

Education, Oppression, and Democracy: A Philosophical Approach to Educational Inequity

by Benjamin Davis

Technology, some say, is the great equalizer in education.¹ That is, technologists suggest computer-based learning generates the proverbial level playing field in public school classrooms, such that each student has access to the same tools and, in this sense, the same academic resources for social advancement. When schools invest in tablets (such as iPads), computers, and software, then, all students—no matter their background—have the opportunity to learn with the same cutting-edge, adaptive devices. In turn, the argument goes, teachers and administrators can track each student's progress, because the software continually collects data on the student and adapts to the student's progress, thereby allowing teachers to provide personalized, differentiated instruction to each student.² In effect, the technologists conclude, computer-based learning is the best way to close the achievement gap.³ And yet, I remain skeptical. Equality in the classroom, I argue, includes more than parity in measured academic performance; indeed, it includes the idea of equality of opportunity in other social contexts, where every person has the possibility to contribute to the community in meaningful ways. In this light, a few questions emerge: Could technology in the classroom provide the means to a more egalitarian society?⁴ Does closing the achievement gap address the major arguments linking public education with democracy and democratic processes? John Dewey writes: "What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy."⁵ My reflections on the educational philosophies of John Dewey and Paulo Freire shed light on the issues of educational (in)equality and the achievement gap in public education, and on genuine social (in)equality, of which educational (in)equality is one part.⁶

As debates about No Child Left Behind and the Common Core suggest, education reformers today

are asking numerous questions: What is the best way to close the achievement gap? (How) can teacher performance be tied to student learning? What is the value of a standardized curriculum? What schools are worth pursuing as alternatives to traditional (and often overwhelmed) public schools? Many attempts to answer these questions assume the need for various assessment measures, and as a result, they reduce the thinking about educational reform to quantitative analyses. Such narrow measures (and the presuppositions upon which they are based) would have horrified earlier reformers such as Dewey, who, as I will explain below, rejected the idea of education as a fixed—and thus quantifiable—end.⁷ And while think tanks, consultants, teachers, and politicians have answered all of the aforementioned questions, they do so rarely (and certainly not prominently) in light of a humanistic educational philosophy. For example, in the midst of the Chicago teacher's strike in 2012, the Heritage Foundation cited the importance of attempting to quantify teacher accountability by arguing: "A good teacher can get 1.5 years of learning growth; a bad teacher gets 0.5 years of learning growth."⁸ I find these quantifications overly simplistic and thus problematic. That is, they overlook the eclectic educational experiences of students and distill them into meaningless terms such as "learning growth." They also misconstrue (or neglect) the broader purposes of education within a democracy. This quantitative approach, I argue, reflects a narrow and myopic vision of education that is also represented in the framing of educational inequality as "achievement gaps," and in the associated popularity of pedagogical strategies that rely upon technologies in the classroom. This framing of the problem, and therefore the solutions posed and the pedagogies implemented, has suffered from limitations in grasping the meaning and real potential of education within a democratic context.

In this essay, I challenge the ideology that education for democratic processes can be

quantified, by turning instead to philosophical inquiry—that is, I move away from numerical data and the frameworks that would produce it, and toward theoretical-practical, philosophically inspired policy reforms in public education. What does it mean, I ask, to be educated in order to be a democratic citizen and thus to share in the equality of opportunity for contributing to the community? This question has been neglected in the majority of contemporary educational debates, and answering it necessitates taking seriously the ideas and observations of philosophers of education. I contend that democratic education ought to be approached and understood philosophically so that we are clear about the foundations of our educational proposals, policies, and practices and have a lucid vision of our aims and purposes. Furthermore, I argue that this philosophical understanding of education displaces the simplifications of technology-based, data-driven metrics, and reveals them to be pseudo-solutions. Instead, it embraces the complexity—the potential for meaningful contribution to society—of each student as an individual and as a human being. Firstly, I critique the current framing of and responses to inequality in public education. Secondly, in view of educating democratic citizens, I closely examine the insights of John Dewey and Paulo Freire in regard to the virtues and ailments of public education today. Thirdly, in light of these philosophical insights, I provide a more comprehensive diagnosis of the crises facing the American school systems, and I suggest that a shifting of frameworks for analyzing the crises in education is required.⁹ Finally, I outline Deweyan/Freirean policy reforms that, I argue, would inspire reflection on, re-conceptualization of, and democratic participation in the primary and secondary public schools, as well as the society more broadly, of the United States.

The Problem of Framing

The contemporary framing of problems regarding educational equity as the “achievement gap” starts researchers, reformers, and politicians off on the wrong foot, as it were. According to this rhetoric, closing the gap would involve African-American and Hispanic students scoring just as well as their non-Hispanic white peers according to current academic measures.¹⁰ That is, when the above framing is

adopted, a solution requires a data-driven answer that is related to measurement in some way: grades, tests, scores, completion rates, etc. This logic—and the reformers, politicians, and technologists who use it—implies both that education is something that can be measured and that it is simple. Education, according to this view, is defined by terms such as “learning growth” and “academic performance.” There is also a second fundamental problem. The rhetoric of “the achievement gap,” drawing on data from measurements to demonstrate this gap, renders “achievement” already understood in a certain sense: high grades, scores, and rates. In other words, in light of such framing, achievement in education is viewed as a fixed end—and, therefore, not as a process. In sum, the frame of the “achievement gap” leads to data-driven solutions based on the assumption that success in education is a static achievement. This framework inherently precludes education from being understood as a process; and, by defining educational equality as equality in measurements, it does not emphasize other aspects of equality, such as those related to teachers, school culture, and the larger community in which education takes place. Solutions oriented around closing the achievement gap—such as technologizing the classroom—can, then, only be pseudo-solutions. In this light, I argue that we need to reframe the problem of education in a democracy so as to avoid misguided “solutions.” In doing so, I will first examine John Dewey’s insights on democracy and education.

Process, Reform, and Democracy: Insights of Dewey

For Dewey, education is not an achievement, but a process that organizes, gives meaning to, and directs experience.¹¹ By noting that education relates to subsequent experience, Dewey suggests that education is not fixed or completed, but rather “a constant reorganizing” of experience.¹² The constancy and activity of education are important; one ought to always be learning actively, for “education is a process of living and not preparing for future living.”¹³ These notions of education were affirmed in Dewey’s later thought. Indeed, in *Experience and Education*, which he wrote in light of critiques of his progressive schools and more than twenty years after *Democracy and Education*, he still describes

education as “an ever-present process.”¹⁴ Deweyan education, therefore, cannot be achieved. To learn, rather, is to be actively and continuously participating in the process of further growth. Put differently, the end of learning is more learning; of growth, more growth; of education, more education.

Importantly, Deweyan education is not only a process, but also “a social process.”¹⁵ That is, it integrates the young into the society, and thus introduces them to the “social consciousness.”¹⁶ Accordingly, a crucial (but not the only) purpose of education involves the enculturation into the aims, habits, and practices of society.¹⁷ For Dewey, there is hope in this process, because it can serve to liberate the young from the past, rather than leading them to recapitulate its errors. In this sense, I argue, Deweyan education is progressive. Dewey claims, moreover, that the direction (and thus the future) of society depends on the education it provides its youth. For that reason, he asserts that “education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform.”¹⁸ As such, education is not only a social process, but it is also a socializing and reforming process.

Dewey’s notion of education has important political implications, viz., that those being educated have a voice in what occurs in their society. In other words, and as he admits, Dewey is describing education in “a democratic community.”¹⁹ Indeed, the above definition of education concluded that the object of education is continued growth; and, if all members of society are to grow as such, the nature of society must be democratic.²⁰ In this light, I will now turn to Dewey’s notion of democracy.

For Dewey, the process of education, the social function of education, and democracy are mutually reinforcing. That is, continual integration into society promotes communal life. “[D]emocracy,” he writes, “is not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the idea of community life itself.”²¹ Thus, the community defines the democracy.²² Importantly, and as aforementioned, Deweyan democratic education applies to all. This, I suggest, is a radical position; it implies that in a democratic society, everyone must have the opportunity for one’s capacity to continually grow. “Democracy,” Dewey elaborates, “cannot flourish where the chief influences in selecting subject matter of instruction are utilitarian ends conceived

for the masses, and, for the higher education of the few, the traditions of a specialized cultivated class.”²³ Instead, the opportunity for personal growth must be afforded to all and a social return be demanded from all.²⁴ There are, indeed, no exceptions. And yet, if majority rule characterizes constitutional democracy in the United States, then what, I ask, of the ruled-over minorities?²⁵ According to Dewey, they ought to receive opportunities equal to those of the majority. To continue this philosophical investigation, I inquire: What would democratic education that purposefully and deliberately accounts for the marginalized look like? To answer, I turn to the educational thought of Paulo Freire.

Oppression, Dialogue, and Solidarity: Insights of Freire

Like Dewey, Freire views education as a progressive and democratic force. Indeed, Freire is a proponent of a democracy that pursues solidarity and equality.²⁶ But modern democracy, I hasten to add, is only *pursuing* equality—there is not yet parity in, for instance, wealth, political rights, or education. In addition, democracy requires freedom, which, like Dewey, Freire argues must be sought constantly.²⁷ Taken in conjunction, the inequality within a democracy and the freedom it requires suggest that certain groups—especially, where majority-rule is present, minority groups—are at a disadvantage. Freire calls these disadvantaged groups “the oppressed”—who, he notes, have internalized oppressive structures and are thus fearful of freedom, even *within* a democracy.²⁸ Importantly, it is the oppressors who initiate the oppressive structure, because they fail to see others as *human beings*. The result is a *violent* structure: i.e., the relationship of oppression is inherently violent.²⁹ But before seeing the possibility for change that lies within this oppression, Freire contends that one must understand one’s historical and political reality. With that in mind, I will now further examine the oppressor-oppressed relationship.

The relationship between the oppressor and oppressed is one of subject and object.³⁰ Hence, and as outlined above, the oppressors’ orientation toward those they oppress is one of violence and exploitation. They also, however, frame themselves as saviors of those they in fact exploit and divide.³¹ Freire labels

this paradoxical presentation “false generosity”—an “attempt to ‘soften’ the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed.”³² In reality, however, this false generosity—this “messianism”—of the oppressor manifests his sense of guilt: the oppressor wants both to perpetuate an unjust social structure and to “buy” internal peace for himself.³³ True generosity, by contrast, consists instead of destroying the unjust social structure; after all, peace cannot be bought; it is experienced in loving acts of solidarity, viz. radical praxis that addresses structural problems, the causes of oppression.³⁴ In this light Freire writes, “The solution is not to ‘integrate [the oppressed] into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become ‘beings for themselves.’”³⁵ But how to transform an oppressive society? Freire’s solution lies in radical education.

Freire asserts that people are conditioned in—but not determined by—their circumstances, and that, if it reflects on these political, social, and economic circumstances, education can liberate people of their conditions. Again, I argue that this transformative education is progressive, insofar as it recognizes the autonomy of students and promotes an audacious and critical curiosity, such that a re-construction of knowledge is possible. Thus, Freirean education assumes the capacity—not the ignorance—of the student, and it fosters a critical perspective toward the growth—the becoming possibilities—of both the world and the self. Like Dewey, then, Freire contends that education “should be ongoing.”³⁶ More than Dewey, however, Freire specifically emphasizes the education of the oppressed.

Because the relation of the oppressor-oppressed is one of subject-object, Freire orients his educational philosophy around subject-subject interaction: dialogue. “Dialogue,” he writes, “is the encounter between men [sic], mediated by the world, in order to name the world,” and it is, furthermore, “the essence of revolutionary action.”³⁷ In dialogue, the actors direct themselves upon an object (e.g., their political reality) with the goal of transforming that reality; and by naming the world, by re-constructing knowledge, dialogue is itself a world-transformative action.³⁸ Thus, Freirean (dialogical) education is a humanizing, subject-ifying, and world-changing process, and it is based on the political hope that,

if implemented, the oppressed can liberate both themselves and their oppressors.³⁹ Either that, or the oppressed are integrated into the current, violent society; neutrality is an impossibility in education.⁴⁰ To confront oppression in our society, therefore, I contend that we must be both active and partial—we must be subjective observers to those who are suffering; they are, ultimately, our fellow human beings and dialogical subjects.

A Theory of Responsible Hope

I have suggested that democratic education be conceptualized, approached, and understood philosophically. I argue not only that this philosophical orientation promotes clarity of educational foundations, aims, and purposes (and in turn proposals, policies, and practices), but also that it refutes the simplistic notions of data-driven, technology-based measurements, proving that they are instead pseudo-solutions. Furthermore, I contend that such metrics attempt to quantify phenomena that cannot be measured.⁴¹ As such, I suggest an embrace of the latent and indeed oppressed potential of every human being to be a co-learner, a partner in dialogue, and a fellow citizen. It is of no surprise, then, that educate relates in etymology to educe, to “direct the flow or course of; to lead or conduct in a particular direction,” and to “bring out, elicit, or develop from a state of latent rudimentary, or potential existence.”⁴² That is, to educate is not to measure or to impose, but to guide the growth of the student. But what would this philosophically informed education look like in practice?

I have found that the framing of “the achievement gap” is itself problematic, because requiring the demonstration of a “gap” through some measurement (e.g., standardized test scores) presupposes that education can be measured. When this is presupposed, “solutions” try to “close” the “gap,” such that both larger contexts (e.g., economic inequality) are avoided and greater potential for democratic education goes unseen. For John Dewey, this wider potential lies in the fact that education is a social process, and thus an engine for progress and reform. But, crucially, for Dewey education functions as a driver for *democratic* social change only when it is afforded to *all*. Here the concern for the oppressed and marginalized enters. In response, as we have

seen, Paulo Freire argues for a dialogical education, based on a pedagogy that respects the student as a co-learner and critical actor in the effort to transform a violent society into a humanizing one rooted in solidarity with others. To do so, both Dewey and Freire suggest the importance of education and, therein, a pedagogical orientation that recognizes and references the capacity and experience of each student. As such, the student is not seen as passive, but rather as socially and politically active.

These conclusions have radical implications in regard to contemporary discussions of education in the United States. If education is an unquantifiable process, then teachers ought not attempt to quantify student growth. If teachers thus re-orientated their aims and praxis, then technological and adaptive “solutions” to “achievement gaps” would be eschewed. (In fact, teachers would no longer conceptualize learning as such, but instead be open to the idea of the student as a social actor to be lead and drawn forth.) In turn, school districts would not have data on the “learning growth” of students, states would not be able to mine this data, and the Department of Education would not be able to make prescriptions based on these metrics. This, some would correctly say, would complicate things.⁴³ Indeed it would. It would force us, as citizens in a democracy, to think of social equality beyond the indices of test scores. It would prevent us from believing that computers and their programs can redress social ills. It would make us reflect more often and more deeply on what it means to have a community of learning; no longer would quantifications speak to “successes” or “failures.” Here I am guided by the philosopher of education Maxine Greene, who cites Søren Kierkegaard living in an age where the “benefactors” tried to assist others “by making life easier and easier.”⁴⁴ Kierkegaard decided, Greene writes, “to make things harder, to create difficulties everywhere.”⁴⁵ In doing so, Kierkegaard, as I am doing here, was responding to the de-humanization of technologization. More specifically, Kierkegaard “saw the individual subsumed under abstractions like ‘the Public,’ lost in the anonymity of ‘the Crowd.’”⁴⁶ In response to this reality, Greene prescribes awakening others to their freedom by communicating to them both their radical freedom *as individuals* and their existence in a world *with others*; these are the con-

ditions in which we must act.⁴⁷ Indeed, the social and educational structures of our world are unjust; yet, we also have a responsibility to others, perhaps especially to the minorities, the marginalized, and the oppressed. And in responding—asking difficult questions, challenging entrenched paradigms, changing public policies, and living in solidarity with others—we work toward the democratic freedom of all.

Philosophical Reform in Practice

At the outset of this section, I want to make clear that a truly Freirean change in the American educational (and thus social) structure implies a revolutionary structural shift in public education. Though I am sympathetic to this radical position, I want to here articulate a vision of pragmatic education policy reform in light of the Dewey’s and Freire’s philosophies of education. While not *per se* revolutionary, these pragmatic measures include elements of Freirean radicalism in, for instance, new, alternative schools and curricula imagined by those who were previously excluded and silenced—students who Walter Benjamin calls “the great transformers,” whose tasks include “cautious and precise but daring applications of new methodologies.”⁴⁸ Ultimately, I contend that pragmatic policy reform is necessary on three *individual* levels: citizen, teacher, and student, and that *praxis* on these levels be realized in steps of reflection, re-conceptualization, and participation. Through these steps, a theoretical-practical alternative in public education emerges.

As citizens in a democracy, we must reflect on our own narratives through questioning: What is our relationship to the unjust, positivistic structures of education in the United States? Do we see ourselves as saviors who in fact are attempting to buy “peace” for ourselves? Do we see education as a way of perpetuating the traditions (and thus the epistemologies, prejudices, and errors of) the past or as a way to liberate the young from our previous limitations? And do we learn from, advocate for, and work with non-citizens, oppressed groups, and the (often-coddled) youth *within* our democracy, such that educational, economic, and political opportunity is afforded to all?⁴⁹ As a result of this reflective questioning, I suggest that we will come to name the world in a way that sees society itself

in process—that the way we frame society and our position therein informs and shapes society itself. The next step, then, is to re-conceptualize our own place as citizens in our society. In this step, we must frame our ontological position as a (non-neutral) *being with* others; this places us *with* the oppressed and *against* their oppressors—both personal and structural. For those who benefit from the status quo, this involves a kind of “breaking” with one’s social class: a “break” that will re-cognize our current educational practices (e.g., looking to technology as a solution, testing students in a way that neglects social and environmental factors, privatizing schools) in a way that attends to them phenomenologically, allowing them *to reveal themselves* as unjust and un-democratic. Here it is important to acknowledge that there is personal risk involved in this “break” of the individual—yet this is exactly the “hazardous self-dedication to learning” that, Benjamin maintains, moves away from “a socially conceived individuality,” away from a violent status quo and toward, I furthermore argue, a being-with-others individuality that sees others as human beings, thus creating difficulties for and “breaks” in oppressive structures of positivism and capitalism.⁵⁰ Indeed, from this re-conceptualization, this re-naming of our world, we citizens will then change our participation in our society. In education, this is a move from a technologizing and positivistic social inertia to theoretical-practical action (itself informed by our reflection and re-conceptualization). The result—seen, for instance, in reformatory measures such as affirmative action and in schools’ hosting community discussions on racism, gender discrimination, and poverty—presents a challenge to the structures of oppression. Thus, and more specifically, the tenor of our national discussion on education policy would change.⁵¹ In both primary and secondary education, we as citizens would enact an end to standardized tests, a refutation of the narrative that we live in a meritocracy, an elimination of vouchers and tax exemptions for private schools, and legislation that prohibits for-profit (charter and other) schools.⁵² Here, by opposing public-private partnerships in public education—including, for example, those made with charter schools by the Walton Family Foundation and other philanthropic organizations characterized by what Freire would call “false

generosity”—I place myself outside of mainstream education reform that favors “school choice” in the United States.⁵³

Public schools teachers also must reflect on their role in shaping the Great Community. To begin, they ought to consider their own love for and knowledge of their subject matter, as well as how they conceive of their relation to their students. What I am calling for, through these reflections, is that teachers re-conceptualize their role to one of non-neutral dialogical activists: that teachers, as educators, seek to educe the inherent potential in *all* of their student-citizens in a way that challenges the errors of the past as well as the unjust structures of the present, and to do so in a way that presents themselves as co-learners in the process of social progress. In turn, this re-conceptualization would inform teachers’ participation in society. They would move away from technological “solutions” in their classrooms, opt-out of standardized tests, pursue their own robust intellectual lives, and, crucially, they would be advocates for the reform of the education of teachers in their own states. It is in this latter point, by calling for *structural* reform in the *education of teachers*, that I again separate myself from mainstream education reform. Indeed, through reform at the state level, I argue that teachers and other citizens could shift the way public school teachers are educated. In order to promote the intellectual lives of our teachers, through advocacy and referenda, citizens could change the nature of teacher’s colleges in each state. For example, in regard to curricula, students desiring to be primary and secondary school teachers could be required to study not “education,” but a discipline (e.g., Mathematics, English). Furthermore, I suggest that the requirements for would-be teachers to pass in their discipline be strengthened: by graduation, public schools teachers ought to publish two articles in undergraduate journals, attend two conferences in their discipline, and pass comprehensive exams based on reading lists similar to (though with less rigor than) those in graduate school.⁵⁴ These structural reforms would improve the teachers’ ability to name the world, and thus to participate in a broader process of opportunity for their students. In addition, it would redress some of the disparity that is caused by elite private schools’ employing of teachers with graduate degrees from prestigious colleges and

universities while public schools employ teachers from local, state-funded schools.⁵⁵

Finally, I contend that students, too—as citizens and dialogical subjects—can direct outcomes in education. Here, too, by including the *students themselves* as reformatory actors, I diverge from the education reform mainstream that focuses almost exclusively on voters, policy makers, and teachers. Through reflection, I argue, students notice that their experiences and perspectives are relevant to the process of (Deweyan/Freiran) dialogical education, and that they are indeed capable contributors to this process. In turn, I argue, students begin to re-conceptualize their role in the classroom—from receptacles of information to drivers of social change informed by their personal growth and continued learning. Consequently, the practice of students will change: seeing their education as connected to their experience, they will abolish the dichotomy that suggests curricular and extra-curricular learning; they will demand access to teachers who view students as subjects in a world-transformative dialogue, and who can interweave their own mastery of subject matter with the experiences of the student. As such, students will participate in their society as citizens, supporting reforms that move policies away from positivistic metrics, technologized practice, and myopic pseudo-solutions, and calling for rhetoric to match reality in a way that addresses their own social, economic, and political opportunities. It is in this dialogical and subjective social participation of the students, I argue, that the lines between citizen, student, and teacher blur, and that we begin to see the emergence of a democratic society for *all* in our country.

References

¹ E.g., the Kathy Wyer writes, “Technology, both high and low, has become a great equalizer.” “The Great Equalizer,” *Teaching Tolerance*, December 8, 2014 <http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/number-19-spring-2001/feature/great-equalizer>.

² This is known as “adaptive learning,” defined as “data-driven tools that can help [teachers] mold coursework around individual students’ abilities.” Paul Fain, “Intel on Adaptive Learning,” *Inside Higher Education*, December 7, 2014, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/04/04/gates->

[foundation-helps-colleges-keep-tabs-adaptive-learning-technology](http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/04/04/gates-foundation-helps-colleges-keep-tabs-adaptive-learning-technology).

³ According to the K-12 education newspaper of record *Education Week*, “The ‘achievement gap’ in education refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students. The achievement gap shows up in *grades*, standardized-test *scores*, course selection, dropout *rates*, and college-completion *rates*, among other success *measures*. It is most often used to describe the troubling performance gaps between African-American and Hispanic students, at the lower end of the performance scale, and their non-Hispanic white peers, and the similar academic disparity between students from low-income families and those who are better off.” “Editorial Projects in Education Research Center. (2011, July 7). Issues A-Z: Achievement Gap. *Education Week*. Retrieved December 7, 2014 from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/achievement-gap/>. Emphasis mine.)

⁴ Martin Luther King Jr. called this more equal and thus more just society the “beloved community”; and, in contrast to the idea that a solution could be imposed, he thought the community’s realization must be internally driven, requiring “a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.” James M. Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.* (New York: HarperOne, 1986), 58.

⁵ John Dewey, *The School and Society*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1900), 3. Henceforth TSS. It is worth noting that numerous executives of technology companies send their children to schools with limited uses of technology. See Matt Richtel, “A Silicon Valley School that Doesn’t Compute,” *The New York Times*, December 10, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/23/technology/at-waldorf-school-in-silicon-valley-technology-can-wait.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

⁶ Furthermore, there has been much recent scholarship suggesting that social inequality in the United States has reached such a level that it threatens democracy. In citing a number of books on this topic, a recent article in *The New Yorker* comments, “[T]oday’s left doesn’t engage in dissent; it engages in consent, urging solutions that align with neoliberalism, technological determinism, and global capitalism:

'Environmental despoiling arouses righteous eating; cultural decay inspires charter schools...the cri de coeur against alienation surrenders to the triumph of the solitary; the marriage of political and cultural radicalism ends in divorce.'" Jill Lepore, "Richer and Poorer," *New Yorker*, March 16, 2015, 31. In this light, the insights of Paulo Freire, as we will see below, are especially important.

⁷ In a reflection on his ideas about education reform, Dewey writes: "The lesson for progressive education is that it requires in an urgent degree, a degree more pressing than was incumbent upon former innovators, a *philosophy* of education based upon a *philosophy* of experience." John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Touchstone, 1938), 29. Henceforth abbreviated EE. (Emphasis mine.)

⁸ Lindsey Burke, "Chicago Teachers: All About Avoiding Accountability," *The Heritage Foundation*, <http://www.heritage.org/research/commentary/2012/09/chicago-teachers-all-about-avoiding-accountability>.

⁹ As a recent article in *The New York Review of Books* (Jonathan Zimmerman, "Why Is American Teaching So Bad?") indicates, these crises include the lack of intellectual pursuits, in general, of public school teachers. Additionally, Paula Freire writes, "Teachers who do not take their own education seriously, who do not study, who make little effort to keep abreast of events have no moral authority to coordinate the activities of the classroom." *Pedagogy of Freedom* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998), 85. Henceforth abbreviated PF.

¹⁰ An obvious problem with this argument is that, strictly speaking, the achievement gap could be closed if the scores of non-Hispanic white students *decreased*.

¹¹ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1916), 76. Henceforth abbreviated DE.

¹² *Ibid.*, 76.

¹³ Larry A. Hickman and Thomas M. Alexander, eds., *The Essential Dewey, Volume 1: Pragmatism, Education, Democracy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 230. Henceforth abbreviated TED.

¹⁴ EE 50.

¹⁵ DE 99. This phrase is also used to describe education in TED, p. 230.

¹⁶ DE 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ TED 234.

¹⁹ DE 100.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ TED 295.

²² Dewey elaborates on this idea in "Search for the Great Community," from *The Public and Its Problems*. He outlines two principle conditions: first, that one's intelligence must allow one "to engage in political affairs"; second, that there must be "general suffrage, frequent elections of officials, and majority rule." TED 298. The potential tension between the political engagement of all and majority rule is of special interest to this thesis vis-à-vis the work of Paulo Freire (see below).

²³ DE 192.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 122.

²⁵ This was an important question to James Madison: "When a majority is included in a faction, the form of popular government, on the other hand, enables it to sacrifice to its ruling passion or interest both the public good and the rights of other citizens." How, then, to render the majority "unable to concert and carry into effect schemes of oppression"? In contrast to Dewey, Madison called for a republic and *not a democracy*. *The Federalist Papers* (New York: Signet Classics, 2003), 75. Henceforth abbreviated TFP.

²⁶ PF 99.

²⁷ Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 1993), 29. Henceforth abbreviated PO.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 29, 55. Freire writes, "[T]he oppressed are not 'marginals,' are not people living 'outside' society. They have always been 'inside'—inside the structure which made them 'beings for others.'"

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁰ Similarly, Lenin offered “Who? Whom?” as a definition of political science, meaning that someone (subject) will dominate another (object). “Politics,” *Oxford Reference*, December 12, 2014, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191735240.001.0001/q-oro-00008442>.

³¹ PO 126. Although beyond the scope of this thesis, this notion of “saviorism,” or what Freire calls “messianism,” is relevant in contemporary discussions on education in humanitarian and “development” work. (See, e.g., William Easterly, *The White Man’s Burden: Why the West’s Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.)

³² *Ibid.*, 26.

³³ *Ibid.*, 126.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 27, 127.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁷ PO 69.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 68, 69. Freire writes, “There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world.”

³⁹ Importantly, Freire argues that the oppressors cannot be liberating. See PO 26.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 16. “What is my neutrality,” Freire asks us all, “if not a comfortable and perhaps hypocritical way of avoiding any choice or even hiding my fear of denouncing injustice. To wash my hands in the face of oppression” (PF 101).

⁴¹ Here I point to a recent essay by Leon Wieseltier in *The New York Times*. “[T]he discussion of culture,” Wieseltier writes, “is being steadily absorbed into the discussion of business. There are “metrics” for phenomena that cannot be metrically measured. Numerical values are assigned to things that cannot be captured by numbers. Economic concepts go rampaging through noneconomic realms: Economists are our experts on happiness! Where wisdom once was, quantification will now be. Quantification is the most overwhelming influence upon the contemporary American understanding of, well, everything. It is enabled by the idolatry

of data, which has itself been enabled by the almost unimaginable data-generating capabilities of the new technology. The distinction between knowledge and information is a thing of the past, and there is no greater disgrace than to be a thing of the past.” “Among the Disrupted,” *The New York Times*, January 7, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/18/books/review/among-the-disrupted.html>.

⁴² “educate, v.,” OED Online. March 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/>

⁴³ The French mystic and philosopher Simone Weil writes, “Nothing is so clear and so simple as a row of figures.” Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots*, trans. Arthur Wills (London: Routledge, 2002), 44.

⁴⁴ Maxine Greene, *Landscapes of Learning* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1978), 161. Also, in regard to “benefactors,” see note 52 below.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ For Freire’s ontology, see PF 58. Our being, he reminds us, is a “being with.” That is, we are with others.

⁴⁸ Walter Benjamin, “The Life of Students,” in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 1913-1926 (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 41. Henceforth abbreviated TLS.

⁴⁹ As a recent article in *The Atlantic* points out, American youth are being sheltered from purportedly dangerous ideas well into college. See “The Coddling of the American Mind,” *The Atlantic*, September 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/09/the-coddling-of-the-american-mind/399356/>.

⁵⁰ TLS, 42, 38.

⁵¹ “[T]he fundamental problem,” William Deresiewicz writes, is that “we no longer believe in public solutions.” See his excellent “The Neoliberal Arts: How college sold its soul to the market,” *Harper’s Magazine*, September 2015 <http://harpers.org/archive/2015/09/the-neoliberal-arts/?single=1>.

⁵² For a refutation of the illusion that we live in a meritocracy, see *The Economist’s* “An hereditary

meritocracy” and “America’s new aristocracy,” both from January 24, 2015 (<http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21640316-children-rich-and-powerful-are-increasingly-well-suited-earning-wealth-and-power> and <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21640331-importance-intellectual-capital-grows-privilege-has-become-increasingly>).

⁵³ According to its website, in 2014 alone the Walton Family Foundation invested more than \$200 million in K-12 education in the United States. In addition, student-populated and so-called progressive groups that favor school choice, such as Democrats for Education Reform (DFER), turn out to be more right-of-center than their names imply; in the case of DFER, this includes beings partially funded by Wall Street hedge fund managers (see former Assistant Secretary of Education Diane Ravitch’s comments on DFER in her post “Texas: How to Buy Education Policy” at <http://dianeravitch.net/category/democrats-for-education-reform/>).

⁵⁴ As the president of Bard College writes, “No... teacher who does not experience criticism and evaluation by peers of his or her own written work deserves the right to assign a paper to a student.” Leon Botstein, “The Love of Learning,” <http://www.bard.edu/about/loveoflearning/>.

⁵⁵ See Richard C. Sha and Eliza Woolf, “The Private High School Option,” *Inside Higher Education*, January 17, 2011, https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/on_the_fence/woolf_on_careers_in_private_schools.