and for which (in the context of forward-looking educational practice) respect is absolutely fundamental. It is connected directly to the challenge of assuming who we are, which is what a purely technical, objective, and grammatical vision of education cannot do or be.

The historical, political, social, and cultural experience of men and women can never be acquired outside of the conflict between those forces that are dedicated to the prevention of self-assumption on the part of individuals and groups and those forces that work in favor of such an assumption. Teaching preparation that considers itself to be above such "intrigues" does nothing less than work in favor of the obstacles to self-assumption. The socio-political solidarity that we need today to build a less ugly and less intolerant human community where we can be really what we are cannot neglect the importance of democratic practice. Purely pragmatic training, with its implicit or openly expressed elitist authoritarianism, is incompatible with the learning and practice of becoming a "subject."

Sometimes a simple, almost insignificant gesture on the part of a teacher can have a profound formative effect on the life of a student. I will always remember one such gesture in my life when I was an adolescent. A gesture that marks me profoundly but whose significance on my life was almost certainly not noticed or known by my teacher. At that time I experienced myself as an insecure adolescent, not at home with a body perceived as more bone than beauty, feeling myself to be less capable than the other students, insecure about my own creative possibilities, easily riled, and not very much at peace with the world. The slightest gesture by any of the better-off students in the class was capable of highlighting my insecurity and my fragility.

On this occasion our teacher had brought our homework to school after correcting it and was calling us one by one to comment on it. When my turn came, I noticed he was looking over my text with great attention, nodding his head in an attitude of respect and consideration. His respectful and appreciative attitude had a much greater effect on me than the high classification that he gave me for my work. The gesture of the teacher affirmed in me a self-confidence that obviously still had much room to grow. But it inspired in me a belief that I too had value and could work and produce results—results that clearly had their limits but that were a demonstration of my capacity, which up until that moment I would have been inclined to hide or not fully believe in. And the greatest proof of the importance of that gesture is that I can speak of it now as if it had happened only today.

The importance of the kind of knowledge transmitted by gestures such as these, which are part and parcel of daily school life, needs serious reflection. It's a pity that the socializing character of the school, with its multiple possibilities for formation or deformation, especially in the context of the ordinary informality of the day to day, is so much neglected. What we mostly hear about is the teaching of contents, understood almost always, unfortunately, as the transference of knowledge. One of the reasons, in my view, for this negligence is a too narrow understanding of what education and learning are. Really, it has not yet dawned on us that education is something that women and men discovered experimentally, in the course of history. If it were clear to us that our capacity to teach arose from our capacity to learn, we would easily have understood the importance of informal experiences in the street, in the square, in the work place, in the classroom, in the playground, among the school staff of both.
teachers and administrative personnel. There is strong "witness" potential in all of these informal situations, but it is, practically speaking, unexplored territory. In "Education in the City," I drew attention to this fact when I discovered the calamitous state of the education system that Lula Erundina encountered when she took up office in 1989 as mayor of São Paulo, Brazil. On my first visits to the city schools, I saw the calamity with my own eyes and I was terrified. The whole system was a disaster, from the state of the buildings and the classrooms to the quality of the teaching. How was it possible to ask of the children the minimum of respect for their material surroundings when the authorities demonstrated such absolute neglect of and indifference to the public institutions under their care? It's really unbelievable that we are unable to include all these elements in our "rhetoric" about education. Why does such "rhetoric" not include hygiene, cleanliness, beauty? Why does it neglect the indisputable pedagogical value of the "materiality" of the school environment?

Yet, it is such detail in the daily life both of teacher and student, to which so little attention is given, that in fact possesses significant weight in the evaluation of teaching practice. What is important in teaching is not the mechanical repetition of this or that gesture but a comprehension of the value of sentiments, emotions, and desires. Of the insecurity that can only be overcome by inspiring confidence. Of the fear that can only be abated to the degree that courage takes its place.

There is no true teaching preparation possible separated from a critical attitude that spurs ingenuous curiosity to become epistemological curiosity, together with a recognition of the value of emotions, sensibility, affectivity, and intuition. To know is not simply to intuit or to have a hunch, though there is an intimate connection between them. We must build on our intuitions and submit them to methodical and rigorous analysis so that our curiosity becomes epistemological.¹⁰