

Nel Noddings' and Paulo Freire's Pedagogies of the Heart for Social Justice

Nel Noddings discusses motherhood and teaching as caring relationships. She emphasizes the importance of the caring relationship between the student and the teacher. This interaction is the milestone of the teaching enterprise:

What I am recommending is that schools and teaching be redesigned so that caring has a chance to be initiated in the one-caring and completed in the cared-for. Sacrifices in economies of scale and even in programs might be called for. These would be minor if we could unlock our doors and disarm our security guards. Schools as institutions cannot care directly. A school cannot be engrossed in anyone or anything. But a school can be deliberately designed to support caring and caring individuals, and this is what an ethic of caring and caring individuals, and this is what an ethic of caring suggests should be done.

(p. 476)

I agree with her completely on that both motherhood and teaching are not roles. A mother and/or a teacher are not actors/actresses.

Noddings' description of teaching as a situation where the teacher is engrossed in the cared-for/student and the projects of the cared-for that become the first and only priority in the relationship is completely accurate. In other words, teaching is a caring and selfless activity:

The one-caring is engrossed in the cared-for and undergoes a motivational displacement toward the projects of the cared-for. This does not, as we have seen, imply romantic love or the sort of pervasive and compulsive "thinking of the other" that characterizes infatuation. It means, rather, that one-caring receives the other, for the interval of caring, completely and nonselectively. She is present to the other and places her motive power in his service. Now, of course, she does not abandon her own ethical ideal in doing this, but she starts from a position of respect or regard for the projects of the other. In the language of Martin Buber, the cared-for is encountered as "Thou," a subject, and not as "It," an object of analysis. During the encounter, which may be singular and brief or recurrent and prolonged, the cared-for "is Thou and fills the firmament."

(p. 472)

The selflessness of teaching is also reflected in Martin Buber's stress on the "subjectness" of the student (Noddings, 473). In other words, the student is a subject; he/she is not an object, an idea that resembles Paulo Freire's pedagogy.

Another idea that I find that both Noddings and Freire share in their teaching philosophies is that of joy/happiness in the teaching relationship. Noddings comments: "This working together, which produces both joy in the relation and increasing competence in the cared-for, was advocated, we may recall, by Urie Brofenbrenner in his discussion of cooperative engagement in tasks, and it was also implied by Robert White's discussion of competence as the desired end of 'effectance motivation.'" (p. 473). In his Pedagogy of the Heart, Paulo Freire emphasizes the element of joy/happiness involved in teaching: "Democratic educators can only see the acts of teaching, of learning, of

studying as serious, demanding tasks that not only generate satisfaction but are pleasurable in and of themselves.” (p. 90). He further elaborates his point by describing the qualities of an authoritarian teacher (the banking model of educators) whose behavior in class cannot generate joy/happiness:

[An educator’s authoritarianism] is equally manifested in a number of opportunities, in his or her excessive vigilance over the learners, in his or her lack of respect for the learners’ creativity, and for his or her cultural identity. It is also manifested in his or her lack of acceptance of the popular-class learners’ way of being, the manner in which he or she warns the students and censures them.

(pp. 90-91)

Noddings continues describing the caring relationship between the teacher and the learner; she highlights the human rights of the learner-subject: “He is a human being responsible for his words and acts, and the one-caring as teacher meets him thus. Why he thinks what he thinks is as important as what. The domain to which he refers for justification is significant. How he relates to others as he does all this is important.” (p. 473). The attribution of human rights to the learner such as the right to be solely responsible for his/her words/thoughts/actions and the interest in him/her are also ideas that remind the reader of Freire’s pedagogy.

His wife, Ana Maria Araujo Freire describes the seminars Freire organized during his twenty-nine-month term heading the department of education of Sao Paulo in the early nineties in Pedagogy of the Heart. The vital role of debating/dialogue played during those seminars as well the stress on human rights can be seen in the following description of the conferences:

Going deeper in the educational issue, the second seminar had as its objective debating on: education and citizenship, power relationships within the scope of the school, the role of municipal, state, and federal councils on education, experiments carried out on the state and national levels, alternative educational proposals, human rights, violence, marginalization, and the right to education.

(Emphasis mine, p. 121)

Additionally, Ana Maria Araujo Freire, when she documents democratic rebelliousness throughout Brazilian history, she discusses among other revolutions the participation of intellectuals in the struggle. They drafted the Manifesto do Mundo that demanded among other things free and universal vote rights, freedom of thought and press, and the right to work (Emphasis mine, p. 134). Here again there is the same focus on human rights and what it is moral as the right to work, for instance.

Noddings also emphasizes dialogue/debate as the way the teacher can underscore the subjectness of the learner: “encourage him to stand personally related to what he says and does.” (p. 473). The presence of dialogue/voice of the learner is further shown in the example of a fifty-year-old learner who participated in the seminar Freire organized:

One of the strong presences was that of an approximately fifty-year-old literacy learner who married prematurely by the decision of her father, a farmer from Alagoas. A strong soul, with calloused hands and ease in communicating, the democratic leader of a community in the outskirts of Sao Paulo, she frequently asked the three-thousand-person audience if they wanted her to continue speaking: and they did.

(Emphasis mine, Note 8)

In evaluating Freire's approach to adult education there is a striking similarity with Noddings' description of the attention paid to the learner in terms of his/her background/social interactions/words/acts: [Literacy:] in understanding adult education as an act of respect toward the adult's oral discourse and reading of the world acquired through years lived in society, and of movement toward overcoming those facts, Freire too was daring to organize an event of such a nature.

(Emphasis mine, Note 8, pp. 122-23)

In "My Faith and Hope" Freire describes an encounter he had in California where he talked with two homeless people and an American woman who felt she was not American because of her poverty. He discusses how the homeless man can only in his dreams while sleeping find the home he does not have. Freire, nonetheless, stresses how it is crucial to maintain faith and hope in the midst of adversity. That is, hope and faith that dreams can become real in actual life and not only in dreams while we sleep; people can achieve knowledge, power, and humane living conditions. He mentions how some educators do not hold faith and hope in their struggles. It is essential for Freire, though, to maintain his hope and faith: "One of the positives among all the negativity of the troubles my family faced was having gone through the crisis that we did without being tempted to adopt a fatalistic position. Far from us was the idea that we were being tested by God." (p. 104).

Freire describes hope as an activity that is not solitary but engages the other. He recites an example where his friend needed Freire's hope in order to rekindle his: "The struggle for hope is permanent, and it becomes intensified when one realizes it is not a solitary struggle." (p. 106). Noddings' notion of the caring relationship is also not solitary. The goal is to engage the learner: "He is not just part of the lesson, a response to be recorded as 'move 15' or whatever." (p. 473). In other words, teaching and learning are activities that engage/need the other, because they are caring/hopeful relationships instead of formal deposits of knowledge/record as authoritarian educators view their role.

Faith plays a fundamental role in Freire's philosophy of education. He defines diversity as to whether people have faith or not: "When I defend unity within diversity, I am thinking of unity between those who live their liberating faith and those who do not have it, regardless of why." (p. 103). In other words, we are different from each other as educators/people not because of our race/nationality/sexual orientation/handicap/religion; the first thing he mentions is that we are diverse because of the faith we maintain or not for liberation.

Furthermore, the liberating view of theology Freire refers views the body not as an instrument of sin but as the temple of God: "This way, submission-faith toward a destiny that would reflect God's will makes way for a spurring faith of loving rebelliousness. In this process, there is an understanding of the body –for those who have evolved in their faith –as the dwelling of sin turns into an intelligence of the body as the temple of God." (p. 103).

Effort/mobilization/perseverance are essential elements of Freire's philosophy of education. In Pedagogy of the Heart he at many points emphasizes the importance of

tenacity in pursuing one's dreams. Ana Maria Araujo Freire also shows us that mobilization has also been an important aspect of Freire's personality:

It is the tragic difference that the living conditions in the Northeast have been making more and more marked between Freire, who for a number of reasons, was able to break free from the narrow-mindedness, apathy, immobilization, and lack of hope, and those who, still immersed in all these things, perpetuate their condition as easy preys of the "assistance and aid" that facilitates all destitution.

(p. 115)

This same emphasis on effort can be seen in his descriptions of patience/impatience and their contribution or challenge to the "power of the unfair" (p. 64). Again, he discusses those who show unlimited patience as the privileged ones would like them to do end up canceling transformative action and tend to transfer to God the responsibility for addressing human shortcomings. Impatience, on the other hand, does not help either because the person expects results even during the stages of planning. Also, the impatient relies only on his or her will. In other words, he/she sees the struggle as a solitary activity and cannot see contrary forces or the means for use during the effort.

Injustice is a result of greediness/selfishness which Freire vividly documents and only through a constant engagement to democratically defeat these people change can happen:

Mind-narrowing religious behavior supports the exploitation practiced by the rich. It reinforces the discourse of the reactionary who, while religiously indifferent, clasp their hands in prayer to accuse "land squatters, incited by professional subversives, of violating ownership rights and of threatening the peace society requires.

(p. 65)

This commitment to action which is not solitary and the resistance it brings forth from the powerful is documented in numerous cases during Brazilian history as in the movement of Belaiaada. The forces that take place in this struggle are again evident:

Thus, a cowboy from mixed origin, Raimundo Gomes Vieira, took over the jailhouse in the village of Manga, on December 13, 1838, leading the movement that was called Belaiaada. Having great action mobility, the movement attracted sympathizers, took a significant part of Maranhao, and infiltrated all the way to Piaui, terrifying the powerful in that province.

(Emphasis mine, p. 131)

Faith/hope practiced in relationship with other people is essential in the struggle for the empowerment of the so-called "outlaws" or "marginalized" people. He cites the example of a Brazilian youth who was brutalized by the police as a display of power. Again, Freire stresses the importance to maintain faith and hope that leads to the advancement/realization of knowledge, desires, power, and "to be fully human" in society (Freire, p. 141).

In terms of cheating, Noddings stresses that punishment is not acceptable, because rules are not sacred to the caring teacher. The best approach is to attribute the best motives to the learner. Dewey mentions the goal is to teach all subjects in such a way as "to bring out and make focal their social and personal aspects." (Emphasis mine, Noddings, 474). For example, my student skipped one exercise in our mid-term exam. I attributed the best motives to this action (she forgot to copy this exercise). I compared

her work with the work of her friend and how she completed that exercise and got points. During our final, I noticed how she double-checked her answers and made sure she included everything –she double checked with the other student. In this way, cheating is not punished. It is addressed and tied up to social aspects of learning that help improve/resolve the behavior. As Noddings writes: “She meets him as he is and finds something admirable and, as a result, he may find the strength to become even more admirable. He is confirmed.” (Noddings, 474).

Both Freire and Noddings focus on the qualities of the relationship between the student and the teacher. This is what it is fundamental in their pedagogy. Noddings also uses Mayeroff’s description of “identification-with-recognition-of-independence” which is powerful because it refers to the power of liberation inscribed in education as Freire develops it with his emphasis on hope and social activity. It is a social relationship that includes both identification and independence/autonomy (the Deweyan idea of continuum) with a transformative power. Doesn’t it remind us of Vygotsky’s idea of learning a social activity in the interaction with the mentor/teacher and the scaffolding that takes place and the possibilities for growth/learning? Noddings also concludes that through this relationship a higher level of cognitive achievement is accomplished and an ethical society.

Finally, an element that both Freire and Noddings emphasize and which I find essential in its contribution to the joy/happiness teaching generates for both parties involved in the learning process is what Noddings describes as the student’s contribution to caring: “The student may, however, care for the teacher as a person. He may be fascinated by her and hold her in the highest regard. He may be willing to help her with physical tasks and, indeed, to assist her in teaching other students.” (Noddings, 475). Noddings returns to her “metaphor” of mothering to describe teaching fully, by emphasizing how the student’s responsiveness with questions, comments, and cooperation keeps the relationship alive exactly as it happens between the caretaker and the infant’s smiles and wriggles. Freire also emphasizes the contribution of the learner and how he teaches the instructor as much as he/she learns, although she/he is not aware of it (Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 461).

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