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DIALOGUE: THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN FREIRE AND VYGTOSKY

By

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ABSTRACT

DIALOGUE: THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN FREIRE AND VYGOTSKY

By

Sandra Ferraz de Castillo Dourado Freire

This study is a comparison between the ideas of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and the Russian psychologist Lev S. Vygotsky. Through an autobiographical perspective, the study contrasts Freire's pedagogical approach with Vygotsky's theory of learning, as they were experienced in two different teacher education programs.

The study selects equivalent aspects from both theorists, which guides the construction of the text around the notion of semiotics, culture and consciousness. Through this tripod he study analyses components involved in Freirean-based and in Vygotskian-based classrooms.

The interception of the application of their ideas unveil a common ground based on Marxist influence. Both acknowledge (i) a similar educational sequence in which learning evolves from the social to the individual plane and (ii) the role language plays as mediating social interaction and as mediating the process of thinking. This common path leads to the final claim that addresses the complimentary potential that exists between both educational tendencies. Because Freire's focus is on social action while Vygotsky's focus is on social thinking, teachers can benefit from the two approaches by promoting higher levels of thinking at the same time that empower student to overcome oppression.

To my parents

Novel and Teresa

To my mentor

Pe. Firmino Dalcin

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Writing a thesis involves much more than an individual effort. It actually goes beyond the writing itself, finding inside the hearts of people the nourishment for the most insightful ideas and the most powerful learning. Thanks to this people, this study has been a fruitful learning experience.

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INTRODUCTION

The first question during the very first meeting of one of the courses in my Mater's of Literacy program was, " **What is literacy?**" I tried to answer to the person next to me in my very rudimentary English, "literacy is an extension of the way we read and write what we see." Astonished, by the end of my talk, my peer asked. "What do you mean by what we see?" I tried to keep as concrete as possible because I really didn't have a response with complex explanations yet. I replied. Literacy is the way we see things, the world (big word, who can recognize this borrowing?). She nodded hopelessly but I was actually the hopeless one. I was away from the academic community in which I used to share a common discourse (ideas, influences, meaning). Now I was an outsider into another academic community where I would have to learn their own discourse to communicate. I realized that I was face to face with the challenge of **reconstructing my definitions**.

The next task of that same meeting was to answer a question from the Fall/97 Comprehensive Exam. We were asked to write about **authors and theories that have influenced and change our view of teaching and learning/literacy**. It couldn't be more challenging and this is exactly what I began to write:

> *I am trying to recall names and works that have influenced me in my thinking and in my practice in order to answer this question. While I do this theoretical recapitulation about my practice in the literacy education field, I find myself matching figures and situations that I had met once as a formal knowledge, through reading. listening, experimenting, as well as through action and interacting with others. These are the foundations of my practice,*

though I am not able to recognize them all as isolated sources. The reason is because they were transformed during my learning process and at some point, they all became mixed together in the inner part of myself, changing not only what I think, but also how I think, what I do and how I do it. . . . As seen, I recall authors not only in the education field, but in a way, all of them have to do with the way I changed my view of the worked, the view of myself, and consequently, my practice as a teacher. Of course there are many other authors that(...) I ended up incorporating their thinking into my practice and their practice into my thinking (...) This process is not over yet.

. .

In that evening I realized that I had to **redefine my constructs** as well. It was the beginning of a process that last until now. A process which consists of a constant reevaluation and reconstruction of beliefs and practices.

So, what I have here in my thesis is an examination of my experience in elaborating my concept of literacy. It was also a reflection that took the shape of a dialogue between the two Sandras, and her two main pillars of influences. It was a dialogue between Freire and Vygotsky.

I became interested to know more about Vygotsky and Freire and their theories faced to some similarities in the application of their ideas as I experienced them in two different teacher education programs. First, in the teacher education program in college at the University of Brasília; secondly in the graduate program at Michigan State University. I wanted to find out what was the "it" in Vygotsky's ideas and in the socio-constructivism, predicated in my graduate education that sounded somewhat similar to the Freirean pedagogy and the philosophy underneath Freire's literacy instruction approach that I had been exposed during my teacher education in college. Therefore, I

became strongly motivated in finding a common ground between them that would give me a more solid foundation to base my practice as a teacher and as a learner.

Throughout the readings I encountered three big ideas that were foundations to both theories: consciousness, culture and semiotics/language. Then, I decided to rehearse the answers to some research questions that kept changing on me, due to the unfolding insights I got after each reading. It was during that time I spent to answer those questions that I realized that those concepts would not be complete until I addressed their practical uses/application as well. That's when my teaching and learning history came into play as an important role in this search. As a participant-observer in two teacher education programs I bring examples of my former Freirean formation and to my actual constructivism experiences, I could contrast the two theories. By looking at concrete examples, I could decide which aspects had influenced me the most and how.

Finally, I decided to focus on Freire and Vygotsky's best matching legacy to today's teaching and learning approach: dialogue and reflection. My research question was finally worded as *what role does dialogue play in instruction within a Freirean perspective and within a Vygotskian perspective?* Through looking at the way dialogue was incorporated by each of them, I would be able to see the theoretical concepts of consciousness, culture and semiotics/language reflected in the practices teachers enact during instruction. In Freire, these aspects are problem-posing, process of knowing, limit situation and the process of conscientização (including the levels of consciousness). In Vygotsky, his thoughts are represented by problem situations activities, the theory of

mediation, the zone of proximal development and the process of internalization (with the stages of cultural development).

Thus, dialogue within the instruction brought up elements on each side that enabled me to see in a clearer way where the intersections between the both approaches to education were set, and in which sense my own practice was a synthesis of them. In this sense, through the pages that follow, dialogue plays the role of unfolding aspects of both theories and it is present in within the components that constituted the intersection between the two theories, assuming indeed a secondary role.

Part I draws on the influence of Freire, which is illustrated with autobiographical examples and also with examples of Freire himself, while Part II ties Vygotsky's ideas around Book Clubs. The text in this part, at certain instances tends to dialogue back with the Freirean aspect as a way to stress the conversational activity in which I was engaged while uncovering and connecting Vygotsky's ideas. Part III, however, presents the most relevant part of my thinking: the way their ideas interact. It present points of intersection while comparing selected components of both educational applications.

PART I

A Freirean-based class

If you came to see me in my college years, you would have walked down the Faculdade de Educação corridor, stopped at one of the classrooms, opened the door and seen a large room with glass doors on the back of the room. A chalkboard would have covered the whole width of one of the walls, all sorts of class work would have been posted up on the other walls, and you would have observe a couple of questions on the chalkboard. In the middle of the room, there sat students and instructor in a circle. Monday mornings I was there with my baby by my side, sleeping or giggling in his little portable cradle. Once in a while Wilma brought her girls, who liked to draw and play by the glass doors. Few of us were already classroom teachers. Some of my other peers did other things for a living. Our discussions started out smoothly. We had a topic and a couple of readings had been assigned. The instructor often threw out provoking questions here and there to heat up the conversation. Questions may have been about the dichotomy of education in Brazil, learning theories and practices, or the process of literacy. Lessons were often prepared and presented by students in what we called seminars. I remember the day Tania's groups gave us an egg inside a little bag to keep for a week. There we were at the end of that week: reflecting on our experience with the egg. This was a typical reflective assignment that served as metaphors for the issue we were discussing. Eventually, students divided into small groups and the discussion continued. When we got involved, it was hard to be neutral. Discussions were often loud. We would laugh or cry because many times questions posed existential issues that cut to

the heart. There was stress on being critical, on being able to uncover constructs behind reality and name the ideologies behind our educative practice. I was learning to see and speak with ruthless clarity.

There you have a rough picture of my teacher education experience in college at the University of Brasília. I tried to portray the various elements involved in this and in any educational experience: social context (population); learners and instructors roles; teaching strategies; instructional topics (objectives); purpose for that kind of education (goal); and the learning involved (knowledge). Most of professors advocated a pedagogy based on dialogue and reflection by problematizing learner's reality. These elements are also present in what has been known world wide as critical education, spread during the second half of the twentieth century, most precisely after 1970, and generally associated with the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. In order to better understand Freire's influence in my teacher education program at the University of Brasília, a little bit of a historical background comes is needed.

Indeed, the University of Brasília was created in the sixties right after the inauguration of the new capital, Brasília. It was a period in between dictatorship regimes. As a fruit of an utopian era, the epic construction wished to build the foundations for the society of the future, based on democratic values and on the socialism ideals emergent among artists and intellectuals at that time. National education was moving away from the dichotomy (education for the rich X lack of education for the poor) that reigned since the Portuguese colonization. Educators like Paulo Freire, Darcy Ribeiro and Anísio Teixeira, leaders of the popular culture-education movements that emerged in this milieu,

advocated a new definition of education based on humanist and existentialist constructs. They influenced the organization of the public education system in the new capital and the philosophy of education predicated at the University of Brasília (which is a Federal institution). Even though most of these leaders were thrown in exile after the coup et d'etat in 1964, and their projects ceased, they came back with a more mature definition to help rescue the democracy in the country after the Militar regime. Meanwhile in the institution, those ideals remained only as a hidden part of the theoretical constructs of many educators, because the dictatorship repressed any liberating practice-- you will see how this impacted the practice of scholars later on: it created a culture of the word. The democracy was officially reestablished in 1986.

In the early nineties, when I attended the teacher education program at the University of Brasília, I experienced an academy still in the process of reconstructing the foundations of its identity. There I experienced different teaching styles and different ways of presenting the instructions. But among them, as I tried to represent in the description, there was a fairly common tendency to promote conversations and reflection in the classroom. Which made me inquire, What are the assumptions behind the teaching and learning experience based on conversations? What is involved in a classroom dialogue? What roles teachers, learners, content knowledge play within a dialogue based instruction?

As a matter of fact, dialogue and reflection is not a new learning strategy. In antique Greece, Socrates had a teaching style that consisted of a conversation with his pupils based on questioning. He predicated that knowledge could only be constructed by

the learners themselves. Teacher and learner had the same status as knowledgeable beings, and it was only through an active dialogue which had questioning as main engine that enabled/activated an individual's own process of knowing. He widely used the posing question technique not only for teaching, but for questioning every single statement political leaders/philosophers and teachers used in their rhetorical speeches. He proved the power of questioning with his life.

Also, in a powerful manner, Plato acknowledged the political aspects involved in oral and written discourses by believing that messages were always suitable of a naive and a deep understanding. According to him, this understanding depended on the level of one's own background knowledge and self awareness. *True knowledge* could only be revealed by engaging oneself in dialogue, because dialogue implies that the parts (individuals) go beyond the use of memorized and imported knowledge. In other words, he considered a person's knowledge the one that a person carries within its existence and can "defend in face to face dialogue."

Closer to our time, Freire brings a pedagogy that consists of dialogic teaching and negotiated learning. In a horizontal dialogue (a dual conversation) both learners and teachers undertake reciprocal roles of teaching and learning. It is a pedagogy that widely uses the problem posing technique as main engine to foster conscious awareness (critical learning). This educative practice is designed to develop a broader understanding of the self within social settings and to foster a committed practice within a learner's own community. The teaching and learning experience consist of, in Freirean words, a process of active reflection and reflective action. His ideas are the foundations for the critical

pedagogy by advocating a participatory dialogue, self-empowerment, and social transformation.

Banking Education

Within a dialectical perspective (a perspective that considers conflict the central element for change/transformation), in the same way as Socrates beliefs and practice was intended to combat the speech monologue model, Freire's pedagogy was intended to combat the traditional and oppressive teacher centered, skill based model, a model that I personally experienced while in elementary and middle school.

I remember my whole schooling before college, the academic routine was parceled into subject-matters. Each area had its' own topic, and content was taught isolated from the other areas. In middle school each subject matter had a different teacher. Learners were expected to learn from textbooks. Our desks were laid out in columns, distant from the teacher's desk. The talk among learners was not valued; it did not seem right to argue with the teacher for any reason. Teachers had control of the instruction providing us with the "appropriated" content explanation based on her/his own opinion. By receiving information passively, learning consisted more of a form of memorization.

Actually, Freire created a metaphor for the system of education described above. He called it Banking Education. The learner is like a bank account that merely receives deposits. Knowledge is the money, it is the static and decontextualized information deposited into the checking accounts (learners) and it circulates within the bank system in

a way that brings profits to the system owners (dominant class). The teacher is the bank employee who follows instructions for making the deposits.

For Freire, banking education works against humanist ideals and contradicts all values of a democratic society. The banking education theory supports an oppressive pedagogy that assumes that knowledge can be transferred to passive learners; implies on a distance between learners and teacher, and gives a selective and partial explanation of learner's own reality and culture. By not valuing learners' abilities, banking education represses all forms of creativity. Learners are seen as merely reproducers of the models taught. Freire acknowledged that it "has successfully taught sufficient numbers of people to read and write in order to maintain a viable base of both, production and service" (Taylor 1993, p.68), but societies can no longer survive on the back of slavery, dominating its people thought and limiting their creative actions. Freire's pedagogy draws heavily on a denunciation of the notion of banking education.

Political literacy

Thus, Freire's counter-education is the antithesis of banking education. His liberating model is based on (1) the creation of an authentic dialogue among learners and between learners and educators (learners as subjects/agents of their own learning), and (2) the development of learners awareness of their own social reality by examining their current life conditions (learners as objects of learning). Freire's main argument is that only this horizontal dialogue can promote the level of systematic reflection upon practices that leads to a critical consciousness. By dialoguing, people become more knowledgeable

and critical about their own reality, thus liberating themselves from dominant ideologies. According to him, "scientific knowledge cannot be knowledge that is merely transmitted, for it would itself become ideological myth, even if it were transmitted with the intention of liberating men" (Freire 1985, p. 85-86).

Freire's theory had a profound impact in the political domain of the society. His work with the working class and with poor communities in Brazil led him to develop a literacy instruction system (known as Método Paulo Freire) capable of empowering learners against the oppressive conditions in while they lived, conditions determined by the dominant class. He saw that this oppressive social condition was reflected in the illiteracy of the people. In order to dominate, oppressors must deny those they oppress the uses of language in its full spectrum, both oral and written. The oppressed, because they do not develop language according to the dominant standards, are deprived of participating in the broader society equally. Because he considered language a tool for domination, he believed that language (rising literacy) was the main tool for liberating learners from oppression, while promoting a true democratic society.

Semiotics

Freire started to deal with adult education in the late forties when he was the director of a Governmental Professional Institution that prepared people to work in industry, then SESI (Social Service for the Industry). Through SESI he went to one of the institution's unit in a fishery area. After the first meeting with the fishermen, he realized that they did not understand each other's talk. He bought a house by that community and

moved in with his family. For a whole month, he would tag along with the fishermen all day, taking part in their celebrations, meetings, and any social events within the community. Everyday, as he walked with the fishermen, he took notes of words and phrases they used. He would sit and listen their long stories and ask for the meaning of specific words and expressions.

He then started to reflect upon some language problems: syntax, semantic, thought structure, and the symbolism represented in the semantic structure of the fishermen's discourse. He learned to use their same metaphors to speak with them. And, by doing so, he could get not only a better understanding of their thinking process through their narratives, but also, he could introduce to them keys to understand the dominant discourses of Brazilian society.

From a linguistic operation of the learners discourse, Freire turned his investigation into a pedagogical project that started by a study of the community discourse in order to find out the semantics contained in student's own uses of language. It is a bottom-up instruction that helps the learners construct their own learning.

This example illustrates Freire's notion of language. He acknowledges the functional view of language and its socio-political implications. He understood that the social context in which the fishermen's language was embedded (the fishery community) and the traditions created around their common activity (fishing) impacted the way they used (and created) language to understand/explain their own reality.

In other words, Freire acknowledges that the primary function of language is **social:** the fishermen narratives were to communicate their own experiences with one

another, in the same way they were negotiating meaning around events. The secondary function of language is **individual,** it mediates consciousness, i. e., it reveals the way they see their relationship with the world -- which implies on the level of awareness of the relationships that are involved according with the level of abstraction and objectivity in which they are able to explain these relationships. As humans, we use language to interact with one another in order to give/negotiate meaning of social conditioned events. Therefore, individuals can never be understood apart from their relationship with the world (time and place.)

Due to human's sophisticated thinking abilities and their uses of language (in its various forms), they not only differ from animals, but it is also the way they rule societies in a complex manner. For Freire, all kinds of social enterprises/interactions are mediated by language (verbal and non verbal), and the quality of that mediation impacts the relationship between individuals and their surroundings. Language is a cultural and a semiotic mediation device, i. e., language is what regulates and mediates thought and action according to the specific social codes involved in the situation. It is indeed the most sophisticated tool of decoding and making meaning. Freire sees language in terms of its discourses in order to uncover the ideological constructs that socially conditions human behavior.

However, human beings are politically accountable for their language practices, no matter what they are. Freire's emphasis on the relationship among language, experience, power and identify gives weight to the political aspect found in his pedagogies. In order to explain how the epistemic discourse functions, picture one of

those fishermen's social struggle when speaking for himself under a oppressed condition. For instance, let's say he is begging with the person in charge of the fishery unit for some new ropes for his boat. Freire observed that they used the sign structure embedded in semiotic codes that reveals the "episteme of colonialism and white supremacist capitalist patriarchy." The strongest forms of domination occurs with the spread of semiotic codes from the dominant ideology, which makes itself the basis for interpreting all discourses. By doing that throughout the whole sections of the society, the dominator gets to invalidate and to silenced the dominated by misrepresenting the latter's discourse.

> It is Freire's particular strength that he has developed a critical vernacular that can help to translate both the Others experience and his own experience of the other in such a way that ideological representations can be challenged. . . . Freire is careful to make sure his language of translation provides the oppressed with tools to analyze their own experience while at the same time recognizing that the translation process itself is never immune from inscription in ideological relations of power and privileges. (McLaren, p.114).

The sign system

Even faced with their illiterate status, fishermen dealt with everyday literate events involving social constituted traditions around their fishing. They shared meaning, values and codes around the events within their family; within the school; around the fishing activity; when meeting with friends; when attending the church on Sundays, etc. These are called *traditions of mediation*. Tradition of mediation are those in which every one is born into and is embedded on discursive practices that belongs to one specific community. The uses of these codes impact not only individuals' interpretation of the world but also condition one's social action. It is also within traditions of mediation that

the firsts literacy transactions occur. Implicitly in Freire's notion of the power of discourse, it is the notion that literacy is originated in the oral domain. The written word should be an extension of these vernacular practices. After all, the sign system exists as a way to represent and translate into print the meanings of a specific discourse community.

Thus, the sign system plus the semiotic codes "carry prior interpretations since they have been necessarily conditioned by the material, historical and social formations that help to give rise to them." (?) In other words, every symbolic representation is synthesis of the relationship between society/social group and specific context (direct experience) in which it was historically created. Through a Marxist concept of infra and superstructure, Freire perceived that those relationships occur in different levels throughout the society. For instance, the uses of a specific tool may bring a socio-political meaning beyond itself, that designates the character of the social condition of its user within its corresponding historical context. Semiotic codes are present in everything human create. From bricks to books, each tool designates specific individual-social relationships that are conditioned historically. Those relationships imply on specific uses of language, on a specific discursive practice.

Indeed, what Freire saw within the discursive practice of the fishery community was the power differentiated between the vernacular and the dominant oral discourse; it resided in the specific uses of the language semantically and syntactically. Thus, he understood that the fishery community's social condition was affected by the lack of literacy ability that would enable them to function within other discursive domains. Therefore, only a high literate person would be able to stand by her/himself against

domination to speak in the discourse of the dominator, and use its metaphors and constructs. Language and the sign system constitute a form of social and cultural criticism, in which all knowledge is fundamentally mediated by linguistic relations that inescapably are socially and historically constituted.

Unlike Plato or Socrates, for whom writing is static, Freire developed a much broader perception of writing. He takes writing into a dynamic dimension, that designates multiple possibilities of relationship. For him, when someone interacts with sign system (inner condition to humans within and with society), one is recreating a meaning conditioned by one's own background and by the situational context of the moment. Due to socio-historical conditions, individuals' perception of their world is always changing, and it is different each time individuals interact with text (even with the same piece). For each time, new relationships and connections can be established according to one's own level of self-awareness of this experience as a social act. To develop a critical consciousness is to assume readers' role as an active part of the word and the world, i. e., one is responsible for one's own actions that intentionally or not, has a social impact. We are in constant interaction with the other (personally or virtually) mediated by the word/language, independent of the level of this relationship.

In the case of the sign system, there are different levels of relationship. Going back to Plato's perspective, the "serious" writing is the one written with knowledge, i. e., ideas must be sustained with arguments constructed within various layers of abstraction in which "only the more skilled readers can interact with it." Literacy is seen through Plato's perceptive as both a liberator and as a weapon for domination.

Freire acknowledges that one's interpretation of a text and sign system may result on a form of domination. For him, the "interpretation of a text always has a self-interest and that it has a political dimension, an assertion to power" (Freire 1997, p.235). He objects messages with intention to dominate or oppress, he objects the uses of literacy that privileges someone, a class that evokes dominant power. The empowerment and liberatory aspect in Freire that condemns any anti-democratic relationship is present in the way he teaches people to read and write.

Actually relationship is an important notion in Freire's approach to reading and writing. For him, a printed word is not static, and it holds no absolute meaning in itself. The text comes alive when in interaction with the reader. This one interprets the text according to her/his own knowledge, and not with the knowledge of the text. Just like the way we use the words to convey meaning in oral. In the same way as we "re-say" and "re-phrase" ourselves when engaged in an oral dialogue, for Freire, written word has also the potential of being "re-interpreted", "re-told" what has been written. The relationship between person and text is what changes with the whole context, not the written words themselves.

Consciousness

Consciousness is the major and fundamental construct behind Freire's theory and his literacy instruction approach. He has a holistic perception of human beings by looking at the individual through all interrelationships that take place among human condition: relationship between individual-nature, among individuals, and between individual-

cultural instruments (tools.) He developed a deep concern with the functions of consciousness and how individuals make use of semiotic devices in order to make sense of the world and behave in society. By considering language the most sophisticated human device, word meaning plays an important role in the overall of his philosophy and his instructional approach, because it is the way to develop learner's into critical consciousness.

The Church and the definition of Conscientização

Between 1964 and 1978, all popular initiatives were repressed in Brazil. As any non-democratic regime, the government centralized all national decisions. In the educational field, the government released projects like MOBRAL to be implemented nationally. It was a program that, in short, was used as to counter Paulo Freire's literacy instruction. It was in this milieu, during about 15 years of hard repression, that sectors within the Catholic Church tried to keep some popular work committed with the political education. This work was also done within catholic schools' students organizations, that gradually recovered its strength after 1978.

For highschool (1985-89), I attended a private Catholic school which offered a program designed to prepare teachers for K-4 Elementary. Teacher education classes stressed the importance of considering the needs and interests of students as part of the ideal teaching. There I was first exposed to concepts such as students as subjects, as the ones responsible for the action of learning, while the teacher was the problematizer of the learning topics. The first thing that we, student teachers, had to acknowledge when

planning a lesson was the elaboration of the problem situation that would enable students to connect with the content. At that point, those concepts sounded so new for me, whose own classroom experience was based on the Banking education theory. Reflecting back on the contrast between the two realities made me ponder what was behind *students needs and interests; the problematizer teacher; problem situation.* If we acknowledge that the teachers graduated in these programs were to start working in rural or "inner city" schools, by focusing on students needs and interests and by problematizing their life situation, means re-rising the foundations for a political education again.

It was during this period that I also got involved with Catholic youth activist groups. Pe. Dalcin, a local priest, and a group of nuns from the high school I attended, advised and sponsored those groups. They hosted our meetings and oriented our projects with poor communities. Because of the Militar regime, those Catholics institutions which kept developing social liberation practice, worked with discreteness. So, most of our meetings consisted of an agenda that spanned the trivial to the polemic. Within this context I was first introduced to a model of informal education based on dialogue and reflection, which goal was to develop political consciousness.

In the 1980s, with the end of the Militar regime, Brazil met a renewed movement for the national consciousness and political commitment. For instance, I remember a class type meeting in which Pe. Dalcin was explaining the concept of *conscientização* for youth groups. At one point, he wrote on the chalkboard: conscientização = consciência + ação *(conscientization = consciousness + action).* It was a pedagogy based on three main

principles: see, judge and act. I was taking part in the recovering process of revitalizing popular education movements that had been repressed since the coup et d'etat in 1964.

In order to understand Freire's notion of consciousness, it is necessary to understand the meaning of the word *conscientization* (from the Portuguese *conscientização*) and its uses. In the Portuguese, the word *conscientização* differs from the word consciousness, although they are parts of the same process. While the terminology consciousness can, semantically, be defined as a sense of one's personal or collective identity; or a special awareness of or sensitivity to a particular issue or situation, Freire believes that consciousness is the way that enables individuals to relate with the world around them. It is a way of perceiving and understanding one's own surroundings. It is the flow of information that takes place between the inner and the outer of one's own mind. It is the path through which one withdraws from one's own mind and enables to project one's own mind towards/upon the surrounding world.

Thus, *conscientização* refers to the action of becoming conscious, or the action of activating consciousness. Freire, however, expanded the meaning and uses of this terminology. In his thought, conscientization is the whole pedagogical process which implies on providing individuals opportunities to reflect upon their own existence which results in a commitment with social change. I.e., this process involves the development of individuals self-awareness accompanied by a social transformation/transforming action. Himself defines *conscientização* as the critical development of the consciousness seizure, i. e., *conscientização* transcends the spontaneous perceptual stage of intellectual awareness, to foster into a critical stage, able to recognize objectively the world/particular

situation through an epistemological perspective of knowing. According to him, while consciousness is set within intrapsyche conditions - processed internally, inside the individual (determined by an ongoing and mutual relationship with social instances), *conscientização* emerges from the action of actually transforming the surrounding world, according to the readiness of the consciousness. In other words, it is the act of becoming conscious and, therefore, having internal conditions to support individual actions, that impacts one's will of establishing new relationships with a particular situation.

Conscientização **and praxis**

In order to explain the process of *conscientização*, Freire imports the word *praxis* from Hegel and Marx to stress the relationship between one's own thoughts and practice. Praxis, which is the combination of reflective activity with one's own actions, is an essential concept in the process of becoming conscious. Therefore, he views human existence holistically as a task of praxis.

In whatever manner, his concerns of the social aspect of the consciousness focus much more on the social conditions: "*conscientização* refers to learning to perceive social, political and economic conditions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality." (Freire 1987, p.19) In the social dimension, *conscientização* enables individuals to take critical decisions considered by the ability to perceive reality objectively and the self as epistemological being (praxis) committed with the well being of the broader society. The politico-economical dimension refers to when the transforming action faces the social structures that cause any form of oppression upon the

individual. So, by understanding individuals epistemically, i. e., valuing the historicity and socio-cultural conditions and own praxis, Freire explains that:

> consciousness is viable only because men's consciousness, although conditioned, can recognize that it is conditioned. . . . A [human] act upon the world effectively, transforming it by their work, their consciousness is in turn historically and culturally conditioned through the inversion of praxis. According to the quality of this conditioning, men's consciousness attains various levels in the context of cultural-historical reality." (Freire 1985, pp.70-71)

Levels of consciousness

Freire identified different levels of consciousness, according to its manifestation through the many ways of interacting with reality, and it is conditioned by the socio-historical context in which it takes part. He first introduced this analysis when talking about **the culture of silence**. The culture of silence is the dependent part of the greater social context, which reflects of the powerful relationship between the dominator and the dominated. In a classroom in which the teaching and learning experience is the one acknowledge in banking education:

"To understand the levels of consciousness we must understand cultural-historical reality as a superstructure in relation to an infrastructure."(Freire 1987, p. 32). Consciousness acquires a historical-cultural configuration through the Marxist concepts of superstructure and infrastructure and the relationship between them (including men's dynamic role) toward a total understanding of a greater whole (culture).

a) The semi-intransitive consciousness: In closed structures, individuals are immersed in their own condition and the manifestation of their consciousness "cannot objectify the facts and problematical situations of daily life."(Freire 1985, p. 76) Individuals

actions are focused on meeting the challenges of their biological needs and organic factors. Their perception of reality lacks a sense of historicity, and they do not understand problems beyond their immediate world. Therefore, there is no commitment to self existence because they delegate the explanation of their reality conditions to external factors. They feel victims of the society's structures, remain passive to any external action.

b) <u>The naive transitive consciousness:</u> It is when people still like fabulous explanations for the concrete reality but they start to find arguments that explain the problems related to their world based on the values of a social group. These arguments are weak, however, and can not sustain a position or an opinion and can not explain objectively the reality and the conditions in which people live. Usually, arguments and reasons are mounted upon someone else's ideas. They easily become victims of ideologies and are easily controlled by group leaders, who often are the manipulative character while the mass remains on semi transitive or naive transitive state of awareness. It is a pessimistic view of the present. They usually complain about their present life condition but are not aware of the process of individual change because they do not acknowledge the contradictions that permeate existence. On the other hand, it is also a type of consciousness very characteristic of the emergence of popular masses, provoking conflicts with the elite mass. The contradiction generated in this stage, gives a start on the historical transition, to social engagement. This stage enables people to become politically active and to generate critical consciousness among the engaged.

c) <u>Transitive consciousness:</u> It refers to the political responses to a new consciousness; a critical kind of thinking, by which individuals assume their epistemological role in their process of seeking of their own identity within the broader context. See the relational factors that shape the reality. They question current representations of the reality and search for the factors that influence and condition it. According to Freire:

> Critical consciousness is brought about, not through an intellectual effort alone, but through praxis—through the authentic union of action and reflection. . . Engagement and objective distance, understanding reality as object, understanding the significance of men's action upon objective reality, creative communication about the object by means of language, plurality of responses to a single challenge – these varied dimensions testify to the existence of critical reflection in men's relationships with the world, Consciousness is constituted in the dialectic of man's objectification of and action upon the world. Yet consciousness is never a mere reflection of but a reflection upon material reality. (Freire 1985, p. 69)

It is also interesting to note that the promotion from one level to another level is conditioned by historical and social factors as well. While the transition from the first stage to the second is given automatically according to the promotion within the economical standards of the community, the second to the third level is only possible

through a specific educational action. That's why Freire focus his educational approach on the promotion of the critical consciousness. That is his goal.

Critical consciousness and scientific knowledge

As seen in his pedagogy, being critical is being able to articulate scientific knowledge in order to support one is self against any act of domination. Scientific knowledge is the kind of knowledge essential to the process of *conscientização*, once it reveals the condition of a group or community. Therefore, scientific knowledge can only support the liberating act if it is related to a social situation, not to an isolated individual phenomena: "*Conscientização* refers to [the perception of] social, political, and economic conditions and [it disposes an individual] to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire 1987b, p.19.) Scientific knowledge finds its strength when used within its social dimension.

Limit-situations

People just develop into the critical stage to Political literacy when, as subjects individuals are able to transcend their individualistic perception to a broader perception of reality, and acknowledge the limit-situations that they need to withdraw from in order to "become more human." Limit-situations are, indeed "problematic and conflict circumstances which call for a resolution. They are challenges to further growth . . . to develop one's potential in several dimensions (language, self, and social participation)" (Schipani 1984, p. 4.) In sum, Freire refers to limit-situations when pointing to any

oppressive conditions that limit one's experience within society. In this view, illiteracy was the limit-situation that set the frontier for people among the fishery community.

Dialogue and consciousness

According to Freire, dialogue is the mediation factor for the process of conscientization and for the act of knowing. His approach to consciousness raising is characterized by a horizontal dialogue, which he calls the true dialogue, among learners and instructor. The dialogical dimension of his approach reflects Freire's democratic assumptions that permeates his pedagogy, by considering learners ability to express themselves (needs, interests, tendencies) through speech/talk within the community. In his belief, only through a systematic dialogue can learners reach the discourse of power, politically speaking, by developing metacognitive strategies built upon their own individual discourses. The democratic foundation of this pedagogy is extensively developed in his writings and speeches. There, the most important element for democracy is listening and considering others, which leads to the concept of citizenship: inspire individual commitment to the well-being of the society.

Culture

First of all, Freire differentiates ourselves from animal because of our ability to make culture. He uses the word culture to refer mainly to our reality, to our surroundings and to the conditions in which we are born. In fact, Freire's view of culture is completely engaged with his view of consciousness. It is impossible to understand one concept

without considering the other. His concerns for education for the consciousness, taking off from understanding human action in the world epistemically, directs his perception of the use of culture. He begins with the premise that humans exist in and within the world, which explains his anthropological perspective on human condition as a natural and social being in the making of their own history. He views any human activity as embedded in cultural meaning, and men/women perform in their surroundings as objects and subjects of the aims of their social values. "Because he considers the social plane comes prior the individual plane, in order to get to the individual identity, there is a need to rescue the cultural identity first" (Gadotti 1996b, p. 583).

Freire defines naive or critical consciousness according to people's relationship with surroundings and with others. While the latter group is capable of using scientific knowledge that requires elevated degrees of abstraction and the ability to use a powerful discourse to explain reality, the former group is not able to rely on such abstract concepts. However, either in naive or critical understanding, actions within society are perceived through the notion of culture.

Thus, culture refers to all human manifestation in the world, including all sorts of action (behavior) and production. The notion of culture ranges from the engagement into activities that involves a simple tool creation to activities that involves a most abstract thinking mode. Because of his dialectical view between the consciousness and the transformation action of the reality, his thought draws heavily in the integration of theory and practice, study and action.

Cultural Action

In Cultural Action for Freedom, for example, the concept of cultural action is understood as all sorts of relationships across the different classes of society, and actions that may work either for the freedom or for the domination of its people. On one hand, cultural action for domination leads to all sorts of discrimination, and is based on the values of the dominant class through the mere transmission of knowledge. It is characterized by vertical relationships in which the dominant class rules through an abstract knowledge which is not related to people's practices. Education operates on the banking metaphor and is committed to cultural action for domination.

On the other hand, cultural action for freedom leads to a democratic cultural action while considering each individual epistemically, i. e., the knowledge involved is the one based on people's daily practice. It is characterized by a horizontal dialogue that promotes a systematic reflection upon those practices in order to develop a higher level of thinking. By dialoguing, people become more knowledgeable and critical about their own reality, thus liberating themselves from dominant ideologies.

> The fundamental role of those committed to cultural action for conscientization is not properly speaking to fabricate the liberating idea to invite the people to grasp with their minds the truth of their reality. Consistent with this spirit of knowing, scientific knowledge cannot be knowledge that is merely transmitted, for it would itself become ideological myth, even if it were transmitted with the intention of liberating men. The discrepancy between intention and practice would be resolved in favor of practice,. The only authentic points of departure of the scientific knowledge of reality are the dialectical relationship between men and the world, and the critical comprehension of how these relationships are evolved and how they in turn condition men's perception of concrete reality. (Freire 1985, p. 85-86)

Thus, Cultural Action for Freedom leads to a political literacy while considering the dialectical aspects of knowing, which presumes a dynamic relation between subject and object through reflection upon reality/ a specific situation. "In humanistic terms, knowledge involves a constant unity between action and reflection upon reality . . . Like our presence in the world, our consciousness transforms knowledge, affecting on and thinking about what enables us to reach the stage of reflection." (Freire 1985, p.100)

Consciousness, culture, and literacy

Thus, Freire's literacy instruction is a cultural action for freedom, conceived in opposition of cultural action for domination. "We wish to design a project in which we would attempt to move from naiveté to a critical attitude at the same time we taught reading." (Freire 1967, p. 123)

> Conscientization occurs simultaneously with the literacy or post-literacy process. It must be so. In our educational method, the word is not something static or disconnected from men's existential experience, but a dimension of their thought-language about the world. That is why, when they participate critically in analyzing the first generative words linked with their existential experiences; when they focus on the syllabic families which result from that analysis; when they perceive the mechanism of the syllabic combinations of their language, the learners finally discover, in the various possibilities of combination, their own words. Little by little, as these possibilities multiply, the learners, through mastery of new generative words, expand both their vocabulary and their capacity for expression by the development of their creative imagination.(Freire 1987a, p. 22)

For instance, picture a classroom designed specially for the fishery community I have been citing using the Método Paulo Freire. Learners would be sitting in a circle talking about a set of illustrations. All samples portray a fisherman, like them, his house and family in different conditions. The coordinator (the mentor, the teacher) leads the discussion by asking 'What do you see? Who made the well? Who made the house? Who

made the boat? Why did he do it? With what materials?' In contrast with questions like 'Who made the tree, the pig, the birds, the sea, the fish?' At certain point the group will construct definitions about nature and culture, clarifying concepts of necessity and work, and differentiating man-nature relationship (transformation) from man-man relationship. According to Freire, the man-man situation can not involve domination or transformation, because "they are relations among Subjects" (Freire 1967, p. 63)

This Freirean-based classroom starts by discussing the object to be known within the social setting of a learner's own reality. Then, through an investigating attitude towards the objects, the discussion evolves through different levels of knowledge abstraction, developing learner's thinking ability towards to a broader understanding of it. His concern is to provide learners with tools, theoretical tools to analyze the ways society validates injustices and inequity through its institutions. His goal is to give maximum strength to the "human potential for creativity and freedom within the oppressive political-economical and cultural structures in the society . . . through the process of conscientization. . . . in which action is based on a critical reflection and critical reflection is based on practical action." (Gadotti 1996b, p.169)

Freire observed similar organization in the learning process development, as stated in *Education for Critical Consciousness*. The process of conscientization considers education more than a transference of knowledge. The learning process evolves from reflections of the immediate contact with the knowledgeable object (learner's practical reality), then the understanding of the system that surrounds object and learner (practical reality confronted with abstract knowledge/theory), which leads learner to a social

engagement involving transformation action(critical consciousness and political literacy).

Thus, he considers the world dynamically "in the making" by critical reflection, transforming action and concrete realization.

> "Our observations lead us to underscore that Freire's great intuition is to have perceived the structural continuity between his literacy method on the linguistic-symbolic dimension and the conscientization process on the level of self and social interaction." (Schipani 1984, p. 42)

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PART II

A Book Club meeting

A few years later, I came to Michigan State. There you would find me in one of the Erickson Hall classrooms. Indeed the classroom's physical environment does not differ much from my previous teacher education class example. If you came on a particular Wednesday evening in the middle of the semester, and stood by the door you would have seen the class dividing into groups and members of the groups exchanging their work, discussing and writing down as they talked. Topics ranged from methods of encouraging emergent literacy, the role of story telling, authentic assessment to a wide diversity of issues around literacy theories and practices. Oh! You certainly would have seen us filling out our own self-evaluation sheets. Our instructor would move around the groups, eventually stopping by each group, and helping out with some questioning. Although exhausted after a day of work, I bet you would have been able to see wondering, intrigued or surprised faces in the conversation. Most of us were teachers and came to class directly from school. When time was up, all the groups came to a community share. Our instructor often represented students ideas on the chalkboard, giving feedback to every single idea. It could be a simple list, or a web or a concept map, or some sort of framework connecting and organizing our different contributions. The stress was on developing deeper thinking about the issues discussed. I was learning to cooperate in creating educative conversations.

The description portrays a typical routine of a Book Club meeting in one of the courses in my graduate program at Michigan State University. Similar to my account of

my undergraduate experience in Brazil, the Book Club classroom also involves an engaging discussion about topics relevant to teacher education and literacy. Despite contextual differences, dialogue and reflection dominate both classrooms. The Book Club instruction values students' background knowledge and provides a relevant and supportive contextual setting for learning. Students take an active role in the classroom through the peer-led discussions. The instructor's role is a listener who supports students' learning by provoking questions and responses.

Actually, the program promoted a pedagogical practice grounded in the ideas of the Russian psychologist and scientist, Lev. S. Vygotsky. Vygotsky left a legacy from the twenties and thirties that has been reborn in the United States and in several part of the world in the last three decades. It has impacted theories of learning and instruction practice (Soderman 1999; Dixon-Krauss 1996) by valuing learners' backgrounds and privileging their active role in the learning process within a meaningful social context.

Vygotsky was a social psychologist that wanted to prove that meaningful social interactions impacted learning and scaffolded individual development. Vygotsky's notion of individual development transcended and defied the past contemporary notion of conditional reflexes/reflexology. Although he was influenced by the behaviorist school, at the end of his career he had rejected any type of reductionism, specially the view that individual development determined social behavior. For him, the social domain (cultural conditions) was as important for individual development as child's biological/organic (natural) conditions. He believed that a phenomenon must never be observed in isolation from its broader context.

The social functions of language were indeed the primary component for Vygotsky's research in his work for the Leninist Russian State of the twenties and thirties after the Bolshevist revolution (1918), in a period between the World Wars. As a psychologist, his research focused on developing a theory of learning founded on the principles of the Marxism. In a sense, the ultimate goal of his research was to develop highly skilled individuals to be active within society in order to validate the new civic values of the socialist nation. By looking at the learning process through the manifestation of social behavior, he brought a new paradigm to psychology.

The main engine research from which he built his theory is the connection he saw between speech and reasoning. It was by considering the social aspect of language that he and his followers conceived the theory of mediation and the stages of cultural development. These findings promoted a tendency in the educational field to ground instruction in social interaction experiences mediated by language. Many of his findings echo in current versions of social-constructivism, emergent literacy and whole language approaches.

All of these tendencies emerged in opposition of the reductionism models of learning and teaching available in the twenties and thirties. They privilege an integrated curriculum based on the teaching of language. All of them value and promote classroom talk and interactive activities in which reflection has become the newest addition. The following example illustrates these tendencies in general:

When I accompanied my pre-schooler's classroom visiting the dairy farms at MSU, I saw those children learning so many things at once: language arts (learning

vocabulary related to cows/calves and milking, noticing the letters and numbers identifying the cows, "reading" the print in the signs); physical skills (walking through straight corridors, muddy and slippery floor); counting and classification (noticing cows displayed in different sections for different purpose. A just born calf was placed in a warmer spot); using their different senses (noticing particular smell, touching the animals skin, holding cold bars; looking all around; listening for different kinds of "MOOS", they could have tasted milk and cheese that day at snack time); music (spontaneously imitating cows sound and singing songs with cows in it); problem-solving (someone got their head caught up between the bars by one of the gates, children participated actively proposing ways and figuring out how to move the bar sideways); imaginative play (they played around the tractor, climbing in and out, pretending to drive, to be the farmer, etc.); active thinking (talking and questioning throughout the whole trip).

If we agree that *children use all of their senses to learn* (Welty 1984) then we are more likely to acknowledge that my son's experience surely had a bigger impact on his learning than my own when I was a child. As I have said before, my basic schooling took place within a Banking Education teaching and learning experience. In contrast, when you visit a classroom today, you often see children doing much more than individual drills, isolated reading, copying and reproducing. As in my son's classroom example, teaching and learning implies a dynamic and integrated curriculum that values learners' personal background and promotes a social environment that validates the learning experience.

As well as in my teacher education experiences, discussion and reflection have become valuable procedures in regular and in basic education classrooms. Discussions may occur in small groups or in large groups, or in other formats, but it is there as an important part of the learning experience. Thus, we have in Freire and in Vygotsky, legacies that advocate integrated curriculum that focus on the context of learning and on social interactive activities with discussion and reflection as the main engines of the pedagogical process.

By having discussion and reflection as the most important part of its model, Book Clubs seemed appropriated as a truthful educational application of Vygotsky's principles because it promotes a format that privileges talk, stressing the relationship between language development and the thinking process studied by Vygotsky.

The Book Club Project

The Book Club Project was developed by Raphael and colleagues to enhance Student's talk about text by involving methods and strategies in a very dynamic way in order to promote the exchange of ideas within a group, and to stimulate a high comprehension as well as a high level of thinking a subject. The Book Club meeting itself is a student led-discussion about a book or books read by the members of the group. There are three basic components plus instructional settings forming the project: (i) reading: structured around thematic units using related books; (ii) writing: the reading logs consist of a kit of blank pages for picturing ideas and lined pages for written reflections and thinking sheets; and (iii) community share: students publicly share

thoughts before and after book club meeting. Instruction takes place during all the procedures by supporting students and improving talk about books. It might consist of preparation for a discussion or modeling a conversation, but the most important feature is that the instructor has to be aware of the eventual needs and interests emerging from the group during the development of the project.

Indeed, it is a reading program that is based upon Vygotsky's ideas by giving "emphasis on understanding the social organization of classroom interactions" (Moll, 1998, p. 5). Book Clubs are organized around the notion of mediation, interpersonal relations and individual activities. The notion of language as mediation for thinking may be associated with the students-led discussion groups and their discussion regarding books. Also, by creating a context that combines individual learning and social learning, book clubs draw on the Vygotskian concept of the zone of proximal development, which refers to students' proximal level of development – the space that licks just beyond their independent level of functioning, where they need assistance from an adult or more competent peer; it is to be contrasted with their actual level of development (what they can do on their own).

The most valuable aspect of Book Clubs, besides a format that provides integration among all language arts and across curricular areas, resides on the talk propitiated:

> Book Club has been a successful program for my students and I think much of this success comes from the Book Club discussions. It was difficult learning to have a discussion about text without the teacher mediating. Students try to include me in their BC talk at first because it doesn't seem normal to them not to respond to the teacher. Once they understand and develop conversational skills though, they have the

discussion time and they often want to continue into lunch or recess time (Montpass 2000)

As well as in the Book Club example described in the beginning of this section, the program prompts students to relate to the content by establishing meaningful conversations. Contrary to traditional classrooms, instruction now values and counts on students contributions. Through a Vygotskian perspective, we were constructing our own knowledge by giving and sharing meaning over specific content. And, by doing so, we were constructing a kind of talk, a community discourse, that mediated our interactions with one another.

Semiotic Mediation

Actually, understanding the notion of semiotic mediation was, for me as a teacher, one of the biggest gains from Vygotsky's theory. It helped me to build the bridge between the social and the individual learning. In the Book Club's example, the book and, consequently the discussion that accompanies it, mediates the interaction between students. Book Club worked as a good model to illustrate Vygotsky's first premises: (i) that the social plane precedes the individual plane; (ii) and that every human act is mediated by a cultural tool – which leads to his theory of cultural development (discussed later on this section.)

The sign system

The notion of tool mediation, or cultural mediation, is embedded in the notion of semiotics. For instance, the use of the same tool in different settings, or communities,

may imply different social relationships. This is because tools have different meanings according to the different conditions in which they were created and used. The meanings, the codes/values that surround a specific tool change from community to community, which leads us to define semiotics as related to the use of signs by a specific community. As any human symbolic operation, the notion of semiotics is based on sign systems in relationship to different level of abstraction, which imply diverse degrees of mental activity that regulate human behavior.

For example, Cole & Wertsch mention that "Luria observed that the sophistication of the written marks that children make on paper to help them remember a set of objects goes through a microgenentic sequence from iconic mimicry toward abstract summary, even before the children know the conventions of written language." (Cole & Wertsch 1996, p. 5) What Luria observed reminds me of what we now call emergent literacy. The literacy process observed in this child includes an oral universe (listening and speaking) and a sign system universe (reading/writing). With this case, we can see all aspects working for the purpose communication (social function) at the same time that it is causing an impact directly on this child's thought development. S/he is internalizing a specific kind of thinking peculiar to this community as s/he experiments the action of writing with the desire of explaining the world around her/him (individual function). It is not a linear, fragmented and isolated process. To the contrary, s/he is immersed in a holistic process because I doubt that s/he has been exposed to each of these human features in isolation. But if s/he were engaged in the same activity within another cultural setting, the meaning conveyed would have been different.

The semantic aspect of cultural tools (considering language a cultural tool) is a notion that I experience myself, as a bilingual person learning a third language. Literary translation among languages do not necessarily translate their semantics/meaning. In this sense, I understand the signs as the cultural values and codes generated within a specific community/culture. At the same time, they are used for social interaction/communication and for conveying one's own thought. Through a Vygotskian perspective, they have a social and an individual function.

As human beings, we are also part of the animal kingdom and we share with animals the need of using signs for survival. Once animals organize their societies with the use of signs, from the most instinctive animal hierarchies like ants and bees societies, to more cohesive and productive societies like monkeys, apes and gorillas animals communicate instinctively among themselves by signs. However, humans go beyond the use of signs for communicating instinctively. Humans are capable of using signs to communicate intentions (social function), which means that the use of signs by humans is related to human's thinking abilities (individual function).

Cultural tools

Because humans have very sophisticated thinking processes, they are the only species to create and use **tools** (artifacts) to organize societies. Moreover, humans created symbols to represent not only the tool itself, but to represent human relationship with it, the activity in which the tool was conceived and designed. Symbols understood in this relationship, may be able to refer to the most concrete and observable to the most abstract

and complex non-observable behaviors. It means that, behind the specific purpose of the concrete signs that guide human activity, exist an abstract meaning that has a psychological function. That is where the concepts of semiotics enters the picture.

Vygotsky and Luria, when discussing the functions of tool and symbol in child development, observed:

> Nowadays psychology has begun to realize that growth processes alone do not account for the whole complexity of child development; what is more, when it comes to the most complex and specific forms of human behavior, growth, in the literal sense of the word [meaning the botanical/natural aspect of growth], while remaining an element of the process of development, is but a subordinate factor. The processes of development display such complicated qualitative transformations of one form into another, as Hegel would say, such a transition of quantity into quality, and vice versa, that the notion of growth cannot be applied. (Veer & Valsiner 1994)

Thus, according to this statement, I come to understand once more that they believed that the meaning making is the utmost important feature of human behavior that permeates and conditions the ways in which signs and tools are used. By taking in account the contextualized social environment in which tools are used, Vygotsky's develop the concept of cultural tool. Cultural tool has an important role in understanding semiotic mediation, especially when talking about psychological forms of behavior. More specifically, in their study of speech (the external, observable aspect of language) as a psychological tool in the construction of individual consciousness, Daniels observed that "the social does not become individual by a process of simple transmission. Individuals construct their own sense from socially available meanings . . . Changes in social circumstances (particularly patterns of communication) give rise to changes in the patterns of construction." (1996, p. 10)

> Meanings, tools and goals all necessarily relate the individual and the social world of which the individual is part, for they are all formed in socio-cultural context. Understanding the use of tools (psychological or physical) is jointly constructed by the developing child and by the culture

in which the child is developing, with the assistance of those who are already more competent in the use of those tools and in culturally appropriate goals. These units of analysis therefore integrate the micro-social contexts of interaction with the broader social, cultural and historical contexts that encompass them. (Tudge and Winterhoff 1993, p. 67, as quoted in Daniels 1996)

"(They) . . . direct attention to the ways in which activity is structured differently across contexts. If cognitive development proceeds through the construction of meaning from activity, an understanding of the cultural structuring of activity is crucial to an understanding of the ways in which meanings evolve differently in different contexts. (Bidell 1992, p. 313 as quoted in Daniels 1996, p. 19)

In a more complete sense, semiotic mediation imply not only on the notion of a tool mediating social interaction, but also imply on the meanings the tool itself conveys in relationship with its context. Thus, the notion of semiotic mediation enriches the uses of the book within Book Club in a sense that provides learners with opportunities to negotiate and construct meaning. It promotes learning experiences based on the relationships the students establish with the book and with one another, and it addresses both the "individual and the social world" in which the student resides.

Language as a cultural tool and a semiotic device

For Vygotsky, language is a cultural tool and therefore, a semiotic mode of mediation. He relies on two semiotic potentials in human language: "a potential for decontextualization and a potential for a kind of linguistic contextualization, or re-contextualization. The first is tied to his account of abstract word meaning and concepts, and the second is tied to his account of inner speech." (Cole & Wertsch 1996, p. 43).

Egocentric and inner speech are important concepts in understanding Vygotsky's explanation of the social origins of individual mental functioning. First of all, there is an external form of speech: "Its external form reflects the fact that the child has not fully differentiated this new speech function from the function of social contact and social interaction." (Wertsch, p. 57) Then, there is an egocentric form of speech, which is a speech form found in the transition from external to inner speech, the latter being what enables a child to engage verbally with others. It is the form that "enables humans to plan and regulate their action and derives from precious participation in verbal social interaction. . . . The primary function of speech , both for the adult and for the child, is the primary function of communication, social contact, influencing surrounding individuals" (Daniels 1996, p.57)

With his interest in analyzing the mental processes, he considered language, particularly speech, an extension of the consciousness and a window to its functions. With a Marxist orientation, he took the word meaning as the cell, the microstructure of consciousness acting directly within its social connotation. Taking Marx's method of socioeconomic analysis, he considered the word meaning as a unit for analyzing consciousness, preaching that *the word is a microcosm of consciousness that reflects all its aspects.* As Wertsch mentions, "he viewed the word as capable of reflecting the [dynamic] inter -functional organization of consciousness instead of individual mental functions." (1985, p. 194)

Culture

The notion of culture in Vygotsky is drawn from Marx's historical materialism of social organization through Hegel's dialectical framework. It is related to the dialectical concept of interaction between man and world in the social plan. Most specifically, his concept refers directly to the quality of mediation of such interaction. The notion of culture in Vygotsky particularly refers to the uses of those tools made by humans, and how their social implications shape individual's internal development and the mental process. Luria is the one who explains that:

> In the complicated inter-relations with his surroundings, his [man's] organization is being differentiated and refined; his hand and his brain assume definite shapes, a series of complicated methods of conduct are being evolved, with the aid of with man adapts himself more perfectly to the surrounding world . . . [including] that social change of civilized forms and methods with help the child in adapting itself to the conditions of the surrounding civilized community. (Veer & Valsiner 1994, p. 46)

His concept of culture relies on the concept of mediation. In fact, Vygotsky developed the concept of mediation in a more complex way than he did culture. In his thought, culture is understood within the concept of the mediation act. As Wertsch acknowledged "neither Vygotsky nor his followers provided extensive accounts of the notion of culture. An explication of Vygotsky's notion of culture must be based on an analysis of the role that culture played in his overall theoretical system." (1995, p. 61) The notion of mediation, however, plays a fundamental role in his research about how cultural tools shape intelligence and consciousness. Cultural tools are artifacts that serve specific social functions. Their studies focused on what kind of structural connections are made through analyzing the interaction between the organic individual being and his

artifactual social environment. For them, this interaction implies constant mutation in

individuals' behavior. There is first what they called interpsychological category, which is

the social experience. Then, there is what they called intrapsychological category, which

is the mental process itself, this is the internalization of behaviors. The latter determines

his up-coming social enterprises because it impacts directly action within the

environment. The notion that the social plane precedes the individual plane in terms of

internal development rests on Vygotsky's suggestion that humans are never as

autonomous and as free of outside interference as it might at first appear. Instead,

> human mental functioning, even when carried out by an individual acting
> in isolation, is inherently social, or socio-cultural, in that it incorporates
> socially evolved and socially organized cultural tools. . . .The word social
> when applied to our subject has great significance. Above all, in the widest
> sense of the word, it means that everything that is cultural is social.
> Culture is the produce of social life and human social activity. That is why
> just by raising the question of the cultural development of behavior we are
> directly introducing the social plane of development." (Vygotsky 1981,
> p.164)

Thus, the social plane is not only a fundamental role in Vygotsky's uses of culture, but it

is also the foundation for his approach to individual development. Perhaps this is the

major contribution of Vygotsky's thought to the field of human science. It is not really

surprising given his view of culture within social context. But the turning point, what

contradicted specially the western individualist psychological approaches, is his uses of

culture in order to explain the formation and development of the individual mental

processes. For him, the way individuals appropriate cultural tools in a social setting is

critical to the way the internal processes develop. To be more specific, internal functions

develop according to the way the mediation of cultural tools and signs (language, sign system) takes place within social and cultural interaction.

It is important to stress before, however, that cultural tool also accounts for habits and all types of social behavior. With this notion in mind, cultural development will then relate to the process of mastering behavior and habits in order to develop higher mental functioning. Because it is a dialectical process, it shapes not only the thinking abilities, but social abilities as well.

Vygotsky and his followers developed a mesogenetic method (which considers development as a process) based on the Marxist microgenetic research models in order to study the development of higher mental processes in individuals. The microgenetic research refers to the study of a single cell/structure that belongs to a bigger cell, but it does not mean that the cell/structure has to be isolated to be studied. The mesogenic principle is to approach this cell/structure by analyzing its relationships with its surrounding cellular environment.

> The application of this method becomes possible (a) in the *analysis* of the composition of the cultural method of behavior, (b) in the *structure* of this method as a whole and as a functional unity of all the components processes, and (c) in the *psychogenesis* of the cultural behavior of the child. . . . [There is] a genetic relation between certain structures of cultural reasoning and behavior, and the development of the methods of behavior. (Veer & Valsiner 1994, pp. 62-70)

The scientist is also a part of the equation. S/he might propose tasks and might get involved along with the child/patient. It is also called historical-genetic method because it investigates cultural behavior from a historical point of view, i.e., looks at "the very

process of formation of the highest forms of behavior, instead of investigating the functions already formed in its developed stage." (Veer and Valsiner 1994, p.70) For Vygotsky and his followers, no functions are ever seen as fixed structures. Functions and behaviors change. A dynamic relationship exists between external behaviors and individual's internal functions during the process of mastering methods for solution of the problems in the social surrounding. As Vygotsky himself stated, "the cultural-historical development of psychology goes along the path of cultural methods and habits; the history of culture starts with a primitive outward technique and ends with a complicated psychological technique." (Veer and Valsiner 1994, p. 53)

To better understand the cultural historical perspective, Cole explains Vygotskian mediation using a transformative metaphor:

> it included the cultural mediation as a central focus and served as a juncture where natural and cultural processes are joined to create specifically human forms of action. . . . This juncture point is in the mediated act. Vygotsky (1929) wrote that the mediated act (A-X—B) consists of two simple reflexes, A-X and X-B. These elements are, he argued, in the quality that emerges when they are combined. To capture this quality he depicted the familiar triangle:
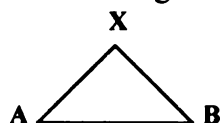
> A is an action on B that incorporates X as its means. Mediated action mixes the natural and the artifactual; the relations of its parts are explainable in natural science terms, but the emergent property of their combination is not. It is a qualitatively unique form of thought and action, a hybrid of phylogeny and culture. (1996, pp.2-4)
> It is important to remember the difference between the two notions of behavior,

natural and cultural. When studying the cultural development of a child, natural behavior refers specifically to organic functions that makes uses of very concrete and basic tools

for interacting with one's surroundings. Cultural behavior occurs when a child makes use of complex methods and sophisticated tools such as signs and other abstract tools in order to interact with the surroundings. Children's cultural development, thus, is a process that involves mastering cultural and psychological methods. "First, there is natural development, which is closely bound up with the processes of general organic growth and the maturation of the child. Second, there is cultural improvement of psychological functions, which involves working out of new methods of reasoning, and mastering the cultural methods of behavior." (Veer & Valsiner 1994, p. 57)

The theory of cultural development

By looking at the different methods a child uses to solve a problem, observers can establish phases of cultural development according to reliance on a various reasoning methods and tools employed. These phases were defined as pre-instrumental, pseudo-instrumental (magical) and the real instrumental.

First Stage (primitive/natural behavior): introducing the task to a child. It refers to the process of recalling the data supplied, which will depend on child's attention, amount of memory and interest in the topic.

Second Stage (naive psychology): searching for a method: this is a transitory stage in which the child searches for solutions to the problem. S/he can either discover some mnemotechnical methods using her/his own natural memory resources or, facing the lack of it, ask for assistance. S/he will grasp the suggested method very

quick, "only the difficulties which the child meets on this path bring her/him to the second stage." (Veer & Valsiner 1994, p. 64)

Third Stage (the external cultural method used to solving the trick): It is not observable and it takes a short time. The child replaces the process of memorizing by a rather complicated external activity (creation, new associations and new forms)

Transition from the third to the fourth: when the external becomes an internal/ingrown activity.

Fourth Stage: "after mastering the structure of some external method, [the child] constructs the internal process according to the same type" (Veer & Valsiner 1994, p. 66) This is the stage in which the transition from internal to external speech takes place.

What is important to keep in mind about the concept of cultural development in Vygotsky's studies is that "[it] does not create anything over and above that which potentially exists in the natural development of the child's behavior. Culture, generally speaking, does not produce anything new, apart from that which is given by nature." (Veer & Valsiner 1994, p. 59)

Consciousness

It was Vygotsky's concern for the origins of language that led him and his followers to focus on the problems of thinking and speech and of the origins and functions of consciousness. He understood the formation of higher mental functions and consciousness by looking at the relationship between the internal and external factors that

involved the human behavior, i. e., observing the relationship between human action and cultural signs –note he uses the notion of cultural mediation in order to explain mental functions. He considered the dialogicality and *polyphony* in consciousness by believing that signs in consciousness precede its "genuinely reflexive strata", i.e., before every human action a meaning must have been internally mastered in the first place. A meaning that he preached to be originated through social interaction.

Because Vygotsky and his followers viewed any mental function always in relationship to human activity, the context in which individuals participate in activities play an influential role in activating mental activity. However, just asserting the relationship between individuals and the environment is not enough to understand Vygotsky's concept of mental function. For that, we must add his concern with the cultural signs that mediate this interaction, the so called psychological tools and technical tools. That is how semiotics came to play the most important role on Vygotsky's research, especially on the last third of his life. Speech is what mediates different levels of thinking. However, it is important to note that it is not the tool or the sign itself (I understand that later on Vygotsky conceived every tool to be a psychological tool due to its contextualized use) that conducts to a higher function, but the triadic relationship among mental processes, physical activity, and the whole external context (social and natural.)

Due to the fact that consciousness, as an internal non observable function could not be measurable, Vygotsky's foundation for understanding consciousness relied in its socio-cultural constructs: he viewed "consciousness as the objectively observable organization of behavior that is imposed on humans through participation in socio-

cultural practices. . . Although Vygotsky's texts do not explore the concept of consciousness extensively, by the end of his life he understood consciousness broadly as the subjective reflection of material reality by animate matter" revealing a strong Marxist influence. (Wertsch 1985, p.187)

As Daniels accounts of Vygotsky highlights, Vygotsky's focused on the social origins and the social nature of higher mental functioning and the uses of culture as a way to intercept the structure and functions of consciousness. The social origins of individual mental functioning is explained by Luria as "the highly complex forms of human consciousness [goes] beyond the human organism. One must seek the origins of conscious activity . . . in the external processes of social life, in the social and historical forms of human existence." (Luria 1981, p. 25)

Although Vygotsky acknowledged different types of consciousness, his "primary concern was with uniquely human forms of reflecting reality that emerge in a socio-cultural milieu. . . . Vygotsky's understanding of human consciousness is that humans are viewed as constantly constructing their environment ant their representations of this environment by engaging in various forms of activity." (Wertsch 1985, pp.187-188).

The dynamic organization of consciousness implies a mutual transformation caused by the interrelationship among all components of thought, both horizontally and vertically. Due to his developmental/genetic approach, he thought that each component had different functions in different level of development – of the young child, of a more mature child and of an adolescent [what about adults?]. "Thus, instead of focusing on static structures, Vygotsky emphasized change, transformation, and dialectical negation

as inherent aspects of the organizational principles of human consciousness." (Wertsch 1985, p. 191)

Therefore, consciousness awareness- or self-reflection, for example, is just one of its possible modes. Wertsch explains that "it is a form that exists when consciousness itself becomes the object of consciousness" (1985, p. 191) which we would, in today's parlance, label metacognition.

In both, Vygotsky and Freire, the uses of the term reflection do not refer to a "passive reception of data . . . [but] is just as much concerned with the organism's active transformation of reality and representation of reality" (Wertsch 1985, p. 188)

The theory of activity

According to Wertsch, Vygotsky was heading in the right direction by assuming a direct relationship of the word with both thinking (internal: meaning) and speech (external: sound), i. e., the word as a semiotic mediation of human consciousness, but "it [the word] is not a unit for analyzing human consciousness itself. . . [By taking the word as a unit of analysis], Vygotsky failed to provide an adequate account of the natural line of development, and he failed to specify what it is that is transformed by social forces [the cultural aspect of it]" (Wertsch 1985, pp. 196-197)

Therefore, still recalling Wertsch, Vygotsky's study of semiotic codes are reduced to the functions of the intellectual part of the consciousness. That fact opened space for criticism and dualistic interpretations because his study of word meaning did not explain

adequately the relationship between natural and social forces of development. Wertsch criticism is that:

> word meaning is not really a unit that reflects the interfunctional relationships that define consciousness. . . . but rather if we took a tool-mediated action, would better define Vygotsky's notion of consciousness as a dynamic organization interfunctional relationships. . . Just as word meaning transcend the boundary between individual and social, so does action. . . . [However] word meaning (or any other semiotic unit for that matter) is a unit of semiotic mediation of mental functioning, not a unit of mental functioning itself. (Wertsch, 1985, pp. 206-208)

Since Vygotsky did not reach the point where he could explain "how human consciousness is related to social institutional forces" (Wertsch 1985, p. 210), it was left to followers such as Wertsch to extend beyond Vygotsky's studies to draw upon the social processes. While looking at structure of human activity/labor within the system of social relationships and social life settings, he acknowledges the Leont'ev's theory of activity, which emerged from Vygotsky's studies as a more adequate unit of analysis for consciousness. Wertsch claimed that activity transcends the word as unit, because it better extends the genesis of Vygotsky's thought concerning the inter-functioning of thought and material between internal and external functions; between the inorganic(thought) and organic body(things man produces). The word, in this case, is part of this bigger spectrum of human behavior. The most important characteristic of an activity is that "it is a socio-cultural interpretation or creation that is imposed on the context by the participant(s)." (Wertsch 1985, p. 203)

PART III

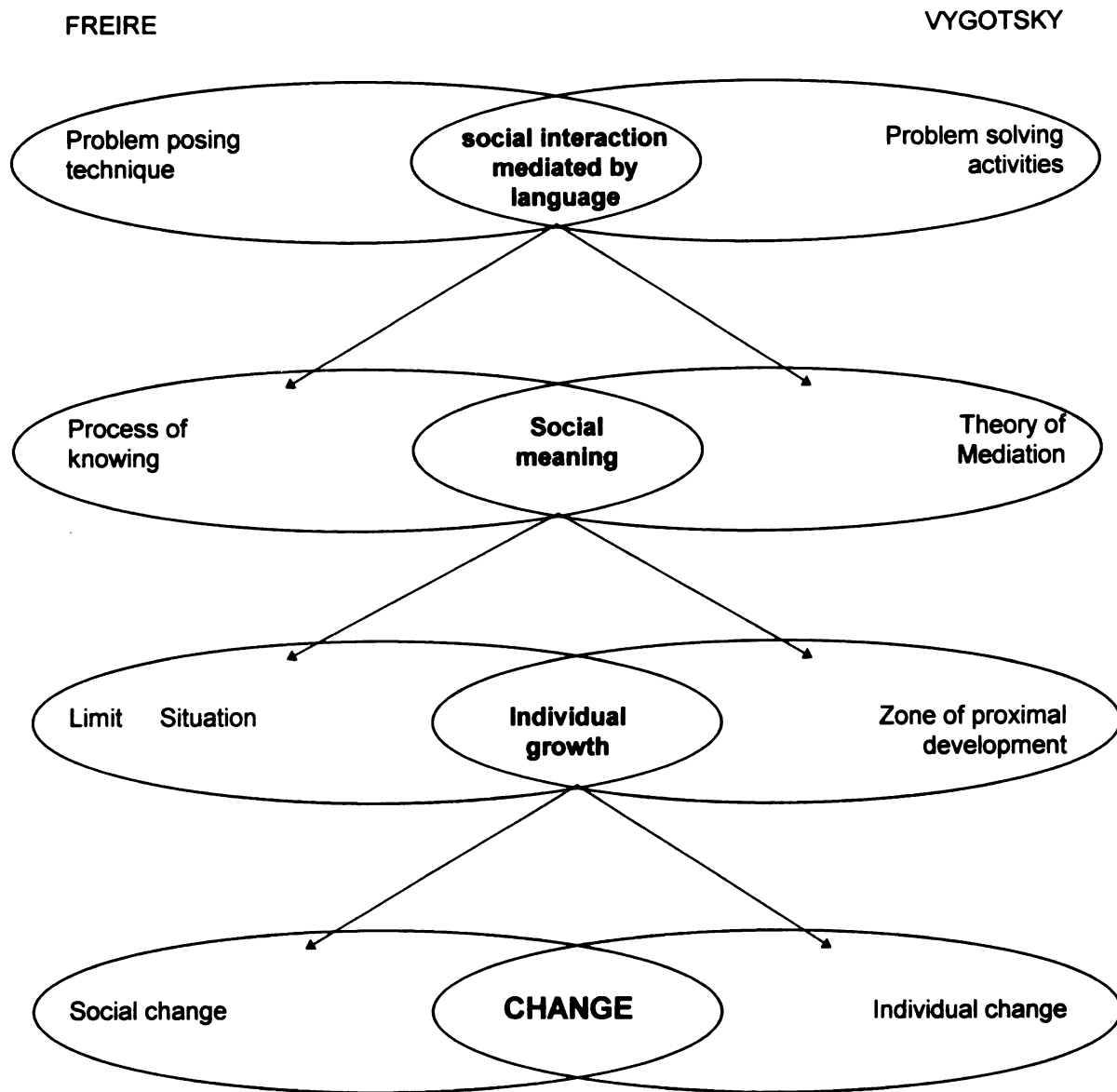## The intersection between Freire and Vygotsky

When I finished compiling the data for this paper there were many things that still needed explanation, especially regarding the comprehension of Vygotsky's theory. Even though his findings, like the notion of mediation and the stages of cultural development, were important I was puzzled while trying to understand the goal for education within Vygotsky's perspective. Among my data, I found a note to myself (August/99): *It is not clear to me their view of "man": Why did they (Vygotsky and his followers) want humans to develop those higher thinking abilities for? What kind of "man" did they want for that society? What was their main social need? What were the social ideals this learner would have to implement/work on in his/her society?* At that point, I was still interpreting Vygotsky through a Freirean perspective which considers learning as a process that takes place as a collective experience and implies on a social change. I could not understand how learning could be a goal in itself if it didn't imply on any social action beyond it. However, it was by understanding Vygotsky through the perspective of social psychology, which focus on the study of the mind *in* society, that I would be able to create an intersection between those two educational tendencies.

Freire's pedagogy provides me with tools for managing cultural diversity and students with different background knowledge in the classroom by accepting students the way they arrive in the classroom. If we fight for an authentic learning, authentic mediums, authentic assessment, it is important to consider learners in their authenticity, the integrity of their identity. Problem-posing, process of knowing, limit situation, and social change,

are pedagogical components that give emphasis on learning as a collective process that leads to a social action committed with the change of the conditions that surround the group of learners.

However, Vygotsky's learning theory provides me with tools to address learning diversity by promoting interactive activities adjusted to their individual learning level, by using a mediation tool, by working within learners' zone of proximal development, and by expecting them to show learning over a period of time.

Recalling the situations described in the Freirean-based class and in the Book Club meeting, I selected those components from Freire and Vygotsky's theories in order to illustrate their pedagogical representations as I drew intersections to illustrate how I saw them connecting. As a result, I found not only points of intersection, but also a path in common, mediated by dialogue, that presents the following dynamic: *social interaction mediated by language > social meaning > individual growth > change*.

FREIRE   VYGOTSKY

```
  ⬭ Problem posing        ⬭ social interaction      ⬭ Problem solving
    technique               mediated by               activities
                            language

  ⬭ Process of            ⬭ Social                  ⬭ Theory of
    knowing                 meaning                   Mediation

  ⬭ Limit   Situation     ⬭ Individual              ⬭ Zone of proximal
                            growth                    development

  ⬭ Social change         ⬭ CHANGE                  ⬭ Individual change
```

In both teaching and learning experiences examples, the first point that I identify

is a **social interaction mediated by language.** In a Freirean perspective, **problem posing**

is indeed a technique that propitiates knowledge to emerge from a collective stand point.

The discussion starts (and evolves) by problematizing aspects of our daily lives. As I said

earlier, *when we got involved, it was hard to be neutral. Discussions were often loud, we*

would laugh or cry, because many times questions posed existential issues that cut to the heart.

In a Vygotskian perspective, more specifically in the example of the Book Club, the **problem solving activity** takes the shape of a reading activity that promotes student interaction with the book, both socially and individually. It is indeed a sequence of systematic activities that integrate all language arts skills. Note that the problem posing technique must have a goal implicit once it focuses on the action of discussing the problem. While in a problem solving activity must present clear objectives in order to the activity be successful. These two concepts, action (goal) and activity (motive) were developed by Leont'ev and his theory of activity.

In conversation, learners negotiate **social meaning,** in accordance with their individual prior knowledge and cultural background and the contribution of their peers. In a Freirean-based classroom we generated knowledge by discussing the social meaning of *an egg inside a little bag* [that we kept] *for a week. By reflecting on our experience with the egg* we were learning to be critical first of all with ourselves, by looking at our own relationship with the knowledgeable object. In this sense, the **process of knowing** was a collective act: we shared our ideas by adding our perspectives and complementing each other's discourses while generating a collective consciousness. In Freire's process of knowing, learners are subjects and objects of the learning themselves. As a matter of fact, *Lessons were often prepared and presented by students in what we called seminars.* Learners and teachers traded roles as a way to say that we were all teachers and learners at

the same time, without considering the teacher's expertise. Within Book Clubs, however, we constructed knowledge by interacting over a cultural tool: the book/text **(the theory of mediation)**. The essential part of this interaction between learner and book was mainly individual – reading and writing, but supported by the group within the small group discussions and community share. It was a format that actually allowed us time to process information and to draw some conclusions. The learners would develop their own perception of the subject through inner dialogue, to share with the group.

The process of negotiating the possible meanings of a learning situation through an engaging dialogue, must create opportunities for learners' **individual growth**. In Freire, the dialogicality that existed between learners and teacher, between listening and speaking the word, between theory and practice, was always pushing us to transcend our own limitations. Individual growth was achieved by outgrowing the **limit-situations**. Once we became *critical,* once we had uncovered the *constructs behind reality and named the ideologies behind our educative practice,* we could no longer remain in the 'barracks' of oppression. This condition, even though it refers to the individual, existed within the social domain. A limit-situation can only be transcended (by the individual) if there is a collectivety that supports the new upcoming social condition.

On the other hand, through the Book Club's discussions, *our instructor would move around the groups, stopping by each group, and helping out with some questioning.* In other words, you would have seen the instructor or a more knowledgeable peer working within our zone of proximal development. And all of a sudden *you would have been able to see wondering, intrigued or surprised faces*: you indeed would have seen our

confidence in advancing towards a larger understanding, solving one more problem. Again, here there is one more individual ability that expands thanks to the influence/help of the group/other peer.

Interestingly, note how the dynamic from **social interaction mediated by language** all the way to **change** it can also represent the steps of Freire's process of *consicentização,* at the same time that can also refer to Vygotsky's process of internalization/the theory of cultural development. The concepts presented in the diagram, can be also represented through the Ron Harré's Vygotsky Space diagram, which emphasizes the idea of relationship between both educational tendencies. In sum, both theories want to move learners from concrete and simple thinking to more abstract and critical thinking. In either case, however, learning promotes change, and as a more knowledgeable other at the end of the learning process, the learner becomes an agent in her/his community.

CONCLUSION

As I leaped into developing this paper, I became engaged in a profound reevaluation of my intellectual identity, which I found to be so bound on my whole existence as a person, because this study let me interact deeply with both theories, especially with Vygotsky, which allowed me broaden my knowledge as a teacher and as a person. By constructing my learning of Vygotsky, I reconstructed the Freirean influence so important in my teacher education.

The most significant finding for me in doing this study, went beyond the intersection of both theories to their combination. As far as I see, they are pedagogies that may complement one another. By promoting dialogue and valuing interaction, both theories may benefit one from another in a sense that they both follow a pattern of instruction that moves from the social to the individual. While most accounts of Freire stops with social change as a result of access to literacy, Vygotsky provides extensive explanation about the develop of the mind that begins in the social domain. On the other hand, Vygotsky's account of the social mind addresses a change within the individual to become part of and contribute to society as it is and it does not lead to the edge of social transformation, topic that is Freire develops extensively.

As I look at the concepts that made possible the intersections, I understood them not only as way to enrich my teaching (like a planning tool), but as a way to promote a dialogic relationship with students by considering their individualities with their learning communities.

All of this process surely sounds somewhat utopian, as utopian is the education Freire advocates. Even now as I finish writing these last sentences, I keep hearing his voice and his lips slowly moving underneath that white beard, preaching for "um mundo menos feio, um mundo mais humano" (*a not so ugly world, a world more humanized.*)

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APPENDIX

Paulo Freire: A biographical sketch

In Brazil of the forties, there was Paulo Freire working with working class communities, fisherman and peasants in the Northeast, the poorest region of the Country. He was an educator who had his first bachelors degree in Law, loved linguistics, studied philosophy (therefore, sociology) and had a special interest in psychology. He has been considered the greatest educator of his time, "the first among a dying class of modern revolutionaries who fight for social justice and transformation." (Taylor 1993, p.1)

From 1946 to 1954, he worked as the director of a Governmental Professional Institution that prepared people to work in industry SESI (Social Service for the Industry.) His position supervising the educational units/centers in extremely poor areas got him involved with education and teacher training. Such a task made him interested in the academic failure so prevalent among the poor population that he worked with.

In this role, he started a innovative project by promoting periodical teacher meetings in which they discussed problems in their work with the children and conducted surveys among the children's families to understand conditions and to look for solutions that they, the teachers and families, could implement. With the successful results of this school-community work, he started to visit more schools under SESI's coordination to speak to teachers and to families.

It was by establishing this close relationship with students' daily life within their own communities that their living condition revealed to Freire the oppressive character of a social structure that promotes the domination among social classes.

Later on, he took part in the Movement of Popular Culture, a group that worked in the education of worker class communities for the Governor of Alagoas, in the Northeast of the Country. This opportunity helped him build in-depth knowledge of Education and Culture among poor communities. This movement was very influenced by the Europeans sociologist's movements, like the one called *Peuple et Culture* in France. It was during his participation in this movement and afterwards that he started to work on a pedagogical theory of his own.

Freire's first insights emerged from his concrete experiences with peasants, but they echoed in Marx's socialist approach. As Freire himself had said more than once, he got to Marx through the daily work with the worker class people. His own insights and assumptions about the relation of the human condition to socio-economic structure matched Marxism theoretical framework, and it was the crucial foundation for Freire's analysis of those communities.

Freire was the first to bring together a historical, social and linguistic dimension to the literacy instruction field in Brazil back in the forties. He applied concepts from the psychiatry like alienation and consciousness to the process of learning, which became the basis for his consciousness raising and empowerment approach to education within literacy instruction. His definition of consciousness in education has to do directly with the application of those laws made by the dominant class but never used by them for the needs of the population. A conscious population is to be able to transcend its oppressive condition within a dichotomy society by using the same laws in a democratic plane.

His pedagogy brings a deep understanding of the individual and of the social aspects in the process of education. He bases his praxis in democratic socialism and points out the importance of the social perspective brought by Marx, though he critiques the denial of the individual by the Marxist Mechanists. To the individual Freire emphasizes the subjectivity that every person uses to understand the world (the epistemic being), without denying the importance of the objectivity needed for the construction of knowledge. To the social, he approaches the dynamic and dialectical relationship between individuals and society based on the use of complex systems of communication media/signs. The process of education is, therefore, a process that uses language as a mediating device for the development of consciousness within specific socio-cultural context at a given historical moment.

Because of the military repression that took over the Government during the sixties, Freire's process of conscientization came to be associated with class struggle while Cultural integration became associated with political revolution. Forbidden to go back to his home-country from 64 to 79, he lived in several countries in the Americas, Europe and Africa. However, it was during his years living in Chile and Switzerland that he generated and wrote his most important writings.

Exiled from his country, he took his original project along to several other countries where he visited and lived for almost 16 years. Along with his life, his thought and his theory expanded, met new frontiers and was constantly reshaped. In the seventies, through the publication of *Cultural Action for Freedom* and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire's ideas found voice in several other countries struggling with political-socio and

economic domination, especially in Latin America and Africa. Some of the "First World" powers, like France, Switzerland, Germany also acknowledged the Freirean revolutionary approach to culture and education founded on socialist ideals. His ideas also spread through researchers in the United States at that time. My reference list show just a few of the massive production of dissertation in American academies that focused on Freire's ideas by that time. His concepts of conscientization and his revolutionary action repercuted throughout the world also through the creation and action of the Institute of Cultural Action, founded in Genebra.

Cultural action for freedom, had his final format while he was teaching in Harvard. There, he got a chance to explore concepts of cultural imperialism. According to Heins-Peter Gerhardt (Gadotti 1996b, p. 161), Freire's first epistemological assumptions relied on (i) the development for a critical consciousness as a result of a critical education work; (ii) the role of education as responsible for the development of a critical consciousness that has to be based on critique and dialogue; (iii) the critical consciousness is inherent in any true democratic society.

Freire himself considered his exile a *true pedagogical experience*. In which he was able not only to take physical distance from the reality in which he originally actuated, but also, it was by confronting himself with other realities that his ideas were reshaped and developed from an Adult literacy method into a philosophy of education approach.

Similar to Vygotsky's ideas, Freire's ideas spread quickly and went through many stages of understanding. Much of the misunderstanding of Freire was from the failure of

white Eurocentric academics to take his critique of capitalism seriously. It is fact that both theories suffered misinterpretation specially during the time of the translation of the first studies, because of the suppress of the Marxist socialist framework which underlined Freire and Vygotsky's fundamental constructs and assumptions that embody and gave strength to their thought. But most of all, misunderstanding were given by the reductionism of Freire's ideas to a single method of literacy instruction.