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Myles Horton and Paulo Freire

We Make the Road by Walking

Conversations on Education and Social Change

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CHAPTER 4

Educational Practice

"The more the people become themselves, the better the democracy"

PAULO: Education always implies program, content, method, objectives and so on, as I said yesterday. For me it has always been a political question, not exclusively an educational question, at what levels students take part in the process of organizing the curriculum. I know that this question has to have different answers according to different places and times. The more people participate in the process of their own education, the more the people participate in the process of defining what kind of production to produce, and for what and why, the more the people participate in the development of their selves. The more the people become themselves, the better the democracy. The less people are asked

about what they want, about their expectations, the less democracy we have.

MYLES: I use questions more than I do anything else. They don't think of a question as intervening because they don't realize that the reason you asked that question is because you know something. What you know is the body of the material that you're trying to get people to consider, but instead of giving a lecture on it, you ask a question enlightened by that. Instead of you getting on a pinnacle you put them on a pinnacle. I think there's a lot of confusion in the minds of academicians as to what you mean when you say you have to intervene.

PAULO: Yeah, it's very good that you said this because I use intervention exactly in the way you use it.

MYLES: Yes, I know you do, but you'd better try to explain it a little better, because other people will misunderstand you.

THIRD PARTY: Myles, in those early days, how did you see your role? How did you evolve your technique of intervention? What did you do?

MYLES: Well, I take the same position as Paulo, that you have the responsibility, if you have some knowledge or some insight, to share that with people. If you have a conviction, you have a responsibility to act on that conviction where you can, and if you're doing education, you act on it in an educational context.

I reacted to the way I was educated, which I thought was miseducation. I thought there ought to be a better way. I've always resented being put down by teachers showing their knowledge and presuming that I didn't have any. The truth about the matter was that I was

in situations like this when I was in school in Brazil [Tenn.], where I knew more than the teacher, and I knew I knew more than the teacher. I started experimenting with ways to get my ideas across without putting people down, with trying to get them to think and analyze their own experiences. So I rediscovered what's long been known, that one of the best ways to educate is to ask questions. Nothing new about that. It's just not widely practiced in academic life. I guess the academicians give you a lecture on it, but they couldn't practice it. So I just found that if I know something well enough, then I can find a way in the discussion that's going on to inject that question at the right time, to get people to consider it. If they want to follow it up, then you ask more questions, growing out of that situation. You can get all your ideas across just by asking questions and at the same time you help people to grow and not form a dependency on you. To me it's just a more successful way of getting ideas across.

THIRD PARTY: Then it becomes their idea.

MYLES: It becomes theirs because they're the ones who come to that idea, not because I said it or because of some authority; it just makes sense. It makes sense because it's related to the process and the thinking they're going through.

THIRD PARTY: It's kind of subversive isn't it?

MYLES: Well yes, I guess, if you say being subversive is that you try to get your ideas across. I've never hesitated to tell anybody what I believe about anything if they ask me. I see no reason to tell them before they get ready to listen to it, and when they ask a question, then they're

ready to listen to it. I just don't see any point in wasting your energy trying to force something on people. We have a saying here. You probably have similar sayings in your culture in Brazil. We say you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink.

PAULO: Yes.

MYLES: This is a problem they deal with in academia by hitting the horse over the head and beating on him till they force his nose in the tub, and just to keep the blows from continuing, he'll try to drink. My system is to make him thirsty, so he'll volunteer to drink.

PAULO: Yes.

THIRD PARTY: But, Myles, did it take you some practice to get to the point so you always knew how to handle those questions?

MYLES: Oh, did it!

THIRD PARTY: Let's talk about that a little bit.

MYLES: See, when I tell something like this, you think I'm saying I was born with a gray beard, like I was born like I am now.

THIRD PARTY: It is confusing because you also said you didn't believe in experimenting on people.

MYLES: Not *on* people but with people. You experiment with people not on people. There's a big difference. They're in on the experiment. They're in on the process. At what point do you get good at something? I had a reputation for being good at leading discussions, but I didn't have that reputation in the first years of the school, when we were trying to figure out how to use our academic knowledge on people.

For example, we always had the practice at High-

lander, back when I was director, of having the staff acquainted with the area in which we were working. There were two ways. We would respond to a student's request for help or we'd just roam around the region to find out what was going on. We needed to know what was happening in the economic, social, and cultural realm where we were working, but we didn't come in and make a lecture on it or write a book about it. We used this knowledge to have insights out of which we asked questions and led discussions. So you had to be knowledgeable; you had to know your subject. You had to know more than the people that you were teaching or you wouldn't have anything to contribute. You didn't have to know more about where they were in their development. They knew more about that than you did. You didn't have to know more about their experiences. They were the world's authority on their own experience and you need to value that, appreciate that.

Highlander has a videotape of a workshop in which Mike Clark, the director at that time, asks one question, and that one question turned that workshop around and completely moved it in a different direction. Well, that was one short question, but Mike had years of experience in the region, out of which he asked that question. Now that's what I mean by using your content. Use your familiarity with your subject, but use it as a basis. First it's a matter of conviction that that's the way you should deal with people, that you should respect them and let them develop their own thinking without you trying to think for them. But how do you do that? You have to practice till you find out you know how to do

it, and then it's like anything else. Like a musician just learning, sit down at the piano and start playing. You just start doing it. It's natural. You don't have to give it a great deal of thought. You just intuitively say, "Well, what can I do here?" And it kind of comes out, but that's practice. That's practice.

PAULO: Concerning this question of not respecting the knowledge, the common sense of the people. Last week I was in Recife leading a seminar for a group of educators, and we were discussing precisely this question of respecting knowledge of the people. A teacher told us a very interesting story. She said that academic learning, the fact of being an academic, is not bad. It's just what *kind* of academic. A student went to a fishing area to do some research, and he met a fisherman who was coming back from fishing. The academic asked, "Do you know who is the president of the country?" The fisherman said, "No, I don't know." "Do you know the name of the governor of the state?" He said, "I'm afraid that I don't know." And then the academic, losing patience, said, "But at least you know the name of the local authority." The fisherman said, "No I also don't know, but taking advantage of asking these questions about names of people, I would like to ask you: Do you know the name of this fish?" And the academic said no. "But, that one you know, don't you?" The academic said no. "But this third one, you have to know," and the academic said, "No, I also don't know." The fisherman said, "Do you see? Each one with his ignorance."

MYLES: There's a mountain story, same plot but different story, of a traveling salesman here in the mountains. He

got lost and he didn't know which way to go. He found a little boy beside the road, and he said, "Hey there son, do you know the way to Knoxville?" The boy said, "No, sir." And he said, "Do you know the way to Gatlinburg?" "No, sir." Well, he said, "Do you know the way to Sevierville?" The boy said, "No, sir." And he said, "Boy, you don't know much, do you?" "No, sir, but I ain't lost!"

THIRD PARTY: It seems to me that you keep coming back in the conversations again and again to this point of the delicate relationship between teaching, giving knowledge, and learning knowledge. Paulo talks about going *beyond* the knowledge that the people bring. Now I suspect that you do that too. Paulo articulates going beyond the knowledge of the people, and Myles articulates beginning with the knowledge of the people, so somewhere in between there there's a practice that both of you have.

MYLES: I have a personal philosophy of what I think the world should be like, what life should be like. Now as I said yesterday I have no rights that shouldn't be made universal, and if I can understand this has any validity and authenticity, then other people can understand it. I start with that premise, so now the question is how you expose people, move people on to where they'll take a look at this. That's the whole purpose of what I perceive Highlander to be. You stay within the experience of the people, and the experience is growing right there, in what I call a circle of learners, in a workshop situation. They're growing because they've learned from their peers. They've learned not what they knew but knew they didn't know. They learned something from

the questions you've raised. You've got them to thinking, so right there before your eyes their experience is changing. You're not talking about the experience they brought with them. You're talking about the experience that is given them in the workshop, and in a few days time that experience can expand termendously. But if you break the connection between the starting point, their experience, and what they know themselves, if you get to the place where what they know can't help them understand what you're talking about, then you lose them. Then you reach the outside limits of the possibility of having any relationship to those people's learning. So you have to be very careful in analyzing a group to know that they're ready to talk about ancient Greece, if that throws light on the subject, or if they're ready to talk about what's happening in Patalonia or Brazil, what's happened in the Soviet Union. Information that brings those things out may be a movie or may be a discussion, because it's still part of their experience. Their experience is not only what they came with. If it only stays there, there's no use to start.

Now my experience has been that if you do this thing right, carefully, and don't get beyond participants at any one step, you can move very fast to expand their experience very wide in a very short time. But you have to always remember, if you break that connection, it's no longer available to their experience, then they don't understand it, and it won't be useful to them. Then it becomes listening to the expert tell them what to do, and they'll go back home and try to do it without under-

standing it or even thinking they need to understand it, you see. That's no good.

I never feel limited by this process at all. I feel liberated by it. I feel I can raise questions that are much more far-reaching and much more in-depth and much more radical, much more revolutionary, this way than I could if I was talking to them and trying to explain things to them. I use it as a way to get in more, not less. I don't feel like I'm riding roughshod over people by trying to get them to share my ideas. I don't have any guilt problems about this at all. I think it's my responsibility to share what I believe in, not only in discussions but in the way I live and in the way the workshops run and in the way Highlander's run, the way life is.

Rosa Parks talks about her experience at Highlander, and she doesn't say a thing about anything *factually* that she learned. She doesn't say a thing about any subject that was discussed. She doesn't say a thing about integration. She says the reason Highlander meant something to her and emboldened her to act as she did was that at Highlander she found *respect* as a black person and found white people she could *trust*. So you speak not just by words and discussion but you speak by the way your programs are run. If you believe in something, then you have to practice it. People used to come to Highlander when there were very few places, if any, in the South where social equality was accepted. We shared it by doing it and not by talking about it. We didn't have to make a speech about it. We didn't even have to ask questions about it. We did it. So, it's all tied

together, doing everything you can to share your ideas. There's no such thing as just being a coordinator or facilitator, as if you don't know anything. What the hell are you around for, if you don't know anything. Just get out of the way and let somebody have the space that knows something, believes something.

THIRD PARTY: Are there specific examples in particular of that delicate balance between *bringing out* the knowledge of the people and *going beyond* their knowledge, as Paulo puts it, and how this is reflected in practice? Theoretically, that is something that people understand, but in day-to-day practice, it's very often hard to really come to terms with and to know exactly how to do it.

MYLES: It's quite obvious that you can't transfer an institution, like it was obvious to me that you couldn't take a Danish folk school and plunk it down in the mountains of east Tennessee any more than you could take a Danish beech tree and cut it off at the top of the ground and stand it up on the ground in the United States and have it grow. When you get down to this transferring level, helping somebody jump from one understanding to another, then it gets rather ticklish as to what the difference is between helping people grow in understanding and unfolding what's already there. There comes a point when you've got to ask if this idea really fits. Will this idea aid this process of growth? This is a problem that has always bothered me, exactly how far you could go in stretching people's experience without breaking the thread. In radical education, people who claim to

be Freirians to my mind make a lot of mistakes, making assumptions about people's experience and knowledge.

PAULO: I think that this is one of the main points of which radical educators have to be aware. If someone is an educator, it means then that this person is involved with a process or some kind of action with others who are named the students. This educator can be working, for example, inside of the school and he or she has systematized practice. He or she has a certain curriculum to follow, and he or she teaches a particular content to the students. It is the same for an educator who works out of the school, out of the subsystem of education. For example, an educator at Highlander does not have necessarily a curriculum, in the broader meaning of this. The Highlander educator does not have necessarily a list of subjects to talk about, to explain to students. Nevertheless, there is something that for me is impossible, and that is the absence of some content about which they speak. What must be the central difference is that in Highlander's experience, the contents come up from analysis, from the thinking of those who are involved in the process of education—that is, not exclusively from the educator who chooses what he or she thinks to be the best, for the students, but also those who come to participate. It is as if they were suddenly in a circle, like this house,* getting some distance from their

* The central meeting room at Highlander is circular in shape. Rocking chairs, a fireplace, and a spectacular view of the Smoky Mountains provide a comfortable atmosphere for workshops.

experience in order to understand the reasons why they are having this kind of experience. It means that also in this setting, the educator, even though he or she is different from a public-school educator, does not transfer knowledge to the group of people who come here. As far as I understand Myles's thinking and practice, with his team here, I see that in all the fundamental moments of Highlander's history—in the thirties, in the fifties, in the sixties, in the seventies, in every moment—the educators here have been educators but have accepted *to be educated* too. That is, they understood, even though they did not read Marx, what Marx meant when he said that "the educator himself must be educated."

MYLES: Yes. Bernice Robinson, the first Citizenship School teacher, says that the most important thing she did was to say the first time the people got together: "Now I'm *not* a school teacher. I'm here to learn with you." Now she didn't get that from Marx. She got that as a black woman from her experience.

PAULO: But what is fantastic, Myles, in the history of this experience is that in learning with those who come here, you also taught them, that it should be possible for educators just to learn with the students. Both are engaged in the process in which both grew up. Educators have some systematic knowledge that the students necessarily don't have yet. . . . And now I think that I am coming near the question.

THIRD PARTY: Sneaking up on it.

PAULO: Yes, this is my way of working, of thinking. First I try to make a circle so the issue can't escape.

When the students come, of course, they bring with

them, inside of them, in their bodies, in their lives, they bring their hopes, despair, expectations, knowledge, which they got by living, by fighting, by becoming frustrated. Undoubtedly they don't come here empty. They arrive here full of things. In most of the cases, they bring with them opinions about the world, about life. They bring with them their knowledge at the level of common sense, and they have the right to go beyond this level of knowledge. At the same time—I want to be very clear, in order to avoid being understood as falling into a certain scientificism—there are levels of knowledge about the facts they already know, which unveil other ways of knowing, which can give us much more exact knowledge about the facts. This is a right that the people have, and I call it the right to know better what they already know. Knowing better means precisely going beyond the *common sense* in order to begin to discover the *reason* for the facts.

Right now I can tell a small story. One month ago I was talking at home with one of my friends, one of the directors of the working class institute I spoke about earlier. At the end of a course about workers' lives, a young man said, "When I came here I was sure that I already knew many many things about these issues, but I was not as clear about the *reasons* for them as I am now." What this young worker meant is precisely the central question you asked. That is, how, starting from where people are, to go with them beyond these levels of knowledge without just *transferring* the knowledge. The question is not to come to the classroom and to make beautiful speeches analyzing, for example, the

political authority of the country, but the question is how to take advantage of the reading of reality, which the people are doing, in order to make it possible for students to make a different and much *deeper* reading of reality.

The question is not to impose readings on students, no matter that they are university students, but how to put together critically, dialectically, the reading of the texts in relationship to the contexts, and the understanding of the contexts that can be helped through the reading of texts. This also is the question, how to make this walk with people starting from more or less naive understanding of reality. Starting from people's experiences, and not from *our* understanding of the world, does not mean that we don't want the people to come with us in order to go beyond us afterward. This movement for me is one of the many important roles of a progressive educator, and it is not always so easy.

I think that we have to create in ourselves, through critical analysis of our practice, some qualities, some virtues as educators. One of them, for example, is the quality of becoming more and more open to feel the feelings of others, to become so sensitive that we can guess what the group or one person is thinking at that moment. These things cannot be taught as content. These things have to be learned through the example of the good teacher.

MYLES: This is a problem, how we can have a body of knowledge and understanding and resist the temptation to misread the interest of the people because we're look-

ing for an opportunity to unload this great load of gold that we have stored up.

PAULO: Not to do that, Myles, is one of the other virtues.

MYLES: Now that blinds us sometimes, it seems to me, from observing the action of the people, the nonverbal language, because we are thinking verbally, and we're only looking for verbal reactions and we don't read anything else.

PAULO: The bodies.

MYLES: We don't want to see that because it wouldn't encourage us to agree that they are with us. Now that's a real problem that I have to struggle with. I've observed that I have two roles, one as a what you might call an educator in relation to the situation and one as a person who has subjective experience I'd like to share with people, knowledge that I've picked up one way or another. I've got to keep those two things separate, but in my enthusiasm, sometimes I mix the two.

One of the things I've found is that if any one of a group of people with similar problems asks a question, then there's a good chance that the question will reflect some of the thinking of the peers. Even if it doesn't, everybody in that circle is going to listen to the answer to that question, because one of their peers asked it. They can identify with the questioner. It's a *clue* that there's some interest there. Short of questions, I have found that I'm secure in a discussion when people actually say what they perceive a situation to be. Then I know where I am. But there's always gradations, from the certainty up to the guessing, the temptation to guess

in favor of your subjectivity, *your* experience instead of *their* experience. How do you deal with that?

PAULO: Yes. There is another obstacle for such an attitude vis-à-vis the object of knowledge and vis-à-vis the students as cognitive subjects, which is the dominant ideology introjected by the students no matter whether they are workers or students of the university. That is, they come absolutely convinced that the teacher has to *give* a class to them.

MYLES: They have the answers.

PAULO: Do you see? They come just to receive answers for any questions they asked before. As you said, this is an obstacle—how to confront a group of students who, in perceiving that you are interested in knowing what they know, think that you are not capable. Is it clear that the students . . .

MYLES: . . . View you as an authority figure.

PAULO: Yes. They expect you to give the first class in an old style, and you say no, I would like first of all to talk a little bit about the very content we should study this semester. And then one of the students can say to himself or herself, this professor is not capable, above all if the professor is a young person. Several graduate students in São Paulo told me how they were obliged to start immediately, giving a list of books and speaking a lot, because the students felt insecure. I think that in such a case, the teacher, understanding the situation, should be 50 percent a traditional teacher and 50 percent a democratic teacher in order to begin to challenge the students, and for them to change a little bit too.

With regard to popular groups, I think if they did

not have too much experience in the school system, the situation is a little bit different. Of course they can be frightened because they think that the educator is a so-called intellectual and they don't see themselves also as intellectuals. They cannot understand that. They think that they don't have culture because the cultured man or woman has first to come to university. Then it's necessary to exercise this discipline you talked about, the discipline of controlling a second intellectual taste that we intellectuals always have, which is speaking about what we think that we know. In the works by Amilcar Cabral there is something very interesting that sometimes shows up very clearly, which is the dialecticity between patience and impatience. Based on Amilcar I always say that, in effect, we should work "impatiently patient." There is a moment when we can go a little farther and say something, and there is a moment in which we should listen more to the people.

MYLES: Yes. Sometimes I think of it in terms of a figure. You try to stretch people's minds and their understanding, but if you move too fast then you break the connection. You go off and leave them, and so they aren't being stretched in their thinking. In popular education, my experience is that working and poor people all come with an expectation. Since they've been told they can learn something, and what they're to learn is the answers to their problems, they expect an expert with answers. Even if they haven't been in school in a long time, they're socialized by society to look for an expert. So I start out by acknowledging that that's why they've come. Then I say, you know you have a lot of prob-

lems. And I just use that as a jumping off place, so to speak, to ask them to talk about their experience. Let's see what's in your experience and not in the experience of experts.

You set the stage for doing something that they're uncomfortable with. You know they're uncomfortable with it, and you have to work through that business of getting them to be comfortable with trusting themselves a little bit, trusting their peers a little bit. They hear Mary say something and Susie says well, if they listen to Mary, maybe they'll listen to me. It's a slow process, but once the people get comfortable with it, then they begin to see that you aren't going to play the role of an expert, except in the sense that you are the expert in *how* they're going to learn, not in *what* they're going to learn. It's a slow and tedious process but it seems to work.

Now I'll admit at times in situations I've had to do what you said, Paulo, do part of the old and part of the new. I remember one time here in Tennessee, I was trying to help a group of farmers get organized into a cooperative, and they announced that I was coming to speak at this country schoolhouse. Well, I knew their expectation was that I would speak as an expert. I knew if I didn't speak, and said "let's have a discussion about this," they'd say that guy doesn't know anything. So I said, what I have to do is make a speech because I don't want to lose the interest they've built up, and I can't change them instantaneously. So I made a speech, the best speech I could. Then after it was over, while we were still there, I said, let's discuss this speech. Let's dis-

cuss what I have said. Well now, that was just one step removed, but close enough to their expectation that I was able to carry them along. So the discussion ended without resolving a lot of problems that I had raised. They were analyzing what I had said. I couldn't get them to talk about their *own* experiences because they were still looking to the experts. Before I left I said, now it'd be good if we could talk about *your* experience. We've talked about my experience, now let's talk about yours. Could we come back next week? And you will be the speakers. In this way I was able to get started with them. I never had to make another speech. You do have to make concessions like that.

"Highlander is a weaving of many colors"

THIRD PARTY: Myles, I'd like some more examples of what Paulo's talking about in terms of the practice with popular education. I know with the labor schools, for instance, at Highlander that you would do classes on parliamentary procedure and how to put out a newsletter and very specific things that I know grew out of requests. With the civil rights movement, it was different. Would you talk about how you got to those two different places. Or maybe they're not different places at all. How did you determine what to do in working with the labor movement? And then how was it different with the civil rights movement, if it was.

MYLES: No, the labor period was the first experience we'd actually had in a structured sort of program. We had to start with what they perceived their problems to be. Our

job was to develop local leadership for the new industrial unions and to help the new local union officers understand better how to function. That was what they wanted. Now what we wanted in addition to that was to help them understand that they should work with a larger community. They should work with farmers, they should deal with integration, they should be part of the world. We had our own agenda.

Now in form we tried as far as possible to do it the way they would expect us to do, because it was relevant to solving their problems. In the way Highlander was run, we would do what we thought was important. Two things just right off hand: One was that Highlander's integrated, so we didn't have to talk about that problem, we did it. And two, we based our whole thinking on the premise that people learn what they do. Not what they talk about but what they do. And so we made our speech about social equality without saying anything, but by *doing* it.

We also believed that they had to be good officials of the unions and that a lot of them would be organizers. They had to learn to think, make decisions—not learn gimmicks, not learn techniques, but learn how to *think*. So in an effort to help them understand the importance of learning how to think, we had them, with no strings attached, in full control of the week or two weeks they were there. They made every decision about everything: classes, teachers, visitors, subject matter. They resisted that with everything they had because they had never had an opportunity to make decisions in a "school," and they thought that was our responsi-

bility. Now I dealt with that by having each group, at the end of the session, say here is what we have learned here, and here is what we propose the *next* group do. We think we can share our learning with them and this is what we proposed that they do. That was done every session. When a new group came, I would say, this is what the last group proposed you do. Now since you haven't had any experience in making decisions about these things, it's all new to you. The first day let's start by doing what people like you thought would be good. After the first day, in the evening, we will organize for the week or two weeks. We'll set up committees—because we try to get them used to using committees in unions—on public relations, on discipline, on subject matter, on visiting speakers, on relations with the community, on running a co-op, because we were trying to get them to understand the economic element in addition to unions. So we turned it all over to them, and they were in complete control. I mean they *exercised* that control. The program was recognizable to them in terms of what they had been told and it was similar enough to schooling that it didn't seem too unfamiliar. You've gotta have a structure that participants can feel comfortable with until they begin to have something to deviate from or add to. Now what they really do would not change things very much from session to session. The schedule was made by people like themselves, and they recognized it as authentic. They would make a few adaptations and changes as they went along.

We had somebody come to teach about the labor board [National Labor Relations Board] who gave a

lot of things to read. The students said: "Hey, wait a minute. We want to discuss this with you. We want to ask you some questions." The visitor said: "It's all in this book. Look it up." The student said: "We don't need you. Just give us the books and go. We don't need you if you don't know what's in them. If we're going to have to read the books, then you go back to Washington, and we'll sit here and read them." That's the way they dealt with visiting speakers. They weren't cowed by anybody, and we were happy about that, because they were beginning to take control of the situation. They'd tell us what to do all the time.

Now, in dealing with grievances, Zilphia was one of the best. She used a lot of drama in teaching how to handle grievances and kept people's interest by role-playing. That was pre-role-playing days, before it had a name, but it was the same thing! The process, the way she worked and the way I worked is one thing we had in common. We not only talked about how to take up a grievance and how to write one, we did it, we played out the whole scene. Students did need to know the technique of how to write up a grievance, if they could write, and they needed to know that they had to have arguments, but we said that won't win a grievance. What wins the grievance is to have a strong group of workers in your department. If you've got the workers with you, then that's the way to get your grievances settled.

Now how are you going to get the workers with you? You've got black people, women, old timers in your plants. We'd go into why you had to involve everybody and why you couldn't discriminate. It takes the power

of everyone united to get a grievance settled. So we'd take even settling arguments, which is usually kind of a technical thing, as a basis for educating people about democracy. In everything we did, those elements came out. In a class on union problems, the students would raise problems that they had, and we'd discuss them. And I knew the problems those people had because I'd dealt with the same kinds of people over and over again. I knew more about their problems than they did, but I didn't tell them that. I never, never put down a problem on the blackboard or listed a problem that they didn't list, even though I knew it was their problem, and I didn't do what I see some people doing today. I didn't put it in my own words and revise it to make it clear. I've seen that happen in these training programs, where somebody will say something and then they'll rewrite it so it makes more sense. That's a put-down to a worker to edit his or her way of saying things. So the workers worded the problems. First I would ask, "What do you know about that problem already?" Then they said, "I don't know anything." Well okay, you know how to survive, you're here. Your union sent you here. They thought you had some leadership ability. I would push them to name what they know, and they find right off, with a little struggle and a lot of embarrassment, that there are some things that they can articulate. They don't need any games or any playing around. The one thing they know is their own experience. They don't need to homogenize it with other people's experience. They want to talk about their own experience. Then other people join in and say, "Ah ha, I had an ex-

perience that relates to that." So pretty soon you get everybody's experiences coming in, centered around that *one* person's experience, because that's an *authentic* experience not a *synthetic* experience. Authentic. And everybody recognizes authenticity. Workers recognize authenticity. Academic people quite often don't *want* authenticity. They want some kind of synthesis that takes the experience a little bit away, so it'll be more bearable to them, I suppose. But they recognize this is authentic.

After everybody had the benefit of hearing everybody else's problem discussed, we would ask on the basis of what you've learned that you knew—that you didn't know before that you knew—and on the basis of your fellow workers' experiences, now how do you think it'll be best to deal with these problems? It was so enriching, you see, to have a person learn that they knew something. Secondly, to learn that their peers knew something, and learn that they didn't have to come to me, the expert, to tell them what the answers were. Then they planned: here's how we'll deal with this problem when we go back home.

Now that was the way the whole labor school was run. We taught a lot of things that they needed to know. They needed to make speeches. They needed parliamentary law, which I don't believe in, but they needed it. But they also needed, we thought, a lot of other things. We tried to involve everybody in singing and doing drama and dancing and laughing and telling stories, because that's a part of their life. It's more of a holistic approach to education, not just a bunch of

unrelated segments. The way people live was more important than any class or any subject that we were dealing with. That's an extremely important experience. They had that learning experience, making decisions, living in an unsegregated fashion, enjoying their senses other than their minds. It was that experience that was probably worth more than any *factual* things that they learned, although you know there were some factual things that they learned.

This didn't mean that we didn't add to that mix. Once you get people talking about a problem and there's no solution within the group, which is often the case, then you go outside the group and introduce ideas and experiences that are related to the problem. Workers in other places, in other countries, and in other ages, all are relevant if they're related to the problems at hand. People's minds get opened up to wanting to know all these things. They'll ask questions. How did the labor movement get started in England? What caused the revolution in Russia? Why do people call us communists when we organize? I remember one time I said just go to the encyclopedia and read about what communism is, and they said, is it in the encyclopedia? They thought it was something the manufacturing association had cooked up! They read the definition and they discussed that. They took an "encyclopedia class," but that was an extension of that experience. I didn't say, now you need to know what communism is. If I'd said that, they wouldn't have ever bothered to read it.

We can use current examples. The Bumpass Cove people, for example, didn't know when they first came

here that they could know what toxic chemicals did to people. They thought that that's something they had to go to the health officials and the company officials for. Even though they knew the officials were lying to them, it didn't occur to them that there was any way for them to find out for themselves. When they asked what are these chemicals, Juliet Merrifield, who was working with them, said well, let's go down to the library and look it up—just like I said look up communism. They ended up, as they say in the movie, making their own list.* They didn't know they could know that when they started out, because they'd been denied the opportunity to know that they could know about chemicals and their effects. They thought that was in the realm of experts.

PAULO: Listening to Myles, I felt challenged to make some reflections about one of the points.

MYLES: Good. That's what I wanted you to do.

PAULO: Of course I am in agreement with this global vision you give us. The first reflection, which is good to underline, is how *difficult* is the task of an educator. No matter where this kind of educator works, the great difficulty—or the great adventure!—is how to make education something which, in being serious, rigorous, methodical, and having a process, also creates happiness and joy.

MYLES: Joy. Yes—happiness, joy.

PAULO: That difficulty is how to give an example to the students that in working on the practice, on the personal experience, we necessarily go beyond what we did. For

* Lucy Massie Phenix, producer, *You Got to Move: Stories of Change in the South* (New York: Icarus Films, 1985).

example, if I know critically what I did in planting seeds, if I know what I did during the act of planting, if I get the reason *why,* of course I go beyond what I did. I had a kind of umbrella, a framework of knowledge, which was not so clear at that point. Beginning with what I learned initially, I discovered lots of possible extensions of knowledge, which were otherwise almost invisible.

Then coming back to the question of joy, of seriousness. I am afraid, Myles—maybe I am not humble in saying that I am sure that you agree with me—that one of the risks we have as educators is to think that the practice of educating, of teaching, should be reduced just into joy. Happiness. And then the educator would not to have any kind of demand on the students, would not make any kind of suggestion to the students to be more rigorous in studying, because the teacher cannot cut off the students' right to be happy. This transforms the practice of education into a kind of entertainment. The other risk is to be so serious that seriousness fights against happiness. Then instead of having a childlike practice, you have a very rigid face of an old and despairing figure! Does it make sense? Don't teach like this; but a great many educators do.

For example, for me it is difficult to *begin* studying. Studying is not a free task. It's not a gift. Studying is demanding, hard, difficult. But inside of the difficulty, happiness begins to be generated. At some point suddenly we become absolutely happy with the results, which come from having been serious and rigorous. Then for me one of the problems that we have as edu-

cators in our line is how never, never to lose this complexity of our action and how never to lose even one of the ingredients of the practice. I cannot understand a school that makes children sad about going to school. This school is bad. But I also don't accept a school in which the kids spend all the time just playing. This school is also bad. The good school is that one in which in studying I also get the pleasure of playing. I learn how to have intellectual discipline. Look, being disciplined, democratically, is something that takes part of life. It's vital for me to have some intellectual discipline in order to get knowledge, in order to know better.

Then there is another point about which I would like to make a comment. Myles said something very important when he stressed the question of thinking. It's absolutely necessary to teach how to think critically, but—I don't know whether Myles agrees with me—it's impossible for me in this kind of education to teach *how* to think unless we are teaching something, some content to the students. I want to say that it's impossible to teach how to think by just thinking. That is, I have to teach how to think, thinking about something and then knowing something. But this is precisely what this Highlander Center has done for the past fifty years. Myles told us about asking people, If the advice of the experts worked in the past, why then are you here now? If you are here now because you were not satisfied with the results of the other way of working, why didn't we pick this way? Why not walk another road? When Myles asked this, undoubtedly they were very enveloped by his questions and his speech—not just thought,

but action. There was some content in that. He was just awakening their memories concerning some knowledge and concrete experiences. The *content* was there, but not so easily seen sometimes. Because of that, it was possible to challenge the group to think in a different way and also to understand the need for getting a new road. The acceptance of doing something different has to do with the understanding of a former experience in which there were subjects that were discussed. What Myles did was to touch their memory about a subject and to remake the road.

I think that it's really impossible to teach how to think more critically by just making a speech about critical thought. It's absolutely indispensable to give a witness, an example, of thinking critically to the students. This is the reason why the experience here has been so good. You always had here a subject that you discussed together with the people, and in satisfying some of the students' needs, necessarily the people went beyond the subject matter.

MYLES: We've always done these things imperfectly. Always.

PAULO: All of us work imperfectly.

MYLES: Always. I don't think I ever did a workshop in which I didn't think later, my goodness I should've known better than to do this. Or, if I had just thought fast enough, I could've helped people understand this from their experience. To this day, I never have the satisfaction of saying this is a perfect job, well done. I've learned something in this job, I hope I can do better next time, but I just have to keep on learning different things.

I would say, just parenthetically, I started out back when I was more book oriented teaching a course on how to think! Somebody had a little book on how to think, and I thought the way to go about teaching people how to think was to teach them what was in the book.

THIRD PARTY: You taught this at Highlander?

MYLES: Yes! The first year. That's when we were really learning. From then on I didn't find the book too helpful, certainly, to use as text. I used the text from the people's experiences after that. But I remember very well starting that way, not knowing that these people didn't have to learn the same way schooling taught people. I wouldn't have known then, to use an example that we talked about, that the people who came here looking for experts really had the answer to that problem through their experience. We've all come a long ways in this, and of course there's a long ways to go.

THIRD PARTY: When you were talking about not ever doing anything perfectly, it seems to me that some of the best learning that I had here as a staff member was in reflecting on a workshop after we had done it, about what we had done right and about what we had done wrong. I wanted to hear you talk some about your own growth as an educator with your peer educators at Highlander and how that process developed over the years.

MYLES: Well see, we all started out with similar academic backgrounds. We were all philosophically socialists, so we had similar goals. So we had to learn together, and I don't mean it wasn't uneven. Some people learned faster or better than others, and some learned some-

thing that somebody else didn't learn, but we were peers and so it was easy to communicate. We did some evaluations like you're talking about. If you look at the old records, as you probably have, you'll see all kinds of long analyses of what we were doing, what we believed in, what was going wrong. We spent a lot of time being very critical, and we invited criticism from the outside. We were trying to get all the help we could in thinking through the problems because we had a very definite sense that we didn't know what we were doing. We were really embarrassed by our inefficiency, to the place where we were struggling. When we invited criticism we got it. I remember that somebody said that I was cruel. I was dealing with a group of young people, and one of the girls cried because she said I made her very unhappy and that I should make people happy, not suffer. I said, well, these were teenagers. When they grow physically they have joy and pain. They have aches, actually. Growing is a painful process, but they have joy in being young. I mean what I'm doing with the mind is the same as nature does with the body. It's no different. I think you should stretch people to their limits and our limits. But those kinds of criticisms would come up.

Then there were criticisms from the left, that we weren't making enough speeches telling people what to believe, and we didn't have the right belief ourselves. And from the right, saying we were revolutionaries, that we were subverting the system. Someone criticized us for getting money from capitalists and fighting capitalism, saying you're biting the hand that feeds you. I said, who else can feed us? In a capitalist society there's

no other place for money to come from. Money has to come from the system, and people that we identify with produce that wealth. We get the money where the money is and use it where the people are. The critic said, but don't you feel awkward about biting the hand that feeds you? I said no, I enjoy just gnawing it up to the shoulder. That was on a public TV program. It haunted me for years, the image of a one-armed capitalist!

We had all kinds of problems we had to deal with, and that was part of education. We weren't just in the mechanics of education. That was never much of a feature at Highlander. We've talked more about it here than we did for years. We just did it. I came out with a strong conviction that nothing, no methodology or no technique was as near as important as the way I did things myself, in terms of my teaching other people. If I stopped having joy in learning, I could no longer help give anybody else joy in learning.

PAULO: Yes, of course.

MYLES: And you know what you do has to be compatible. If I believe in social equality and don't practice it, then what I say is hollow. You have to have that kind of consistency. That's why I'm less interested in methodology or techniques than I am in a *process* that involves the total person, involves vision, involves total realities. I think of my grandfather, who was an illiterate mountaineer and who had a good mind, although he couldn't write his name. He used to say, "Son you're talking about all these ideas, and you got your wagon hitched to a star, but you can't haul anything in it that's not down on

earth." I know you have to have it hitched to the star, and he did too, but it's also got to be down on earth where something practical can be done. You have to tie the practical with the visionary.

I think if I had to put a finger on what I consider a good education, a good *radical* education, it wouldn't be anything about methods or techniques. It would be loving people first. If you don't do that, Ché Guevara says, there's no point in being a revolutionary. I agree with that. And that means all people everywhere, not just your family or your own countrymen or your own color. And wanting for them what you want for yourself. And then next is respect for people's abilities to learn and to act and to shape their own lives. You have to have confidence that people can do that. Now people question me on that. They say, how do you know that? Well, I've had some good experiences. I've gone through two social movements, the industrial union movement and the civil rights movement. I know people can know because I know people can do things, and I know people can die for what they believe in. I know that once people get involved they're willing to do anything they believe is right. I'm not *theorizing* about that, and I'm more fortunate than most people—I think because a lot of people don't know those things like I do, having lived through it and been a part of it. I think our job is to try to figure out ways to help people take over their own lives.

The third thing grows out of caring for people and having respect for people's ability to do things, and that is that you value their experiences. You can't *say* you re-

spect people and not respect their experiences. These are the kind of elements that seem to me to be important, rather than methodology or techniques. Highlander's a good example of it as an educational entity. It is hard to talk about Highlander. Highlander can't be described as an organization because it isn't departmentalized and mechanistically conceived. It's more of an organism, therefore it's hard to describe. It's a mosaic or a piece of weaving. Back in 1932, if you used colors, it would be a certain type of color that dominated. Later on, another color came in and merged with that, and as Highlander changes the series of colors changes, but always some of the old and always some of the new. There's never anything lost. Now two colors may be blended, and always hopefully something new is introduced, so the weaving is still being made. Highlander is a kind of a weaving of many colors, some blend and some clash, but you know it's alive. People during one historical period *know* that period. We knew the Depression period when we started Highlander. We knew both the students and activists. We were all student leaders and activists before we started Highlander, so we brought that into the beginnings of Highlander. Later on the civil rights movement came along, and that came into Highlander and colored a lot of things. We deliberately set out to be involved in civil rights, and that brought changes in the process. It actually changed the composition of the staff. We had more black people. It changed the composition of the board. Movements change what goes on and how things are organized.

Later on we had these dull periods, what I call the

organizational period, like we're in now, and we had that kind of "me" period, where people thought that consciousness was limited to their own conscious, something inside themselves. I guess some people thought it would start there and spread to society, but most of it kind of dead-ended there, as far as I could find out. If it starts there it stays there.

You have to have people at Highlander who come out of those periods, to bring in new ways of doing things. We want and welcome new ways of doing things.

Another thing that we started out talking about during the very first pre-Highlander days was that we would be international. We were part of the world but we had to start locally. That has been coming in and out of Highlander's history all along, and now it's playing a bigger role because Highlander's much more Third World–conscious. We think of ourselves as being part of a Third World. Helen Lewis* says that the places we're working are in the peripheries within the periphery. They're the Third Worlds within the Third World, the neglected area. That concept has tied us in with people all over the world. That's one of the colors that has always run through our tapestry. Sometimes it gets bold and sometimes it fades out. Now it's important. The people who come into Highlander bring new insights, but there's still a part of the old, still part of the same piece of tapestry.

* Helen Matthews Lewis, Linda Johnson, and Donald Askins, *Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case* (Boone, N.C.: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1978.)

"Conflicts are the midwife of consciousness"

THIRD PARTY: You mentioned before the concept of responsibility, but at the same time the concept of nonneutrality, political choice. I'm an educator. I am educated by Harvard. At the same time I have a political point of view. The problem is how to how to share, like Myles said, share my point of view without imposing it, without manipulating people. In practical terms it's a very difficult line.

PAULO: I think that this problem is really very important and deserves to be discussed. While having on one hand to respect the expectations and choices of the students, the educator also has the duty of not being neutral, as you said. The educator as an intellectual has to intervene. He cannot be a mere facilitator. He has to affirm to himself or herself. I think that this issue is more or less like the problem of practice and its theory. Do you say that it involves also the question of the authority of the teacher, the freedom of students, the choice of the teacher, the choice of the student, the role the teacher has to teach, the role the teacher has to answer questions, to ask questions, to choose the problems? Sometimes the teacher has the role of leading or the role of speaking, but the teacher has the duty to come from speaking *to* into speaking *with,* for example.

Then for many people, going beyond some risks that we always have in this relationship is something that is not clear. For example, one of the mistakes we can commit in the name of freedom of the students is if I, as a teacher, would paralyze my action and my duty to teach.

In the last analysis, I would leave the students by themselves, and it would be to fall into a kind of irresponsibility. At this moment, afraid of assuming authority, I lose authority. Authority is necessary to the educational process as well as necessary to the freedom of the students and my own. The teacher is absolutely necessary. What is bad, what is *not* necessary, is authoritarianism, but not authority.

If I do that, if I fall with this kind of irresponsibility, instead of generating freedom, I generate license, and then I don't accomplish my responsibility of teaching.

The other mistake is to crush freedom and to exacerbate the authority of the teacher. Then you no longer have freedom but now you have authoritarianism, and then the teacher is the one who teaches. The teacher is the one who knows. The teacher is the one who guides. The teacher is the one who does *everything*. And the students, precisely because the students must be shaped, just expose their bodies and their souls to the hands of the teacher, as if the students were clay for the artist, to be molded. The teacher is of course an artist, but being an artist does not mean that he or she can make the profile, can shape the students. What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves. And in doing that, he or she lives the experience of relating democratically as authority with the freedom of the students.

It's the same issue, for example, that we have in the relationship between leadership and masses of the people, between the leadership of a progressive party and the great masses of the people. What is the role

of the leadership? It could not be just to *look* at the masses. The role of leadership is also to *lead* the masses while learning with them and never imposing on them. Even I accept that in some moments both teachers and political leaders have to take the initiative in order to do something that is necessary, and it's not possible to wait for tomorrow. But for me, in any case, the next day the teacher as well as the leadership have to begin to explain the reasons why it is necessary to take initiative. In the last analysis, for me it is impossible to take the initiative without explaining why it was necessary.

Because of the importance of this issue, I thought to come back, Myles, to this point in our conversation. As far as I have understood the work of this place, of this institution, respect for communities here does not mean the absence of responsibility on the part of the educators. But we have to recognize that it is not easy. And we also have to assume that the educators have to have initiative.

THIRD PARTY: Myles, can I just add to that one thing. It occurred to me, Paulo, that you always speak of education from the primary level through the university and including the kind of community education that Highlander does. Myles, you speak about adult education for social change, working with people in communities, and I wondered if that makes any difference in the way that you approach this particular issue.

MYLES: Yes I think it does. I think of education as a cradle-to-the-grave education. I use the term *education* in contrast to schooling. I decided before Highlander was started that I wanted to work with adults, and the rea-

sons were that in growing up, commencement speakers always made the same speech that young people are the future leaders of this country. It's up to young people to make this a decent country and solve these problems. And I discovered what everybody else discovered, that they never had any intention of letting the people they were talking to do anything about society. It's a kind of pacification speech. The adults run society. Students don't run society. They have very little to say within the schools let alone society, the larger society. So I decided I wanted to deal with the people who had the power, if they wanted to use it, to change society, because I was interested in changing society. When we started the Highlander Folk School at Monteagle, that thinking was confirmed by a conversation I had with a wonderful woman, May Justus, who was a neighbor and later a board member. She's published fifty-seven children's books. She even had a better record of publication than you have, Paulo! You just have sixteen? She's got fifty-seven! But hers are for children, and they're very thin.

May Justus came to that isolated, mountain community ten years or more before Highlander started. And she would have been a model teacher. She was a mountain woman who came from the neighboring county over here, back in the hills. She had terrific imagination and love for children and love for teaching. She taught my children, Thorsten and Charris. May told me how in grade school, the children were really enthusiastic about life and how she helped them within the confines of the school to have values, to help them love, to have ambition to do something. Then with tears in her eyes,

she said the community swallowed them up and they were absorbed into the lethargy of the community, into the hopelessness of the community. They blotted out all that she had been able to get them to understand in school. In other words, she was saying the community is powerful. Adult society is powerful.

I could give dozens and dozens of illustrations, but my point is that I came to the conclusion I wanted to work with the people who, if they chose to—and I was going to try to help them choose—had the power to change society.

Not that I don't appreciate and value other kinds of education, other levels of education. I just chose to work with the people who, historically and practically, are in a position to change society if they choose to so. My idea was to help people choose to change society and to *be with* the people who were in a position to do that. I took this a step further. I wasn't interested in mass education like a schooling system. I was interested in experimenting with ways of working with emerging community leaders or organizational leaders, to try to help those people get a vision and some understanding of how you go about realizing that vision so that they could go back into their communities and spread the ideas. I had never any intention of going into anybody else's community as an expert to solve problems, and then leaving it for those people to follow up. I thought the way to work was to identify people who had a potential for leadership and use that very straightforward simple approach.

I chose to work with organizations that, as far as I

could tell, had a potential, a potential for structural reforms to lead to social movements and to lead to revolutionary change. I was always looking for organizations that were not aimed at reinforcing the system but aimed at changing the system insofar as I knew. Now I wasn't looking for people who were revolutionaries, because I wouldn't have had anybody to work with. I looked for people whose organizations had a potential for moving from limited reforms into structural reforms. It was a very selective group. First I selected adults. Then within that group, I selected people who had a potential for providing leadership for structural change and who had a vision of a different future—different from those who claimed to be neutral and who supported the status quo.

That was my rationale, and I never faced this dichotomy of not being able to share what you had with people for fear you'd be a propagandist, because my feeling was that there's no such thing as neutrality. The people who use that label are people who unknowingly, for the most part, are dedicated to the support of the status quo. Now to assume that they do not impose ideas on people is a proposition I can't accept. They had an advantage to those of us who want to change society because they are part of society. The people are already in the society they advocate, in the society they're for, so they learn by doing the kind of thing that the so-called neutrals want them to do. We don't have that advantage. I've never felt so powerful that I thought I was dominating people when I shared my ideas with them.

PAULO: But, Myles, for me that kind of problem is not in

your practice or in mine, but this kind of practical problem really exists for many educators.

MYLES: Yes, I know.

PAULO: Sometimes they are not clear. Some prefer to hide their authoritarian choice with a speech that does not make the problem clear. This is the reason why I found it very interesting that Myles brought this question into the conversation between us. Of course it's not a problem for you and for your educators, but it maybe is a problem for many other people in this country and in Latin America. Some of them may be authoritarian, those who say: "But the experience of Highlander is laissez-faire. It's a kind of living in peace, leaving people by themselves. They are not interfered with." Then it's necessary to discuss this question theoretically.

MYLES: Well, I'm not saying it's not important to discuss. I'm just saying that we understand that the people who claim to be neutral, and call us propagandists because we are not neutral, are not neutral either. They're just ignorant. They don't know that they're supporters of the status quo. They don't know that that's their job. They don't know that the institution is dedicated to perpetuating a system and they're serving an institution. They have influence nevertheless.

PAULO: Many times, Myles, they know really that they are not neutral, but it is necessary for them to insist on neutrality.

THIRD PARTY: I want to go back to the issue of manipulation. You said that there's a clear difference between having authority and authoritarianism. I'm trying to figure out different ways people get the authority they

have. Now I want to know what authority you think is legitimate authority.

PAULO: Let's look at that in a very practical way. First of all, let us take a situation at home, in the relationship between the father and the mother and the kids. I am very sure, absolutely sure, that if the father, because he loves his kids, lets them do what they want to do and never shows the kids that there are limits within which we live, create, grow up, then the father does not assume vis-à-vis the kids the responsibility he has to *guide* and to lead. And what is beautiful, I think, philosophically is to see how, apparently starting from outside influence, at some point this discipline begins to start from inside of the kid. That is, this is the road in which we walk, something that comes from outside into autonomy, something that comes from *inside*. That is the result.

It's interesting to see the etymology of education. It means precisely a movement that goes from outside to inside and comes from inside to outside. Then the experience of this movement in life is experience of the relationship between authority and freedom. It is a disaster when father and mother fight against themselves and are not able to give a vision to the kids. I am not saying that the father and the mother never should discuss, because I believe in conflicts. Conflicts are the midwife of consciousness. I am not saying the parents should never fight; they need to fight from time to time. They are not equal and they could not be, but they are not antagonists if they're living together. They are antagonists if they lose love.

Now if you go from home into a classroom, it's the same. The nature continues to be the same. That is, the teacher's not the father and the teacher's not the uncle. The teacher is the teacher. He or she has a personality. He's teacher and not uncle and not father or mother, but he has authority. It means that he has some *space* in which he or she has to accomplish some necessary duties from the point of view of the development of the kids. If the teacher does not work like this, if the teacher is too hesitant, if he or she is not competent, if he does or she does not show the students that he has stability and security from an emotional and intellectual point of view, it is difficult to teach. How is it possible to teach without revealing to the students that I am afraid, that I'm insecure. My insecurity destroys my necessary authority with the students. But the other side is how, in assuming the duty of having authority, of living the authority, to balance the necessary authority with the space of freedom of the kids. Then the teacher has to let the kids know that he or she also fights for his or her freedom in another dimension of life—for example, to get a much better salary. The students have to learn with the teacher that teachers also fight in order to free themselves.

For me it is impossible to separate teaching from educating. In educating I teach. In teaching I educate. But sometimes you can see some strange behaviors in which there is apparently a separation between one thing and the other. Maybe a student says to another, remembering school days, "Do you remember Professor Peters?" "Oh yes, I remember. He knew how to give

good classes of mathematics, but no more than that." You see? It's difficult for students to have a good memory of a teacher who never assumed his or her authority, of a teacher who never established limits.

THIRD PARTY: You speak as if a vision is important in the parent and the teacher. Development of autonomy is part of your vision.

PAULO: Yes.

THIRD PARTY: What if the vision isn't the same? What if the teacher doesn't believe in autonomy for the student or the parent doesn't believe in autonomy? In other words, that's a value that is very important to you and it's very important to Myles. Myles talks about empowering people. He talks about choosing leaders who are going to make a difference. So when you talk about how people have authority, I hear you saying they have to have a vision as very important but I hear more. I hear the vision has to be a specific way. So you're merely saying something very specific about the philosophy of these teachers and these parents?

PAULO: Yes. I insist so much on the clarity of parents and teachers concerning their vision, concerning what they think about the world, about the present, about the future. For me it should take part of the permanent *formation* of the educator. Your question was how to confront and how not to break down the relationship between authority and freedom—that is, how to *share*. There are occasions in which it's almost impossible to share. For example, how is it possible for me to share my vision with a convinced reactionary. I cannot share. But maybe I can share with him or her some *knowledge*

about reality, and in doing that maybe I can change him or her from the point of view of my vision.

I don't know whether I am going too far from your question, but it's very interesting to see how it is possible to convert individuals of the ruling class—but never the ruling class as a class. Do you see? It's very interesting. And because of that I think that seminars and workshops like you have had here for over fifty years are such an important source. I can realize, Myles, how many people over these years had the opportunity to become converted as individuals—but as a class, never. For example, Marx; Marx was converted. Fidel Castro was converted. Ché Guevara was converted. I hope that we are being converted.

Because of this, the security of the educator is also important—his or her capacity of loving, of understanding others though without accepting the position of the others, and the ability not to be angry just because you are different. Not to say it's impossible to speak to you because you are different from me. That is, the more secure you are, the clearer your vision, the more you know that you are learning how to put the vision into practice. You know that you are very far from realizing your dream, but if you don't do something *today,* you become an obstacle for hundreds of people not yet born. Their action in the next century depends on our action today. I think that this kind of educator has to be clear about that.

It's impossible for me just to think of my dream without thinking about those who are not yet in the world. I have to have this strange feeling to love those who

have not come yet, in order to prepare. It is a collective practice, and it means that the presence of those who are alive today is important. Those who come tomorrow will start acting, precisely taking what we did as the starting point. This is how history can be made. Marx said men make history and are made by history, and men make history starting from some reality in which they find themselves, from the reality that they were given. We are now dealing with the present in order to create the future. We are now creating the future by the formation of the present. We are creating the *future present* for the new generation, from which they will make history. For these reasons, I think it is absolutely indispensable that educators be secure, capable, and have a capacity for loving and for curiosity.

MYLES: Curiosity is very important I think, and I think too much of education, starting with childhood education, is either designed to kill curiosity or it works out that way anyway. As you were talking, I was thinking when Charis and Thorsten were little, we had a boat on the lake, and of course to the little kids to ride in that boat was just about the epitome of anything you could find. Then there was a big bluff at the edge of the mountain, where you could break your neck if you fell off, but it was a popular place for people to go. Those were the two things they most wanted to do. Now there's a problem. How do you keep your kids from drowning in a boat or from falling off the bluff? There are two ways to deal with that problem. One is to get rid of the boat and build a fence around the bluff. That'd take care of those two. We didn't always agree on everything,

as any husband and wife shouldn't, but Zilphia and I chose not to solve the problem by removing the problem, but to place restrictions on Thorsten and Charis that would make them remove the boat and build the fence within themselves. We were criticized for saying to them: "There are limits. You cannot do this." Some of our liberal educational friends said we shouldn't say no. We said: "Well, we love our kids. We're going to discipline them to learn within themselves not to do that." That was a deliberate choice.

Now I contend that the people who remove the boat take away the incentive for kids learning to swim so they can ride in the boat. They cripple them in having control and making decisions. The people who remove the boat and build the fences forget to tear them down when the kids get big enough to use them. In adult life it's the same thing. You know there are people who are never allowed to do things that they *could* do. Help people *develop* within themselves. I've carried over that way of thinking in a lot of situations. I think when educators go into an organization or a community as outside experts with the answers, they're taking the boat away or they're building the fence. They're not letting the people have to face up to dealing with their own problems, and they cripple them by not allowing them to make their own decisions.

You see, I'm getting back to what he asked. Do you tell people what you know is good for them, or do you let them flounder around and find out for themselves, maybe helping them explore possibilities? Do you set

up situations in which they can learn but use that as a learning experience instead of a *telling* experience?

PAULO: Yes, but what I want to say, Myles, is that in the process of helping people *discover,* there is undoubtedly teaching.

MYLES: Sure it's teaching.

PAULO: It's impossible for me to help someone without teaching him or her something with which they can start to do by themselves. That is my own testimony of respect for them. It is consistent as a way of teaching. Not necessarily of teaching a certain content or . . .

MYLES: Or a fact.

PAULO: But immediately I need also to teach some content, do you see? I agree with you. My choice is like yours, but in trying to do what you did, maybe—in a different space, different culture, different history—less is then needed. I always was teaching. No matter that I am under the tree talking with some people. This is for me absolute. I have to assume that, you see. I have nothing against teaching. But I have many things against teaching in an authoritarian way.

THIRD PARTY: When most people talk about teaching, they talk about content as if it has a power of reality that is greater than the individual. Do you assume that what you teach about is true or are you always open to the possibility that you're wrong and that the person you're teaching may be right?

PAULO: Of course I am. I am constantly open, precisely because of the limits of the act of knowing. I am sure that knowing is historical, that it's impossible to *know*

without the history of human beings. Now I don't want to discuss this question theologically. It means that it is in the social experience of history that we as human beings have created knowledge. It's because of that that we continue to recreate the knowledge we created, and create a new knowledge. If knowledge can be overcome, if the knowledge of yesterday necessarily does not make sense today and then I need another knowledge. It means that knowledge has *historicity*. That is, knowledge never is static. It's always in the process.

Then if I recognize my position as a cognitive subject, as a subject capable of knowing, my first position has to be a humble one vis-à-vis the very process of knowing, and vis-à-vis the process of learning in which I as teacher and the students as the students are engaged in at a certain moment in a certain class. I am humble not because I want to be agreeable. I don't accept being humble for tactical reasons.

THIRD PARTY: But authentically.

PAULO: Yes, I am humble because I am incomplete. Just because of that. This is not because I need people to love me, though I need that people love me, but I don't have to make any kind of trap for the love. Do you see? Then if I understand this process, I am open, absolutely open, every time to be taught by the students. Sometimes we are mistaken in our understanding of reality. We are even mistaken in our knowing of the knowledge. I don't know if it's good English, but sometimes we are mistaken in the process of *reknowing*. For example, a student suddenly says: "Professor, I think that you are wrong. This is not like this. The question

is different." Then he or she satisfies you. I have had experiences like this, and it is necessary to accept that immediately and to assume a new way of speaking about the issue. Of course, to the extent that you belong to another generation, that you have been serious in the process of teaching—to the extent that you read, that you study, that you develop your curiosity—you have more possibility to clarify the search of the students, than the students have. Less experienced intellectually, they have less chance, but it does not mean that they don't have the possibility to help us.

Because of that, one of the virtues I think that we educators have to create—because I am sure also that we don't receive virtues as gifts; we make virtues not intellectually, but through practice—one of the virtues we have to create in ourselves as progressive educators is the virtue of humility.

THIRD PARTY: Myles, the reason that I asked the question of Paulo is that you said something that could sound very authoritarian, which was, "When I know something is good for people I should do something about it".

PAULO: It's a very good question.

MYLES: When I say I do something about it, what I do about it is to try to expose them to certain experiences, ways of thinking, that will lead them to take a look at what I believe in. I think when they take a look at it, there's a chance that they might come to the same conclusion. They've got to come to that conclusion *themselves.* And if I really believe in what I want people to believe in, I don't tell them about it. I don't as an authoritarian figure say you *must* believe it. I think I know much more

about how people learn than that. I try to find ways to *expose* them to learning processes that would finally lead them to take a look at my conclusion. That's all I can do. Once they take a look at it, if they don't accept it, then I've gone as far as I can.

THIRD PARTY: What about the notion, though, that through the experience of working with them you may decide that what you believe was wrong, and that they may have a better perception of that than you did.

MYLES: Well I think you have to divide that into principles. When I say what I believe, I'm talking about principles such as love and democracy, where people control their lives.

THIRD PARTY: Your vision.

MYLES: My vision. Now the strategy for my vision, the approaches and processes, I've learned from other people. I'm always learning new ways of doing, but frankly, I haven't really changed my overall vision. My vision is so far off, in terms of the goal, that there's been nothing to shift my vision. For example, my vision was clarified politically during the Depression when we were faced with capitalism coming apart. There was a socialist alternative and a fascist alternative, an authoritarian and a democratic alternative. I chose at that time, out of that experience and out of my religious ethical beliefs, to opt on the side of a democratic solution to the problems, not an authoritarian solution. That's frozen into a principle. I believe in democracy versus authoritarianism. That hasn't changed. What *has* changed is an understanding of the capitalist system. If you're going to change a system, you have to understand it, and I

understood it less well then than I understand it now. I've learned a lot about how you work with people, and I've learned a lot about what I like to call subvalues. Those basic principles that I want to share with people have been modified, extended—not limited—and have become more concrete in my imagination. I hold these principles more firmly than I did before, so that vision, so that long range goal is what I want to share.

As for the process of getting there, everybody has to work those things out on their own. I believe that there are many truths, many untruths, and there are many right ways to do things and many wrong ways to do things. Quite often I've said any kind of problem has five or six good solutions and five or six bad solutions. What I try to get people to do is choose one of the good ways instead of one of the bad ways, but not influence which one, because that depends on how people function, what people's backgrounds are. The people who grew up after I did, who have a different background, came to their conclusions through different processes, but their processes are as valued as mine. I don't question that.