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Work as vocation. An interview with Professor Antonia Darder about her life, research, teaching, activism and art

Antonia Darder[A]
Jürgen Rudolph[B]
Tania Aspland[C]
Shannon Tan[D]

A Leavey Presidential Endowed Chair in Ethics and Moral Leadership, School of Education, Loyola Marymount University; Professor Emerita of Educational Policy, Organization, and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

B Head of Research, Kaplan Singapore; Editor-in-chief, Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching

C Professor Emerita, Vice President (Academic), Kaplan ANZ; Co-editor-in-chief, Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching

D Research Assistant, Kaplan Singapore; Journal Manager, Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching

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Abstract

Professor Antonia Darder was extremely kind in giving us an extensive interview, despite her mourning the recent deaths of family members and friends. Professor Darder is an internationally recognized scholar, artist, poet, activist, and public intellectual. She holds the Leavey Presidential Endowed Chair in Ethics and Moral Leadership in the School of Education at Loyola Marymount University and is also Professor Emerita of Educational Policy, Organization, and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

This interview offers Antonia Darder's highly inspirational narration of how a colonized, impoverished minority woman became, against all odds, a highly regarded professor and activist-scholar. Having migrated from Puerto Rico to East Los Angeles at the age of three, Antonia Darder discusses her extremely difficult, impoverished childhood and youth, becoming a mother of three at the age of 20. She shares her experiences with racism and sexism as well as her take on critical pedagogy that is heavily influenced by Paulo Freire with whom she worked before his death in 1997. She talks about her admiration of Freire and her main takeaways from his critical pedagogy, and also provides an overview of her own impressive body of work. In this expansive interview, there are many fascinating snippets: about her absolute commitment to her doctoral candidates; the historical influence of the Ku Klux Klan at a university where she taught that was uncovered in a documentary by her students and herself; and her being an artist as a creative form of survival. In the end, a holistic image of Antonia Darder emerges in which work is a vocation and her life, research, teaching, activism and art are all intrinsically intertwined.

Professor Tania Aspland (T. A.): Thank you so much, Professor Antonia Darder, for making yourself available! We are extremely sorry that you're going through such a difficult time. Our first question is very personal, we hope that's okay. You were born in Puerto Rico and migrated with your mother to East Los Angeles at the age of three. You grew up in abject poverty with a schizophrenic and abusive mother, having to take care of your sister and not having a proper childhood. You left home at the age of 16 and were married with three children by the age of 20. Your childhood and youth must have been extremely trying. You have said that your greatest accomplishment is that you have survived. How did you experience growing up and your schooling?

Professor Antonia Darder (A.D.): Growing up, I went to public schools and lived in a very impoverished community in Los Angeles. As you know, resources are always so much less in schools within subaltern communities. My experience at my home was so intense, there was so much tension, there was so much dysfunction, and there was always so much chaos. It was a very chaotic way to grow up. I consider the dysfunction I experienced as deeply related to the individual and collective trauma of colonization and poverty faced by so many families that are barely able to make ends meet. And in many ways, my experience was akin to growing up in a war zone, a war zone in my home with no place to feel safe. Of course, this did not mean that I was not loved, but that stress my mother experienced was overwhelming for her and there were no resources within the society at that time to help our communities cope with the struggle of surviving socially and economically in a racializing world.

What happened for me, was that school felt safer than home, because at least being in school, I wasn't being knocked around and yelled at in the same ways. And in many respects, school became a haven, and because it became a haven, it was easier for me to invest in schooling and invest in learning. It provided me hope that I could create a different life in the future. And so, it was a way to survive, it was a way to be able to withstand the hardships of the early life, the first 15 years of my life.

In many ways, school became a haven, and because it became a haven, it was easier for me to really invest in schooling and invest in learning.

It was a different time, when I look back. There wasn't a lot of attention being paid to what was happening with the children, especially low-income children. I think the biggest concern was, especially in a Spanish-speaking community, that we were speaking English. The main concern was that we weren't talking to each other in Spanish, which was considered detrimental to our learning. In fact, we would often be reprimanded for speaking in Spanish and I spent lots of hours in the cloakroom sitting alone, because I would forget and start jabbering away in Spanish to my classmates. Those were the elements that were difficult: the cultural and linguistic clashes that went on. But there were other elements to it: it was physically safer to be at school than it was at home.

Figure 1: Antonia Darder and her mirror image (1994).

I think I was lucky because I did have a few great teachers and this is why I have such a commitment to, and such a respect for, teachers and also why I understand the incredible role that teachers can play in the lives of young children from subaltern communities. For me, my first-grade teacher, Mrs. Lewis – I even still remember her name – she was an African American teacher, she was very comforting and I always felt so safe with her. I felt like she liked me, I felt seen by her. Often, what happens for us and what happened for me with many of my teachers was that I didn't feel seen and I didn't feel welcome. But with a few teachers that I remember, there was this feeling that they wanted me to learn, and they were happy that I was there. At least that was the feeling that I had with them as a child.

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Then in fourth grade, I had a teacher from Trinidad, Mr. Horace Vititoe—and I actually remember his name, too. Mr. Vititoe was an important teacher for me, and it was also an important time as a young student because school was getting harder by fourth grade. He had a storytelling way of teaching, but he was also an old school disciplinarian with us, because he expected us to achieve, to get all our spelling words correct and things of that sort. There was a sense that he had expectations for us that we could and would be successful. And because we felt that he thought we could be successful, many of us were very academically successful in his class. There were also teachers who really didn't give a damn, they really didn't care whether the kids passed or not, they weren't very attentive towards us children and did the minimum.

I was learning the difference between teachers who are attentive and who love what they're doing, and who care about the children, and those teachers who are just going through the motions, doing their job. When I was in junior high, I had Mrs. Wasserman. I remember her saying to me, 'you can go as far as you want to go, don't ever let anybody make you feel like you can't'. This reflected that individual ethos, which is part of most Eurocentric schooling anyway. It is very individualistic, it's focused on the individual achieving. There isn't a sense of our collectivity or that we existed as a community of students who had to work together to achieve. But nevertheless, with such little support, it was important to have a teacher who I felt sincerely cared about me. I remember her giving me a little book where she wrote me a note when I graduated from junior high school. It's just little things like that that make a child feel seen and feel like they have some value to an adult, especially children like myself who are struggling, whose parents are deeply traumatized, or whose families are struggling to survive.

Again, I understand what was happening to my mother as part of colonization and the impact of it on her life; and how poverty impacts people that are trying to figure out how they're going to put food on the table for their children, while working these menial jobs and not ever having enough money to get through the week. These conditions are part of everyday life and they impact people, especially when they constantly receive the false message that 'your inabilities are completely your own fault'. There's no talk about the fact that historically and at the present moment, there's been a tremendously unequal economic system that produces subjects who are politically disempowered and who live in poverty, a reality absolutely needed in order for the capitalist system of inequality to be perpetuated. Instead, people are given the message that their poverty is their fault, that if they only worked harder...

Yet, my mother worked very hard. Poor working-class people work very hard. They work harder than people who live in comfortable bourgeois conditions of life. Working-class people work harder in terms of the grit that's necessary to be able to get through the day. And often there's the idea or the message that 'if you are impoverished then you're an inadequate human being, you're a subhuman being, deserving of second-class status'. Often, you're also dealing with racism, you're 'othered', there's a xenophobic process of othering. Because of all this, when I talk to teachers, I always go back to how important their relationships with students are and how they can make an enormous difference in the lives of oppressed students.

I will be 70 next month and that I can still remember the name of my first-grade teacher tells you the power that a teacher can have. The sad thing is that society itself does not truly value children nor early education. It doesn't value the labor of teachers in the way that it ought to, it doesn't provide them the resources that are needed; it often expects them to produce, to labor in isolation. Given the pandemic, we're seeing the impact of that perspective in teachers. Just a few days ago, I read an article that was reporting on why 50% of US teachers are ready to leave the profession, given the impact of the pandemic on their lives and with so little support provided for them or their students (e.g. Streeter, 2021).

And so many teachers, even when they've come back into the classroom, moving from virtual teaching back into the classroom, they are facing the problem that virtual education only works for a small percentage of children. My granddaughter, who's a third-grade teacher—this is her first year of teaching—had to complete her teacher education during the pandemic. When she went into the regular classroom this year, she found that over 50% of the kids didn't learn the lessons of the last couple of years. So, she's not only having to teach third grade, she's having to teach second-grade lessons and some first-grade lessons for some of the kids, if she's going to be able to reach them and support their learning. And even worse, the resources aren't there. For one teacher to have 40 children and to have to be carrying that extra workload, and to have that workload not even be truly acknowledged, is part of the reason why many teachers are saying: 'Forget it! I went into teaching because I wanted to teach, I love kids, but the conditions just are atrocious'.

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I think what is especially important for me here is that often we don't realize that, when as critical scholars we talk about lived history – or when Paulo Freire talked about the importance of our personal history – this is important because from those histories, we can garner tremendous bits of wisdom that can help us to write theory in ways that are truly grounded in the realities of people's lives. When we're working with students or working with teachers, it's important to listen to what they have to say. So that we can accurately access with them the knowledge of their own experience and see how that might help us all develop greater compassion for our students. I say this because I firmly believe that love and compassion are absolutely essential to the learning process, a relational aspect of teaching often not spoken about in educational formation. Yet our capacity to love our students and to have compassion helps us to understand that they're coming from different contexts and different realities. This is an understanding that opens us to important knowledge and information about our students; they're not little things

or machines coming in to be fed with knowledge. They are human beings, they're organic beings that learn best when the conditions are created that truly honor and respect their humanity, where conditions are created that help them to scaffold their learning, to build new understanding upon what they already know.

I think that often, there's tremendous disrespect toward students because of the way that adults often see children. There's a sense somehow that what children have to say doesn't have any real meaning or that children can't possibly understand what's happening to them. But in my practice, I've not found this to be true. Children may not speak in the words that adults speak, but if you listen to them and you sincerely engage them with respect for the meaningfulness of what they have to bring to the conversation, children have a lot to say about what's going on in their world. But by the time they are teenagers they often have become very reticent to speak, because they don't feel that adults respect them or really care about what they have to say.

Children from some subaltern communities often feel that way. If they're not able to immediately get with the program or dominant expectations of the school, they're judged as less intelligent, less capable, and often treated as biologically inferior or culturally defective. And this can happen, despite how intelligent they may be. This deficit view of working-class children of color is pernicious. I experienced it as a kid, and I've seen it in classroom teachers. I've experienced it in my work with educators by how they talk about their students. For this reason, it's important to challenge teachers to be reflective about what they're saying, and its possible impact on children's lives. The things teachers say will stay with children – especially those things that feel hurtful and demeaning, they will stay with children for a long time. Long after they've forgotten the words, the feelings of hurtful words can persist, especially with respect to being a learner in the classroom. This is to also say that the confidence (or lack of confidence) they feel or the security (or insecurity) they feel about their intelligence, is cultivated very early in life within the classroom environment. Again, this speaks to the impact that teachers can have on the lives of their students.

Jürgen Rudolph (J. R.): Thank you so much for this wonderful answer. Personally, I grew up in Germany, and I grew up in a lower middle-class environment. So, I didn't have all these issues with racism and stark poverty that you encountered obviously, but it rang very true what you said that what our teachers tell us is very important. I remember being called 'stupid' and so on, and it was a chip on my shoulder as a result of that.

A.D.: Yes, I truly understand. What is very important for us to understood is that we must work to create a culture that is humanizing for everyone. All children need to experience a classroom culture that is humanizing, that reinforces their value as a human being. For me, that means caring for others, a sense of consideration, a sense of respect for one another, a sense of learning to work together, to believe that we are better together than we are apart; that sense of building a truly democratic context where people feel like they can speak, they can have a voice, they can participate in making their destinies. All of these elements are integral to a liberating culture of schooling. I may talk about it in relationship to subaltern students because that has been the focus of my work and my experience. But our experience as people of color, for example, is as human as anyone else's. And this goes across all communities, across all classes, across all genders, across all sexualities, across all levels of physical and cognitive abilities.

What we're searching for is often this sense of being recognized for our value as human beings, a sense of meaning, a fullness of life. There's something tremendously humanizing about experiencing a sense of being welcomed and belonging. In contrast, for example. as soon as there's name-calling going on, and if a teacher doesn't attend to it, they lose an important opportunity to teach the value of building community. Name-calling has a lot to do with kids feeling like they have to posture in order to be accepted. Indirectly, this also casts them into a dehumanizing social environment of competing for their worth. This competitiveness is ensconced in the culture itself. As such, values of emancipatory education, social justice, and a truly emancipatory vision of life must address such issues in the everyday life of the classroom. This is just as important as any other topic or subject: how students engage with one another, how they feel about themselves, how their relationships in school deeply influence who they will become in the future.

J.R.: I was absolutely shocked when I was reading recently – I know very little about Puerto Rico – that about one third of the women in Puerto Rico were forcibly sterilized. Your mother was one of them?

A.D.: Right. In the early '50s, there was a U.S. policy, Operation Bootstrap, it was an economic policy, with different initiatives. One of them was the sterilization of Puerto Rican women. It had to do with all sorts of moralistic colonizing beliefs about women of color and our inability to control our sexuality. Similarly, pregnancy was seen as interfering with women being good workers. This was a time when women were being moved into the workplace; and having all these children was going to disrupt the production line. There was then a decision made that the sterilization of Puerto Rican women would be part of the initiative for the modernization of Puerto Rico. This echoed what we saw with Native American women and African American women in the United States and their experience of forced sterilization. In a variety of cases, in the midst of child birthing labour, women were unknowingly asked to sign a document consenting to their sterilization after delivery. It was often done in coercive ways. In the case of Puerto Rico, by the early '70s, 30% of the women had been sterilized. My mother was one of them. At 19 years-old, when my sister, her second child, was delivered, she was asked to sign the consent, they said: 'it will be the best thing for you'. This practice was, of course presented as benevolent, but it was actually very authoritarian and tied to the social control of the island's population.

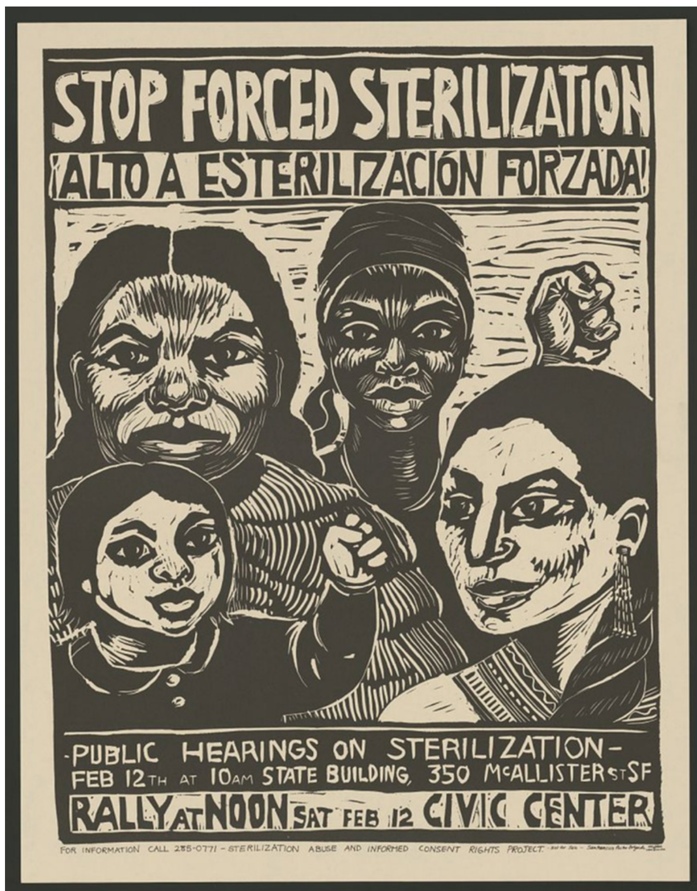

Figure 2: Poster for a 1971 Stop forced sterilization rally in San Francisco. (Not only many Puerto Rican women, but also Black and Native American women were sterilized in the U.S. in the 20th century under questionable circumstances, sometimes forcibly.) Source: Library of Congress. Cited in: Onyekweli (2020).

J. R.: Thank you so much for sharing about your childhood and youth! I'm in agreement with your analysis. While being a young mother and still living in poverty, you attended Pasadena City College, where you earned a degree in Nursing. Later you attended Cal State Los Angeles for a Bachelor in Rehabilitation Counseling. Later, you received a Master's degree from Pacific Oaks College in Human Development and in 1989, a doctorate in Education from Claremont Graduate University. How was your experience studying as a Latina woman in these various educational institutions? Could you share with us some of your encounters with racism and sexism?

A.D.: It's an experience that many women who come from subaltern communities and who finally get into an educational context encounter. What makes it particularly difficult is that often, the way that sexism and racism is expressed is subtle. The way I ended up in nursing school is a good example. I wanted to do pre-med but the counselor essentially told me: 'you've been saddled with three children. It's going to take 10 years for you to get a medical degree. You don't have any money, you don't have any resources. What you need to do is go into a nursing program'. What was interesting is that about a year and a half before that, the first time I tried to go back to college, I went to a community college in East Los Angeles which is a Spanish-speaking Latino community – predominantly of Mexican origin, but as Puerto Ricans, we speak Spanish, so it was natural that we would find ourselves in that community. There too I was discouraged by an academic counselor of pursuing pre-med. He also suggested nursing. Finally, I said: 'Well, okay, then the Registered Nursing Program' which is the full nursing program. To which he said: "Oh no, my dear, you people do better in vocational programs'. I was really young, 20 years of age. And it just didn't compute. I didn't know what the hell he was talking about. But he was very clear about his opinion. He was going to enroll me for the LVN [Licensed Vocational Nurse] program. There's nothing wrong being an LVN. But that's not what I wanted, what I wanted was to study pre-med. And there was so much discouragement around that, which I firmly believe had to do with me being a woman, living in poverty, and being of color.

When someone says 'you people', there's clearly some kind of blanket, stereotypical notion held about our capacity, and it was a very clear message about our intellectual inferiority. His message was that I should go into this program that wouldn't require so much intellectual capacity. He's probably dead now, and I do not remember *his* name [laughs heartily]. But sometimes I wish I could go back and just throw my 30-page CV in his face [interviewers laugh]. I know this is very petty and very childish, but it's just so frustrating. No one should have to go through that! But it has been those kinds of attitudes, as if they're doing us a favor by keeping is down, that infuriated me.

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There were other examples of racism that had to with language. English is my second language, but people forget that. At times when I express things in an awkward way, there's this reaction 'oh, it's because she doesn't really understand'. But it's not that at all. It's often what you do when you speak in a second language, you transpose certain structures of your first language into the second language, and it translates a bit differently. So, one may say things that in the structure of your first language are absolutely correct, but in the structure of the second language, it sounds a bit odd to people who have a very habitual way of turning a phrase – we don't even think about how habitualizing language is, especially within the academy.

I often argue that an ignored consequence of this standardization of language is a stifling of creativity. Years ago, I remember hearing about some research that concluded, the longer people stay within academic life, the less creative they are [all laugh]. Unless you work at maintaining your creativity, there's something numbing about the way the language is used, and the repetitive nature of it and the manner in which language is codified, so it becomes a thing rather than language as a living experience.

There are, of course, many different elements that feed into what causes these kinds of cultural conflicts, the tensions that stem from cultural differences. These experiences of cultural tension can arise for students, not from the dominant culture or the dominant class or gender, when they're working to achieve academically, like everybody else, within a context that feels unfamiliar or unwelcoming. You want to be able to continue your educational formation, but constantly feel like you have to constantly prove your worth and legitimacy.

Another example from my early 20s, was with a white female instructor in nursing school. As part of the nursing program, students had to do a case study about one of our patients. I chose to do my case study on a young Black male patient I was caring for who had a football injury and ended up paraplegic. I worked very hard to give him good care and to bond with him and his family. I was so proud of my case study when I turned it in.

Well, 20 years later, I learned from one of my nursing teachers with whom I ended up remaining friends, that there had been an issue with my case study. When the professors got together to make decisions about grades, they talked about students' projects. My supervising nursing instructor alleged that I hadn't written my case study, that somebody else had to have written it for me because it was excellent. And everybody said it was excellent. She simply could not believe I had produced this level of quality work. But luckily, I had one advocate, the instructor who ended up becoming my friend. She told me: 'I had to stand up and I had to say she absolutely wrote it. She's absolutely capable of doing that level of work'. And there was a whole lot of tension in the room. My supervising instructor actually wanted to keep me from graduating [interviewers gasp]. These are crazy discussions among faculty that often happen but students don't even know. I would have never known that this had gone on, had my friend not told me the story two decades later.

There are just so many ways in which students are racialized, how they are perceived and misperceived, because of how they look or because of their gender or economic status. Sadly, stereotypical attitudes that professors and instructors carry are often deeply embedded. They themselves are not always conscious of how they're manifesting them in the way they interpret and perceive students who they see as being very different.

J.R.: That's really shocking. But none of this could stop you from having an excellent education and doing extremely well along the way.

A.D.: I had three little children that I had to care for by myself. It was about the survival of my children and my own survival. Sometimes when people grow up affluent or when they grow up comfortable, they can't even imagine everyday survival as a motivating factor. But when you don't grow up that way, it is a motivating factor. Taking care of your children is a motivating factor, taking care of your family is a motivating factor!

J. R.: You were already a superwoman at a very young age and this is quite unimaginable and extremely admirable how you managed to do that.

A.D.: I think I'm just stubborn [all laugh]. I'll be damned if I let anybody get in the way of my learning and creating [all laugh]...to let anyone destroy my right as a human being.

TA.: Can we ask you a bit about critical pedagogy? In our analysis, you're one of the successors of Paulo Freire. You're a leading critical educator. Could you please sketch out for us what critical pedagogy is in your interpretation?

A.D.: Critical pedagogy is a school of thought that is derived from critical social theory. A principal aspect of critical social theory is a critique of capitalism. People often forget that that's one of the central tenets, in terms of the work of the Frankfurt School and so forth. Critical pedagogy asks educators to think about education and schooling in a more expansive way, rather than just simply about methods and curriculum. It's about comprehending that how we think about the world will ultimately determine how we teach about the world. It speaks to the importance of culture, how culture works, and how ideology is always at play in our interpretations of the world. And, thus, it is at work within the classroom itself, where cultural politics are always at work. We can't pretend that people somehow just get ideas out of a vacuum, without any sense of relationship or groundedness to contexts. All ideas of teaching are very much politically inspired; they have to do with how we view power and our view of human beings in the world, as well as our understanding of how resources should be distributed (or not distributed).

Critical pedagogy engages with cultural politics and economics, understanding ideology and critique as central dimensions to how we come to know the world, our capacity to question the world, and an understanding that there is always an ideological lens of values and beliefs at work. There actually is no sole individual perspective or opinion that exists. Often people want to hide behind an opinion, pretending an opinion is rootless, devoid of any collective worldview. The reality, whether we wish to accept it or not, is that we are all completely interconnected, and that the values of the society, the ideologies that are formulated and perpetuated within education or within the larger society, have a fundamental impact on how we perceive human beings, how we perceive the purpose of education, and how, thus, we engage with our students.

An important element of critical pedagogy, then, in the issue of critique; that is, our capacity to ask questions, such as 'what are the consequences, if I use this particular practice within my classroom?' 'Who does it positively impact?' 'Who does it harm?' 'What are the consequences of these particular materials?' 'What do we say and how does this impact students who come from different perspectives and different realities?' Essential to critical pedagogy is the educators' willingness and capacity to be present in the world; to be present in terms of their ability to reflect—to be reflective about their labor and to understand themselves as immersed within particular conditions and particular realities tied to relations of power. This is central to understanding

the nature of hegemony and how it is enacted within the context of hegemonic schooling.

Schooling as a social institution has a history, and it is a history embedded in privilege. The process of establishing schooling for working class children only came about when the capitalist class decided they wanted workers to have more critical skills so they could be better workers on the production line. This historical motivation for educating the dispossessed classes is often ignored in the formation of teaching, so teachers never have a full picture of what is taking place or the manner in which state policies and practices are determined, or who is implicated in the process of educational reform. The political economy, for example, is key to the kind of education that students receive. Within the context of critical pedagogy, state politics are considered important to understanding the limits at work in educational practices. These elements are central to understanding education as a complex institutional process, shaped by social and economic interests—generally of the wealthy and powerful.

Of course, in relationship to my work, culture and power are always implicated within the context of the classroom. How is power being structured? How are students being prepared to take their place—whatever that particular place is—dependent on their social location and how they are perceived by those who wield power? So, for example, the education of affluent students is very different than the education of students from subaltern, impoverished communities. It is very different because there's this understanding that affluent students are being prepared to lead the world [laughs], whereas the rest of the students are being prepared to follow and do their bit to perpetuate the status quo, to perpetuate the particular order of power, privilege and wealth that persists within society.

Critical pedagogy seeks to make explicit an understanding of how money and power are always implicated. Along with that, it seeks to cultivate and extend a dialectical understanding of the world. It pushes against positivist notions and fosters complexity in our understanding of the way that tension, in the context of human relationships, is at work all the time. And, more importantly, critical pedagogy promotes a view of tensions as actually being necessary to creative life. Hence, when we invest ourselves in trying to undo tensions, this undoing of tensions actually functions in collapsing our creativity and imagination. Tyranny is a great example of the total collapse of that creative tension with the context of fascism, so that those in power attempt to dominate and control in absolute ways. There's much rhetoric about traditional education supporting us as free thinkers. Yet, that is one of the biggest lies at work, because the conditioning that goes on in education is generally very formulaic, particularly within the schooling of working class and subaltern communities. The formation of students is directed along a narrow line of thinking, designed to gain their consensus, even when it moves against their own interests, maintaining the structures and practices of domination that negatively impact their lives.

Moreover, critical pedagogy asks of educators to understand themselves as intellectuals and cultural workers, as teachers who have the capacity to think and reflect and engage with their labor in ways that are meaningful to a political project of liberation. Rather than just being automatons who dispense instrumentalized forms of deadening curriculum, their practice should reflect a truly organic and grounded way of teaching, of relating openly with students about their world.

When, we as teachers, understand that schooling practices are not innocent, but rather reflect practices that often are anchored to powerful belief systems, material conditions and social contexts that perpetuate inequalities, exclusions and injustice, then how we approach our teaching is going to be very different. Our teaching is going to prepare students in much more complex ways. Students enter classrooms with all sorts of capacity to engage complexity, but the formation has to be one that brings them into critical engagement with their world, where that can reflect on how they come to be who they are. Even the things that they may think as truth that they believe in, they are encouraged to ask: how did they come to believe those truths? Questions like this are essential to the evolution of students' capacity for critical thought.

So often what we see in the process of traditional schooling is much attention placed on form or content. I'm not saying that those aren't important. But the truth is, we can have a form or content that appears to reflect emancipatory values, but pedagogically is taught in authoritarian ways. In such a case, neither the form or content will have transformative value. A transformative pedagogy must be anchored to a political project of emancipation within education that recognizes the relationships that exist between content, form and pedagogical process, and that all of those elements must be brought into play in understanding how we teach, how we interpret student needs, and how we engage the relevance of the curriculum to their lived histories. In contrast, within the context of neoliberal education reform, teachers are contending with very rigid and standardized curricular forms that reinforce passivity and compliance.

J.R.: What you're saying about the school is very interesting to me. I'm also influenced by the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. I'm also very much reminded of what Foucault (1995) wrote about disciplinary power and schools having similar structures like prisons, and the purpose is basically to create docile and productive workers.

A.D.: Absolutely, and, for the most part, it's still that way. Even more confusing and disconcerting, within the so-called "third industrial revolution" characterized by the high digitization of work, is the move by the capitalist class to make workers obsolete. This doesn't get spoken much within educational debates, yet within the context of economic debates about the future such conversations are common. Greater and greater automation and less and less meaningful work benefits a very small, very powerful, wealthy, privileged sector of the society. The majority of society is yet to recognize the devastating implications to labor by this movement toward advancing the use of artificial intelligence. However, simultaneously in the midst

of the propagation of that discourse, we experienced the pandemic. People jolted out of the phrenetic context of capitalist production seemed initially confused and stressed, with a sense of loss of a meaningful existence, exacerbated by the fear of the virus spreading. More recently, however, an interesting dilemma is unfolding, as state proclamations of 'the pandemic is behind us' become explicit. Many workers now don't want to go back into the office, they say: 'Why do I have to go back to the office, if at home, I get as much more work done'.

Many workers came to enjoy the autonomy and freedom of working at their own pace, without being surveilled. There is no question, that we need more conversation about this issue, given that so many office workers, as well as teachers and nurses and administrators are quitting their jobs. Many are refusing to go back to the office, if they feel it's totally unnecessary because they can do their work more efficiently and better at home. Another power struggle then is beginning to take place, as people are choosing to leave work in corporations and industries. I was recently reading about the IT field, where many workers are resigning their posts, tired of unrealistic worker expectations, which prior to the pandemic were normalized and now are being challenged.

J.R.: The great resignation.

A.D.: I don't know if part of what's going on is that people have become aware of how entrapped they were and how imprisoned their lives had become by the capitalist culture of work; and now they are beginning to say: 'Look, maybe there's another way for me to survive, not having to be under the thumb of that' [laughs] – whether it's the corporate culture or the institutional structure. How people are responding seems to be challenging the authoritarian status quo nature of many institutions, including educational systems.

The discourse is very interesting because not everyone is resigning. Some people want to go back to the office or classroom, because they miss the social aspects of engaging with others. But other people feel that they actually have more social freedom and meaningful social engagement with other people when they're not in the office. I don't want to simplify this question, because it is complex. But we have to acknowledge that how people are responding is not just in a vacuum, they're responding to very real material conditions of production and structures of institutions and organizations that impact their lives in real ways. I think that there's more and more frustration around a growing culture of authoritarianism and diminishing opportunities for democratic life within institutions, including schools and universities.

J.R.: We are absolutely with you on that [all laugh].

T.A.: You are one of the great experts on Paulo Freire and you worked with him before his death in 1997. How was it working with Freire? What are your main takeaways from Freire's work?

A.D.: Paulo Freire was, indeed, an extraordinary person, no matter what critiques some people might have of him. In my experience, he represented one of those rare people capable of taking the experiences in his life – no matter what they were, even the most difficult experiences– and learning from them, bring the wisdom that those experiences had to offer, and integrate what he learned from life in his thinking about schooling and society. This was particularly so in thinking about questions related to oppression, inequalities and injustice. Paulo was a fun person to be with. I loved being with him, because there was a great wit about him. There was a real, genuine warmth, he was very honest and, he had an immense capacity for vulnerability.

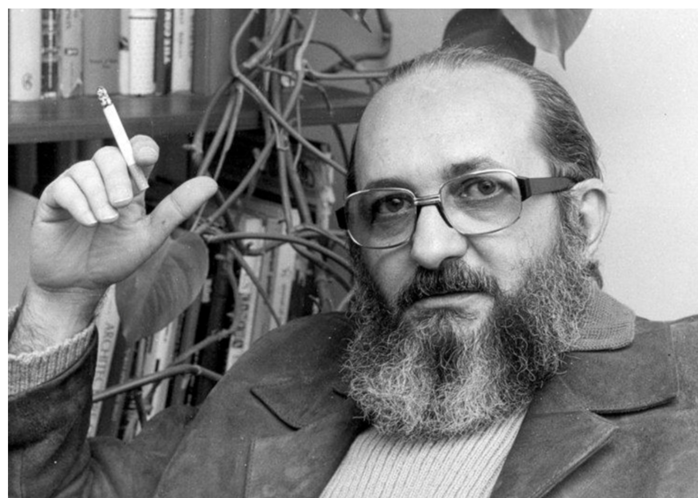

Figure 3: Paulo Freire (1921 – 1997). Source: Freire (2022).

Paulo was a fun person to be with, I loved being with him, because there was a great wit about him. There was a real, genuine warmth, he was very honest, and he had an immense capacity for vulnerability.

He had all those wonderful qualities that I admire in good teachers, in great activists, and in wonderful scholars; in that he had an expansive ability to engage with the world openly. And there was a deep sense of love about him. Love is a central quality for me. What I, particularly, learned with Paulo was how our capacity to love life, to love the world and to love others has such an essential impact on how we engage with our students and those we meet out in the world. You felt a warmth about him that was palpable. I remember one evening when we were at restaurant for dinner, how Paulo engaged with the waiter at the restaurant. In trying to decide what to eat, he said, 'oh tell me what you really like'. He was sincerely interested in what the waiter had to say. That's just how he was. Or something would come to mind and he would begin to converse about it to somebody on the street. People interested Paulo, he was curious about people's lives. And he cared deeply about the struggles and condition of people's lives. He cared about what others had to say about their own conditions of life and was thoughtful about how he could integrate their understanding into his own understanding, especially when they brought an element to his knowing that was not there before, an experience new to him. I would say Paulo loved to learn from others. His great capacity to teach others was

inseparable from his capacity to learn from them.

This, of course reflects one of the key features of his dialectical pedagogy of love, 'you can't genuinely learn unless you can teach and you can't genuinely teach unless you can learn'. The most amazing thing for me was his capacity to actually live his values. This was a man who truly lived his pedagogy. And, in working with my students and working with teachers, I always come back to the importance of living our pedagogy.

For Paulo, his pedagogy of love also required an openness to rethink, to reinvent. For him the world was never a hermetically sealed or dogmatic or sectarian conclusion. That's not the way he saw the world, he believed that we had to maintain an open-mindedness so that we could perceive all the opportunities that might be available even within limited situations. This, of course, refers to his notion of 'limit-situations' (see Darder, 2018a, pp. 130-131). Where even within situations that seemed limited, there are spaces, if we look, where we will find opportunity. This is part of our work as good educators, finding unimaginable opportunities, even within a situation that might seem very closed. By living with openness in our collective relationships with students and communities, we are going to create together greater possibilities for transforming the world—far more than if we come to it in a rigidly sectarian or dogmatic way, which only serves to reproduce the authoritarianism that is the product of injustice and abuses of power linked to the oppression that we find in the world. What is important here is that our pedagogical approach is as important as any subject matter that we teach. But at the same time, of course, we must be knowledgeable about our subject matter.

I think another thing that I appreciated about Paulo was that he was very clear that our teaching had to be more than just about processing content. We had to be able to engage with the very real conditions of students' lives and of our times; we had to be able to critically engage the curriculum. For through critically engaging the curriculum with our students, we're also involved in an important political process related to their critical formation within the classroom. So, if I have certain notions about what's going on in the world, for example, what's happening in Ukraine at the moment, yet I fail to engage honestly my students about what is transpiring, I'm missing an important moment for dialogue. This, of course, entails a loving dialogue rooted in openness, where other views can be brought to the table, so that we can discuss these ideas together and consider the consequences of our particular ways of thinking.

To not do this means losing opportunities to broaden the field of engagement within the classroom. Here, again, I loved Paulo's capacity to go into a situation and, even if he disagreed or there seemed to be a roadblock, he created an expansiveness of being through posing questions. A pedagogy of questions was another significant feature of his work. For often it's not by our laying out the critique or trying to make the interpretation ourselves, but rather by posing thoughtful questions that allow us to enter into genuine dialogue with our students, where we together can reflect on possible actions we might take and their possible consequences. Then, we come back, after we've taken action, and reflect on the impact of those actions, which often leads to new questions to be posed. Dialogue is a regenerating process, when it's done in a way that is open, democratic and purposeful. So, dialogue is not just a conversation; we're not just chatting it up with our students; we have a clear political purpose: to create humanizing conditions that support the dignity of students, their voice as subjects of history, and their empowerment as cultural citizens of the world.

> ***Dialogue is a regenerating process, it regenerates itself when it's done in a way that is open, democratic and purposeful.***

There was never any question that education for Paulo was part of a larger political project. The evolution of social consciousness then is a political process: we don't become conscious in and of ourselves. Consciousness is a collective or shared phenomenon; we develop social consciousness within community.

It was very difficult to be in Paulo's presence for any length of time and not find yourself actually feeling a sense of expansiveness, of more possibility. I think he understood that the worst thing we can do when we're dealing with issues of oppression, when we're trying to transform difficult conditions, is to get locked in into a rigid posture that entraps us, so we don't have anywhere else to go but to take an authoritarian stance. We're going to feel far more vulnerable when we've trapped ourselves into a dogmatic position, than when we cultivate a more fluid and expansive way of thinking about the world; particularly when we reflect on policies and practices of schooling and their impact on students and their communities.

> ***It was very difficult to be in Paulo's presence for any length of time and not find yourself actually feeling a sense of expansiveness, of more possibility.***

J.R.: You taught with Paulo Freire together and you had various encounters with him. You also talked about this before that you had a clash with him?

A.D.: I wish I could have had many more encounters with Paulo. For instance, Donaldo Macedo, who translated several of his works, had many more encounters with him, as did Henry Giroux and Ira Shor. However, my moments with him were always very rich and memorable. For example, we had one of those moments at a small conference. I was much younger, we're talking now about 40 years ago. There was this discussion about tolerance. I think the hardest thing for me was feeling alienated by the way some were discussing the issue of tolerance. The question on the table was something like: 'what does one do in a seemingly liberal situation where some of the behavior or the actions taken are actually racist or sexist and thus, unjust?' My position was adamant, we should absolutely be intolerant of injustice. Paulo, concerned by the tone of the discussion insisted that we, as educators, needed to be parsimonious with our words in such occasions – I remember he used the term 'parsimony'. This concept was not easy for me, in that I can be very fiery, especially when I'm feeling very frustrated.

Over my life, I've come to recognize that I carry collective anger as a colonized person; collective anger and rage as a woman trying to contribute to the world and yet constantly dealing with men who had to validate me, before I could be seen as legitimate. I've not been very friendly [laughs] in such circumstances, to say the least. Anyway, on one occasion, I was pretty upset with the manner a well-known critical male comrade was speaking to one of our female colleagues. Later, I was trying to explain to Paulo why I had become so upset. He said a few things that made me feel he wasn't quite on board with my reasoning. I really pushed back. Then, I remember him looking closely into my eyes and saying, 'Oh, Antonia, one day you're going to be a great intellectual' [laughs loudly]. When I think back, I realize that I was still pretty young and naive. But I think what he was trying to say is that he understood the 'fire in my belly' and why I felt as I did. But at the same time, that wasn't going to be enough, if I wanted my work to make a difference. The 'fire in our belly' is not enough, if we want to bring about social change. We also had to be able to have conversations across the table even with people who we disagree with; because otherwise all we would do is fight or argue, or even enact a sort of violence by our words. These are not Paulo's words, but my interpretation of what I think he was trying to say to me, when he said we had to be careful with our words, in that our speech also has political consequences.

Over my life, I've come to recognize that I carry collective anger as a colonized person; collective anger and rage as a woman trying to contribution to the world and yet constantly dealing with men who had to validate me, before I could be seen as legitimate. I've not been very friendly [laughs] in such circumstances, to say the least.

Nevertheless, one of the things that I understood and that I often speak about in my work is that Western epistemology, in which most of us have been socialized, is an epistemology of conquest. And that means that a culture of war is central to how we have been conditioned to understand and interpret the world. It's central then to the culture of schooling, the culture of the university, and all Western institutions. The culture of war is embedded in the hegemony of the culture industry. I say this because it is the only way we can understand the logic of a citizen formation willing to accept war as a "democratic" solution, even as a solution for peace. When you consider it philosophically [laughs], there's a big problem there. As long as we continue to be epistemologically wedded to a culture or an ideology of conquest and domination, we're going to have a very difficult time transforming this world into a true reflection of a lived justice and equality for all.

J.R.: I think tolerance is really one of these seemingly contradictory concepts...

A.D.: or paradoxical at least [laughs]

J.R.: ...paradoxical may be a better word – because I also think it's very important to listen to the other side. But at the same time, of course, we must never become tolerant of oppression...

A.D.: That's right!

J.R.: As some of the philosophers like even Popper (2020), and especially Marcuse (1969) said: it is a recipe for disaster to have pure tolerance because then the tolerant will be destroyed by the intolerant and all we will have left is repressive tolerance (rather than liberating tolerance: Marcuse, 1969).

A.D.: I'm absolutely with you [all laugh]. We should never be tolerant of policies and practices that serve to dehumanize and strip away our dignity and the dignity of our children.

J.R.: You wrote an excellent *Student guide to Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed* (Darder, 2018a) that I had the pleasure to review in the *Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching* (Rudolph, 2021) and it focuses on this landmark work that Freire published from around 1970. Among many other scholarly books (I think it is a total of at least 11 that you wrote), you are also the author of *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A pedagogy of love* (Darder, 2017). How is practicing critical pedagogy different in the current context compared to when Freire was writing? Because I think Freire was always saying 'oh, you cannot just copy my work, but you must reinvent it in your own context'. What elements of Freire's theory are still relevant and what elements might we question?

A.D.: The particular context in which we practice at any time, even in the same era, will have a great deal to do with our approach; because the context gives us important information about what interventions we need to make, what issues need to be questioned, how we challenge inequalities, and also the consequences our own efforts may have as well. It's hard for me to say 'well, it was easier then or now'. We've been consistently immersed in a profoundly colonizing culture, and we still are. With time, it may become more sophisticated in certain ways or more nuanced in other ways, but it is a colonizing and dehumanizing culture, nonetheless. It is a culture that is 'anti-life' – anti-life rather than 'pro-life', and I don't mean that in the religious sense in any way, shape, or form; a better word here is 'life-affirming'; Freire was about the struggle for a life-affirming culture, where we fight to build contexts for people to be able to be creative. Our curiosity, imagination and capacity to be creators is central to what it means to be a human being in the world. When we think of what oppression does to people, it squelches our creativity, imagination and our birthright to be creators of our own lives. I think Freire understood this and, in many ways, his pedagogy places a great deal of emphasis on supporting students and communities to cultivate their creativity and their epistemological curiosity. His pedagogy of love is about creating a space where students have the dialogical space to question traditional epistemologies and think them through; by doing so, they have the opportunity to rethink their own lives and understanding of how things in their lives and in their communities came to be as they are.

A very relevant dimension for me is that we must acknowledge that Freire was unlike most theorists. What's particularly amazing about Freire is that he wasn't a method. And the reason why he remains relevant to this day is that his pedagogy encompassed principles of engagement, principles of thought, and principles of teaching that were not recipe-bound. He spoke often about reinventing, because he understood that every context will have its own set of formal and informal power dynamics, the culture of the context is going to configure relationships among participants in different ways. When we enter into any context, we have to understand this and we, as such, have to be willing to engage with the histories of the people who are there. In the classroom, it requires a willingness to engage, in serious ways, with the lived experiences of our students.

One of the biggest problems that we find within traditional education is that there's this notion that somehow the student is an object (rather than a subject), an object to be filled, as Freire argued. So, teachers are seldom concerned with students' lived histories, they're not prepared to be concerned with students' bodies, their emotional sensibilities or cultural understandings. The students themselves become conditioned, within an instrumentalizing context, to see themselves as objects. One of Freire's greatest contributions is his effort to breakdown and conceptually dismantle a pedagogy of domination, what he called 'banking education', because it is essentially an authoritarian pedagogy, one of indoctrination and one of ideological brainwashing, in a lot of respects—although most people would not want to look at it that way. But in fact, that's exactly what it is.

Often, I think about the ways in which curriculum gets created, especially in the early grades. There is the standardized curriculum teachers are supposed to teach. In the first grade, you're going to teach ACB, in the second grade XYZ. For each semester, there's an outline, chronologically developed, about what you're going to teach. Well, if a child asks a question about something in the curriculum that isn't coming up until next year, what the teacher often does is to shut the student down or give them some very nonsensical answer; rather than saying 'Well, let's look at that', engaging the students in whatever comes up. Sadly, there is more of tendency to say, explicitly or implicitly: 'Oh well, you're out of order in your learning'. So that response is meant to shut them down and bring them back to the prescribed curricular script. 'Oh, no, we have to study whales today. We're not studying ants. I know you want to talk about ants today. But we don't study ants until next year. We're studying whales today'. Of course, I'm saying this in a bit of a facetious way here. But this example is from an actual classroom moment that I witnessed and thought: 'Oh my goodness, the kids were so excited about those ants that they were watching out in the school yard today and it was such a wonderful teachable moment'. But the unit on ants was not going to be taught until the next year! By then, they may have lost all interest in ants. What better time to engage kids that in the moment, when they are organically experiencing the topic of study?

Consequently, knowledge in schools (particularly working-class schools) often becomes very fractured, fragmented, instrumentalized and objectified, rather than being an organic process. In teaching, we're engaging with children and students who are learning how to engage with their world. In the process of hegemonic schooling, students are socialized to think about the world in ways that are fragmented and instrumentalized, rather than in ways that are integrated and organic.

Freire was very much about engaging with actual experiences of life and embracing teachable moments. He was about engaging with the lived experiences that students brought into the classroom. His notion about where we start – whether we are working in communities or in classrooms – we start wherever the students are at; not where we, as teachers, think they should be. We need to understand that learning is an organic and evolving political process, that we evolve dialogically and democratically together as we learn and work together. In this sense, Freire's pedagogy is powerful!

Of course, the issue of love is a very important aspect of his pedagogy. Because to teach with love means that you have faith in the students' capacity to contribute to their learning, to be a central part of their own learning; that you have a certain willingness to remain open in terms of their capacity to engage their world; and that it's a process in which, as they're talking with each other, they're actually learning to be in dialogue. As such, there's learning that goes on, not just from what the teacher brings, but from the dialogue that's going on among the students themselves.

The unfortunate thing here is that this form of pedagogy, a dialogical pedagogy, is often seen as a lesser pedagogy within the traditional context of schooling. Moreover, when students have been educated in a very traditional, unidirectional kind of banking education and they enter into a classroom informed by a dialogical pedagogy rather than the banking form, they often feel very uncomfortable and disoriented. In the traditional context, they knew what to do—acquiesce and regurgitate the teacher's expectations. But, all of a sudden, in a dialogical context, they're being asked to be co-creators of the knowledge, to be co-creators of what everyone is learning together. And it can be a process where the teacher requires love, faith and patience, as students develop their ability to reflect, to voice their ideas, to engage with one another in meaningful ways, and to consider together the consequences of their learning within their own lives and the world.

Sometimes students will resist, but that's also just another aspect of critical pedagogy, where resistance is considered an important aspect of developing critical thought. It's a necessary part of students' learning. If we understand resistance is a necessary part of life, then as educators we can embrace and engage the resistance of students in ways that support their empowerment and their evolution as cultural citizens of the world. Embracing students' resistance ignites powerful forms of knowledge that can surface and evolve in the process of teaching. We need to respect resistance as a meaningful human response. What's funny is that sometimes, critical pedagogues who try to be very Freirean get very upset or very disappointed when kids in the classroom resist [all laugh]. Yes, engaging student resistance may take a little bit of time because you've got

to stop and remember students have been socialized to learn traditionally in a very different way. So, we're asking them to let go of what they thought they knew and to enter into learning in a very different and unfamiliar way. Here, our capacity as educators to be patient with accepting the discomfort and the dissonance that students feel, when we're creating a critical pedagogical context, is central to our labor. We're not giving students their voice. We are not empowering students! No! We're creating the conditions within the classroom where they can access and develop their own voice and empowerment. Such conditions must also be understood as part of practicing democratic life. There is no question that Freire was very much about a living and embodied democracy. These is a significant aspect of his work that remains tremendously relevant to our work in education and communities today.

J.R.: I completely agree.

A.D.: Actually, there are so many aspects of Freire's work that remain relevant. His belief in our own capacity as educators to bring a sense of wonder to our teaching; and to understand that within that wonderment, there is an expansiveness that is possible and necessary to our formation as empowered and joyful subjects of history. Freire often said, no matter how difficult our labor might become, we should never lose our capacity to have wonder about the world and to engage one another in more lively and humorous ways. Although he was, of course, a serious scholar, Freire was jovial and funny in his own way; he brought his own sense of humor to his teaching.

An important point to make here about dialogue is that it is a way of learning that can't be done alone. It's a way of learning that must be done in community. We learn together because together we go further than if we go alone – there's an African proverb: 'alone, you go fast, but together, we go further'. His work was so much an integration of that understanding. And how we do that best is that sometimes we must be willing to move a little slower, when our fellow learners or comrades need a bit more time to reflect, voice, and make sense of the conditions we are engaging. In this sense, Freire advocated the need for humility and consideration to temper any inhumane tendencies to act out the authoritarian conditioning we may have internalized from our hegemonic schooling.

Of course, Freire's way of teaching is not popular within efficiency-driven modes of education. In a factory-like approach, dialogue is not considered welcome because it's seen as a very inefficient, undisciplined, and time-consuming way of teaching. But the truth of the matter is that, in my experience, by taking more time, being organically engaged with students and creating the context as an educator for the formation of voice and participation through critical dialogue, what you get is very meaningful forms of learning. For example, I have completion rates of 99% of all of the doctoral students I've worked with over 30 years, and I have had five to eight doctoral students graduate, yearly, since the '90s.

J.R.: Wow, that's amazing!

I have completion rates of 99% of all of the doctoral students I've worked with over 30 years, and I have had five to eight doctoral students graduate, yearly, since the '90s.

Figure 4: Antonia Darder with her doctoral graduates in 2014.

A.D.: What's been so frustrating for me is that, although I've been very happy to talk about my approach with doctoral students, often other colleagues don't care to hear it. How I have accomplished this is by living my understanding of Freire and embodying it within my own work. When we create the opportunity for meaningful formation and meaningful learning, students will learn. Often, I would have students come in thinking they had to do a dissertation based on very traditional expectations. So, I would ask them a series of questions: 'Are you excited about that topic?" [interviewers laugh] 'Is that what you're really passionate about researching?' 'Well, what are you passionate about?' Sometimes it took a little while for them to figure out what they were passionate about. But I would not let them move forward, I simply wouldn't, until they could align their true passion with their dissertation work. And here is precisely where we, as doctoral supervisors, have an opportunity to use our authority in ways that are truly emancipatory; truly in the interest of our students' development, both in terms of the formation of their political consciousness and their academic development as critical researchers and writers.

I would have students, for example, that would come to me who had trouble writing. They would say: 'Oh, I have so many problems writing'. What I found was as soon as they started to write about things that were truly meaningful to them, their writing developed and evolved quickly. Many times, other colleagues couldn't recognize the student who had come in three or four years before and who that student was at the end of their dissertation process; because there is something powerful about writing about things that mean something to us, that we care about, that we are passionately committed to. I think that one of the mistakes that we make, in the way we engage students, is that we don't give them enough respect; we don't respect the things that they want to learn. As a consequence, university students are shut down. Yet, despite the fact that some of my former students came in with writing difficulties, many of them have now published books.

There is something powerful about writing about things that mean something to us, that we care about, that we are passionately commitment to.

J.R.: That's amazing!

A.D.: Yes! But it's not magic. It has to do with engaging students respectfully and expecting from them meaningful work; expecting them to respect themselves as thinkers, as people who are involved and who are creative. In the process of mentorship, there has always been a process of co-creation going on—which, of course, evolved over more than 30 years. I would say to students: 'I'm going to be here for you, wherever you are, I'm going to read your work as many times as I have to read it; but you're not going to move forward until it's really saying what you want it to say'. This level of commitment is part of what we need within universities, particularly with working class students and students from subaltern communities. Yet, sadly, often what I find is that many professors love to talk about critical pedagogy as philosophy or the theory, but in terms of how they mentor students, they are unwilling to put in the hours it takes or to be dedicated and committed to those students throughout their academic formation and beyond. That's what it takes, that's what should be done. If we are critical educators who believe in emancipatory political principles of education, that's our job: to create community with our students as part of our larger political project.

It's frustrating to see university students who are struggling suddenly get lost in the shuffle. I've spoken to graduate students who were going through a doctoral program that either felt completely lost or they felt that the professor was attempting to make them do the kind of research that the professor thought they should do, not necessarily what the student wanted to do. But then students would acquiesce and accept to being in a very instrumentalized relationship with their supervisor. It's like 'okay, I guess this is what I have to do to get through'. I don't think that we can build activist scholars in that way. I don't believe that political consciousness can evolve in a context where the student lacks agency and the power to decide the destiny of their own research and their life's vocation.

For me, the dissertation process is a political process of building consciousness. We're wanting students to engage with issues that are significant to them, so that when they go out in the world, they have something to say and something to engage with real importance. I'm not saying 'oh, it is important because I think it's important'. No, it's important because it is meaningful and materially grounded in the world; it's grounded in the material conditions and social realities that students are working in and living in. This is absolutely essential, in terms of this work. I just don't know how to do it any other way. But I feel a sense of comradely love with my students. In fact, I'm still in touch with the majority of my students; these are relationships of solidarity. It's not just for the few years they are students. When they finish their degree, they know they can still call me at any time. There's this sense that they are a part of a larger community of love and struggle, which expands in the process of our working together. And all this has to do with living and embodying a pedagogy of love.

J.R.: That's so impressive. Normally, the attrition in doctoral programs is as high as more than half, so that's so inspiring.

A.D.: Yes. Yet, sadly, as I mentioned before, when I try to engage professors about this issue, given the competitiveness and posturing of university culture, it just seems as if they don't want to hear it. They'll remark, 'I know how to supervise a dissertation', yet their attrition rate is dismal. It is truly disheartening to want to collegially engage on such an important issue and to have little to no positive response. This is one of the saddest things about an institutional culture of so-called expertise. Often folks espouse to wanting inclusion and social justice, but continue to practice a culture of domination. As such, if you're not vigilant about your participation in a culture of domination, you will begin to echo that culture in your attitudes and your preferences and your relationships. It is a powerful dimension of collegial work that often doesn't get engaged in the formation of doctoral students, many who will themselves eventually be professors. I think we have a responsibility to live and be the kind of professor that invokes through our practice an emancipatory vision of the world. Students need to see this is possible, because how can they know it's possible if they don't see and experience it in an everyday, living form? The contentious aspects of it, the struggles and tensions, all of it. We have to be willing to be with our students in all that it entails to be committed to democratic life.

J.R.: Modeling is so important, and you are providing your doctoral students with a model. They can see that it can be put into practice, and then they can practice it in their own teaching career.

A.D.: It's more about coherence and integrity. We all struggle. It's not easy being honest and open about our own struggles, to live this pedagogy of love with them. But it is precisely in that context that we come together to understand why we need solidarity and why we need community to continue this work for life.

T.A.: Just now you were already creating the perfect segue for our next question about your own teaching practice. You have perhaps answered that largely, but may I ask, what is your take on the lecture? Freire appears to have changed his mind about the lecture along the way. He was first perceiving lectures as banking education, that's obviously very bad, one-way traffic and so on (Freire, 1970). But later he said lectures can be good. And discussions can be bad, dialogue can be bad under certain circumstances (Freire & Shor, 1987).

A.D.: I like that question, because I think it really pushes us to understand what criticality is all about. How do we engage critically with dialogue? How do we engage critically within the classroom? So what Freire talked about was that directive aspects in our pedagogy are not a bad thing in the sense that often if we're teaching a particular subject, part of what the students have to learn are the basics.

Figure 5: Antonia Darder giving a lecture.

Even if they're going to challenge a way of thinking, they have to learn the basics, the key aspects of a topic or an issue. Whether it's political science or mathematics, there're underlying principles that inform the curriculum. These must be taught and, as Freire very much argued, we need to teach the hegemonic curriculum, but we must do it critically. In doing so, at times there may be a directive element, but for our teaching to solely be directive is another issue. When we engage with material presented in a directive way, it can't stop there. The material needs to be turned upside down by creating the space for dialogue. 'How are the students engaging with the material? What questions are they asking? How does the material compare to their own life? To their own cultural histories? How would it be perceived in their communities? Through question posing, we create a place for students to enter into the dialogue from the familiar, so they can move from their own world to engaging the less familiar.

It's a sense of our capacity, as teachers, to engage dialectically with a directive approach and a dialogical approach. We need to understand that there's actually a dialectic that can be found there, rather than collapsing it and saying it's either directive or it's dialogical. If we lose the dialectic, we lose the actual tension that exists and curtail the possibility of more creative engagements. In a context, for example, where students have to take standardized tests and pass them – otherwise they're not going to have access to educational opportunities – it doesn't mean the material for the test becomes all we teach. Instead, we want students to learn the material to pass the test, but we will also want them to be able to engage critically with that material, in ways that allow them to both co-create and transform knowledge in ways that make it more applicable to their own lived experience of the world.

The only way to engage critically, then, is to create the kind of democratic context grounded in dialogue, where students' voices can be heard. With dialogue, community happens that is meaningful and engaging, whatever the topics or issues are. So that's how I understood it. Again, Freire would never collapse it as either lecture or dialogue. The moment that we collapse anything, what ends up happening is that we then can get very dogmatic and express a very authoritarian attitude, which actually betrays our own emancipatory vision of education.

T.A.: Your books and articles form an extremely impressive body of work. Could you walk the novice reader of your work through what you yourself would regard as some of your key works and intellectual development? What are some of the changes and constants in your theoretical approach?

A.D.: Oh my, that's a very big question. My work begins with looking at what I called earlier 'the bicultural experience', and what I now tend to call the 'subaltern experience' because it provides a more extensive engagement with the issue (Darder, 1991). But what I was initially looking at was: the experience of students who grow up in a context where they're seen as the other -- where their culture, their language, their sensibilities are not at the center of the culture of schooling? What is the impact of that, in terms of certain crises, moments of dissonance and struggles that students experience?

The best way I could think of approaching the issue was by engaging the dynamic of culture and power in the classroom. My scholarly work begins with cultural power in the classroom and how different political decisions impact schooling, that is, liberal positions and more radical positions versus conservative positions. How do these ideological perspective fuel the culture of the classroom? How were these positions contested? How did the cultural reality of the students themselves clash with the dominant cultural position?

To me, this was an important issue, given that there were conversations taking place about biculturalism within Psychology and some in Education. But what was missing was a political-economic understanding of a subaltern positionality and the impact of that positionality upon bicultural students from the standpoint of their own oppression and domination. The issue of cultural differences was very much part of the conversation that was going on at that time. I was trying to sift through elements: how did that come into play in terms of testing? How did it come into play with respect to language instruction, bilingualism, and other linguistic concerns within the classroom? How did the culture of the teacher impact their own teaching, especially if they were teaching children that are not from their same culture of origin? What did teachers need to understand about how culture and power are at play in the classroom? What was the experience of bicultural teachers, who were Black, Latino or Asian in the U.S. – who were coming from cultures that were 'othered' within the United States? How did they engage with their own teacher formation – as again, there was a very dominant culture that they were being asked to step into? In many ways, bicultural teachers and students are asked to put aside their own knowledge,

their own cultural histories, their own linguistic knowledge, and the wisdom from their communities. So, I worked to examine these questions and the impact these issues had on teachers (Darder, 1991).

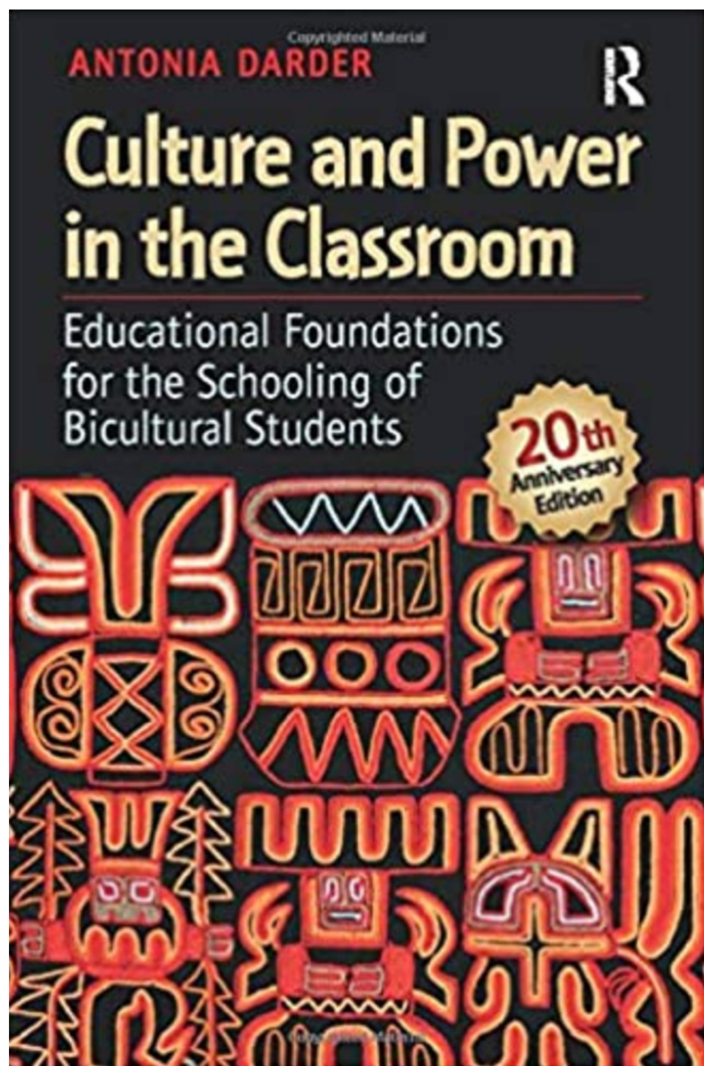

Figure 6: Antonia Darder's *Culture and power in the classroom* (1991).

In addition, with my good comrade, Rodolfo Torres, we looked at issues of 'race' and racism (Darder & Torres, 2004), drawing on Robert Miles' (1993, 1989, 1984) work. We argued that we couldn't understand racism outside of understanding political economy; and there had to be a critique of the totalizing impact of capitalism on societies. We posited that racism or sexism or any form of inequality actually serves to perpetuate capitalism and to maintain an unequal structure of power and wealth. Rather than to commonsensically perpetuate the notion of 'race relations', we wanted people to imagine that perhaps the notion of 'race' needed to be more critically interrogated. There's no question that racism exists because we see the impact of its racializing processes on students, their parents and communities. But often people surmise that because racism is real, so is 'race'. Yet 'race' as a social construction emerges out of a very particular history of oppression and colonization. The construct then exists within a contested domain. Many refute this particular way of looking at 'race', but for us, it was an important question. Moreover, we argued that we had to understand racism as a plural phenomenon. That is, we had to understand, for example, the conditions of the Irish, for example, in terms of their history of racialized oppression due to centuries of English oppression. The Irish, for example, were similarly racialized in England, just as the Irish and other immigrants were racialized in the U.S.

J. R.: How the Irish eventually became white...

A.D.: Yes, they were later racialized as part of the dominant white 'race'. But to understand how they and others were racialized, we needed to create a more extensive understanding of racisms and racialization rather than thinking of 'race' just in a black-white binary. So our work was also about trying to push against and dismantle that binary (Darder & Torres, 2004). In many respects we felt this was an important groundbreaking work, but an understanding that was beyond where most scholars were willing to go. This work remains highly critiqued, particularly by critical race theory (CRT) folks, for whom 'race' is the central unit that drives their analysis.

Figure 7: Darder & Torres' *After race. Racism after multiculturalism* (2004).

Another project that I was involved with (with Rodolfo Torres and Marta Baltodano), was *The critical pedagogy reader* (Darder et al. (Eds.), 2003), which is now going into its fourth edition. We wanted to develop a text that engaged the different issues and questions that were significant to critical pedagogy, so that students, teachers, and researchers working to examine these issues and questions would have a resource that could assist them in gaining a better sense of the complexity and multi-dimensional nature that is the critical pedagogical school of thought. And as we had hoped, over the last 20 years, the volume has made a significant contribution to the study of the field.

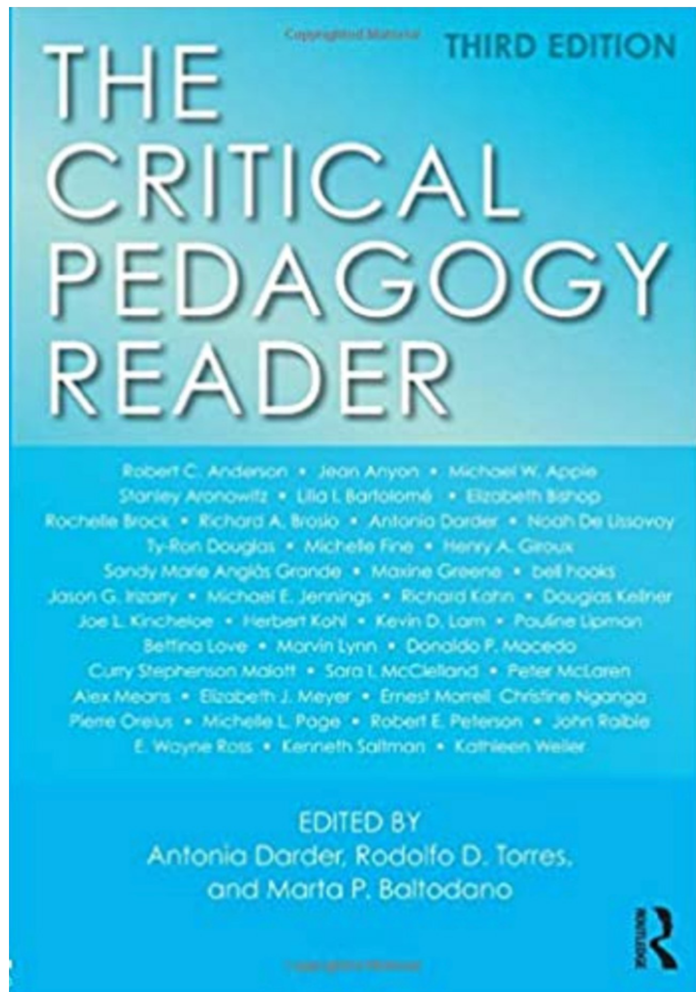

Figure 8: Darder et al.'s *The critical pedagogy reader* (2003).

Another area of scholarship was an effort to begin codifying the evolving area of Latino studies in both education and the social sciences. Our work produced the first *Latinos and education critical reader* (Darder et al. (Eds.), 1997) and the first *Latino studies reader* (Darder & Torres, 1997). This is an example of how my work moved across different scholarly arenas, beyond education. I see this multiplicity in my scholarship as a necessity for the philosophically interrelated understanding I bring to my work, which seeks to understand how issues of culture, language, politics, popular culture, political economy and history are all having an impact on how we understand the world. In order to understand, for example, the oppression of Latinos in the United States—that is, the oppression of Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Dominicans, Latin Americans, Chicanos, etc.—it was important to understand how different histories and experiences of our presence in the United States. We wanted to highlight some of the differences and similarities that exist between communities as a consequence of how Latinos (or Latinx) populations were positioned as 'the other', in comparison to those who were not.

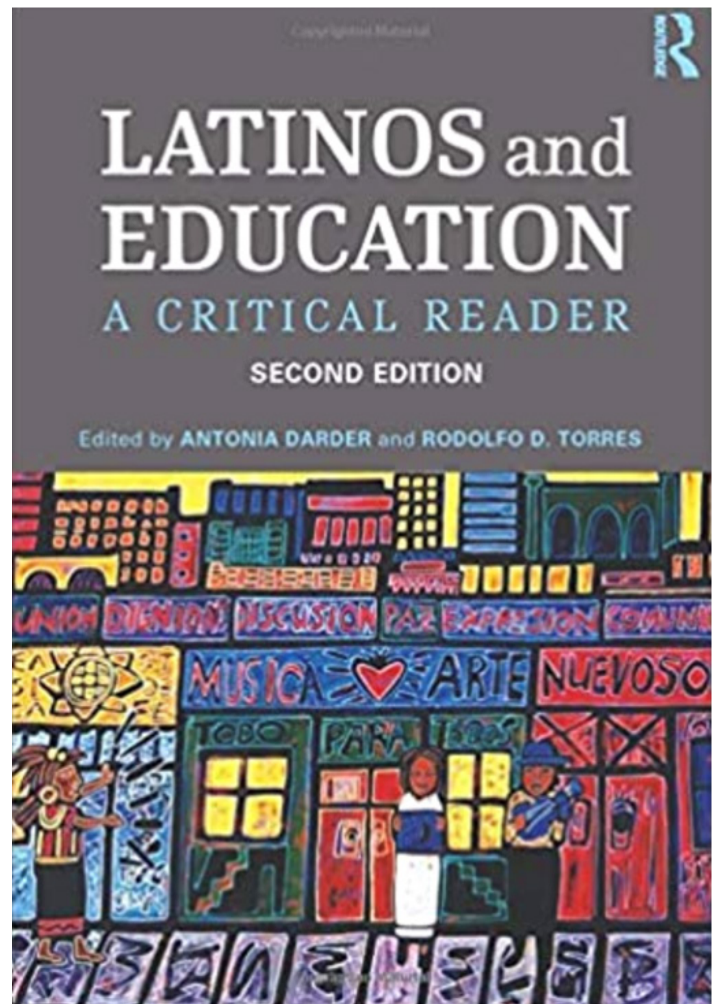

Figure 9: Darder et al.'s (Eds.) *Latinos and education. A critical reader* (1997).

My work has always been trying to articulate the importance of Freire's work within the classroom and the importance of understanding his ideas in deeper ways.

My work has always been trying to articulate the importance of Freire's work within the classroom and the importance of understanding his ideas in deeper ways. For example, *The student guide to Freire's Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Darder, 2018a) was a logical outcome of my concern that students reading the book gain a better understanding of the manner in which Freire's own lived history and intellectual traditions informed his political project. Often, what I found is that when students first read *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Freire, 1970), many would struggle to understand the book. What I had hoped to do was to create a companion text, from whence students could begin to better understand how Freire's ideas are linked to many other scholars, philosophers and theorists of his time. For me, this was important in that readers had to understand that for all of us there's an ideological architecture to our philosophical perspectives, we

all have lineages of thought that inform how we understand the world and these inform our own scholarly work. Freire didn't come up with these ideas all by himself. No one person ever truly comes up with anything in isolation; we are all a historical compilation of many different thoughts and different approaches to understanding and making sense of the world. How Freire came to make sense of the world is not just solely by himself, it was Freire through his experience and Freire through all of his many readings. As he read, he would try to engage different perspectives and think about how different authors helped him to make sense of what he was experiencing. So that was what informed my purpose for that book.

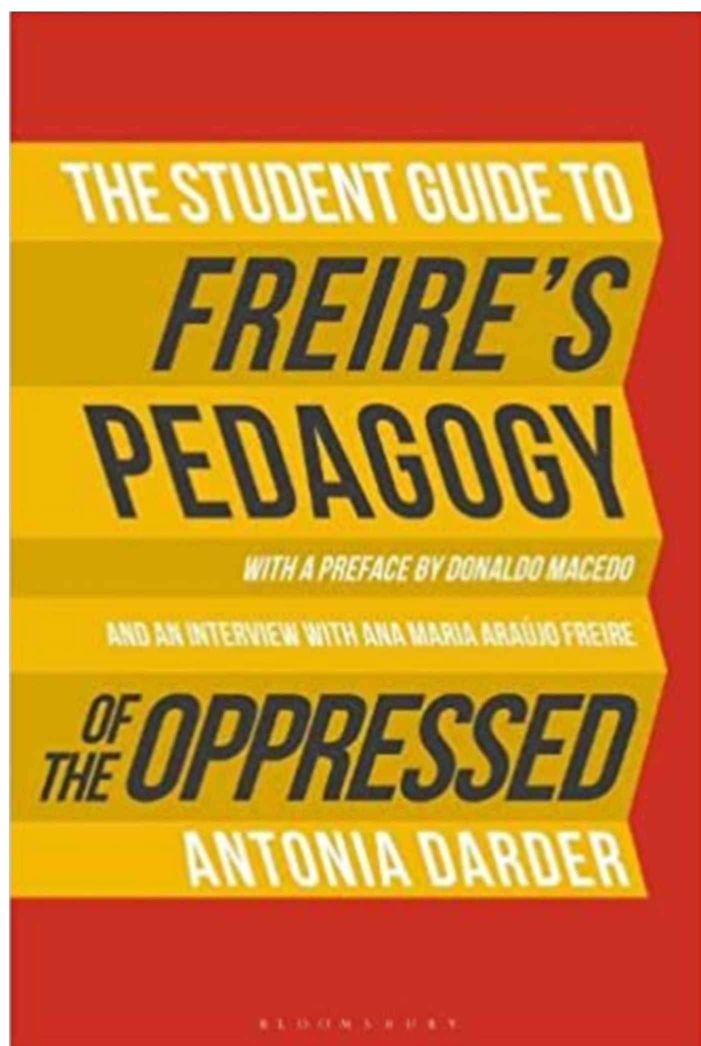

Figure 10: Darder's *Student guide to Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed* (Darder, 2018a).

I've also done some work related to examining decolonizing methodology in terms of interpretive methodology (Darder (Ed.), 2019). I wanted to focus on anticolonial or decolonizing research considered to be more philosophical or theoretical. It is often not acknowledged that there is a decolonizing methodology for the ways in which we build our scholarly texts, the questions we ask, and the kinds of issues that gave impetus to our thinking and to our theorizing. All of these aspects of my research, I have carried out consistently with a strong and deliberate sense of groundedness within the actual conditions in the streets.

Figure 11: *Decolonizing interpretive research. A subaltern methodology for social change* (Darder (Ed.), 2019).

In the decolonizing interpretive methodology book (Darder (Ed.), 2019), I set out the theoretical elements in the first part of the book, then I included five examples from five of my former doctoral students who wrote about their use of the decolonizing interpretive methodology and how they built their research from this approach. I designed the book in this way because I felt that would be the most powerful to show how the methodology is lived, how it's applied and how it has been engaged within the context of educational research. I think in many ways, my work has always been linked to my efforts to bring to light the legitimacy of engaging subaltern views and perspective that so often many people want to discard or marginalize. This has entailed looking at experiences in the margins and trying to bring them into a more central position. Then from there, thinking about both epistemological and methodological questions in terms of Freire's notion of ethics and what it means to be anchored to an ethics of liberation. How do we understand it in terms of a living ethics—a living ethics by which we teach and struggle politically?

I've always believed that to change the world, there had to be an intimate relationship between what we say and do; between our ethics and our practice. We simply cannot live coherently if we are one way in the classroom, and then we

go out in the world and are something else. As Freire and others have argued, coherence and integrity are essential to our work as activist scholars and researchers. Of course, hopefully both qualities continue to mature as we get older and more experienced [laughs]. It is so important for us as professors to be clear examples of this kind of a living politics, this kind of a living pedagogy.

Then, of course, I've done work looking at the importance of the body, the genealogy and materiality of the body (e.g. Darder, 2009, 2012, 2018b). Often, Western epistemology has been so cognitively driven, as if the body were not at all implicated in the construction of knowledge, which is absolutely not true at all. Our sensations, feelings, and sensibilities are essential to our human existence. When we think about the transformation of the world, we can only do this through the actions we take with our bodies – through our groundedness: this to mean, our capacity to ground ourselves. All actions in the world are associated with the way we feel in our body and the senses that stir us, not solely logic and cognition. Hence, bringing the body more deliberately together with our construction of knowledge has the potential of expanding in new ways our field of thought and our capacity for political engagement. For me, this constitutes critically understanding the importance of the body to the process of revolution.

J. R.: Thank you so much for this wonderful overview of your work. We have two more questions. One is about your activism and one is about your art. I really was very impressed when I watched your documentary from 2009, *Breaking silence: The pervasiveness of oppression*, I'm not sure whether you would like to talk about that, or whether you would like to talk about other community projects and struggles that you have been involved in?

A. D.: I can talk about a couple of projects here, work that emerged within community. The documentary, *Breaking silence*, was made with students and with people in the community who had lived around this university and were able to help us understand the history of how this university made decisions. They actually helped us to locate historical information, about this Midwest university [University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign] that was isolated and rural. Community members were important to the project because most of us were not from the area; we were outsiders. So, we wouldn't have known that there were KKK [Ku Klux Klan] attacks on residences 50 or 60 years ago or that there was once a fraternity in the early 1900s that was Klan-oriented

Community members helped us look for material and taught us to better understand the historical conditions. It was a powerful piece of work because it was very much student-driven. Part of the work also involved learning the technology, learning how to go out and speak with other students about the issues. The team members conducted many dialogues about issues of racism and other inequalities on the campus and community; and from all the information collected, the storyboard for the documentary evolved. We did research using the university archives as well. It was a powerful example of how when we do work together as a community, there's so much learning that takes place, beyond just what is produced. The product was the documentary, but what we

Figure 12: Ku Klux Klan student organisation at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign founded in 1906. Still taken from Darder (2009).

got from the experience was far greater than anything that we could have imagined. And there certainly was far more learning that took place than would have if it had only been myself and another technology person working on our own. The documentary wouldn't have had the same strength, depth or impact.

Another favourite project was doing the independent radio community program *Liberación*. That radio program was aired once a week on Sunday mornings. The students and community members worked together on different social justice issues in which they wanted to engage for the radio programs. A wonderful aspect of this work was that we all had to learn to use the technology together, because the project required the use of recording equipment and Garage Band, in order to create the segments which were pre-recorded and put together into a show that then was played on the air. It was an incredible experience! We learned so much about the issues that were important to the community. We always worked to combine reports on a local issue with a global take on the same issue. For instance, when we were engaging water rights within the local community, we also brought in water rights in other places—such as the water struggle in Bolivia. We wanted to communicate that issues happening locally were very similar to issues happening in other parts of the world.

This approach helped to bring the local-global relationship to the table. On another occasion, we did an environmental program examining a utility plant in the community that had closed a decade earlier and never clean up their contamination. In a community dialogue, we discovered that for families living around that plant, there had been an increase in cancer cases; the contaminated area was having an environmental impact. There was a disproportionate number of cancer cases and the children who played in the contaminated field were being exposed. We connected this experience with other communities where that same kind of environmental hazard was also taking place. We started to identify the politics at work. In many instances, the government, instead of cleaning up the contamination, would simply fence contaminated areas and declare them federal reserves. There was a lot of misinformation and shrouding of the facts by those government officials and

corporations who didn't want to take responsibility for the messes they have made in our world.

With the program, we also did segments that explored the political and pedagogical significance of art, music, and theatre within emancipatory struggles. We explored issues of cultural, gendered, and sexual identity. Here again, students would work together and people would team up on different issues. Someone would say 'hey, I want to do a show on Latina women' and the work would begin on that issue. The project was so much about supporting students and community members in becoming producers of independent media. Through the impact of the radio programs aired in the community, we witnessed the pedagogical and political value of working together. In essence we utilized radio as a form of political resistance through a pedagogy of the airwaves (Darder, 2011). But none of this work could have been done as effectively, if it were not for the participation and solidarity of the students and community working together. It was public pedagogical work fully grounded in the power of the community we had built together through our shared labor.

Figure 13: Antonia Darder, doing a *Liberación* radio program.

I think that pretty much sums up my approach to teaching, scholarship and activism. For instance, with teachers, I want to work with them to create a context, where they are able to talk about what's going on in classrooms and in their schools, a place to actually talk with and support each other. I've also tried to bring people together who are teaching in K-12 [from kindergarten to year 12] with people who are teaching in the university, in order to promote more dialogue across education. For me, separating K-12 and university conversations is an artificial division, because the enterprise of education moves across these terrains, and there need to be ways to connect and engage the work, because the impact of educational policies and practices are felt across the trajectory of education.

Again, you can't make this kind of dialogue happen without bringing teachers, professors and students together. I recall that one of the most poignant moments in my work with teachers occurred when we were challenging standardized testing and decided to have a forum to bring educators together with parents and students. When the young people spoke about the impact of standardized testing on their lives, I don't think there was one person who didn't have tears in their eyes. Because you realize the brutality of it that you can't get from a book. This approach requires a willingness to listen to people, you have to be with people, you have to want to hear their struggles. This has so much to do with our capacity to be not only the kind of educator, but also the kind of scholar and researcher, that creates meaningful research with others, instead of for them. In doing so, we may appear to be the most erudite or academic scholar. Because, actually, people like that tend to spend very little time in communities or spend very little time talking with regular people. I'm not saying such erudite scholars don't contribute, but it's a very different kind of contribution than the kind of contribution that I believe we so desperately need in the world today. What we are in need of is much more grounded scholarship. That is, knowledge construction grounded in everyday life and tied to the actual suffering and struggles of everyday people and their communities.

When the young people spoke about the impact of standardized testing on their lives, I don't think there was one person who didn't have tears in their eyes. Because you realize the brutality of it that you can't get from a book.

For that reason, working with teachers' unions is important. In teachers' unions, we often find the continuum from more conservative to radical educators, who are all, in one way or another, invested in moving a more democratic education project forward. So, you would think that the teachers' union would be the place to do it, right? After all, teachers' unions came out of the struggles of workers. But not necessarily. Because, unfortunately what we often see is that some teachers' unions adhere to a very bourgeois project, a project that has very little to do with transforming the oppressive working conditions of teachers. It's become primarily about getting more money for teachers. I'm not saying that teachers shouldn't get more money. Teaching is hard and usually undervalued work. But I don't think that the money should be the main purpose. We should be focusing on the conditions of teacher labor. That to me is far more important than just getting a few extra dollars a week.

T.A.: Thank you so much for sharing these cases in point. Our last question is: In addition to your scholarly and political work, you're also an artist, you're a poet, songwriter, and a visual artist. Your work as a visual artist displays a variety of themes, including political struggle, family, nature, spirituality and love. Could you tell us more about your art, please? How are you able to do so many amazing things? How do you manage your time, what drives you?

A.D.: [laughs] I don't know. What I can say about the art is that I didn't go to art school, all of the art emerged organically, as a necessity. I say necessity, because making art has been for me a strategy for survival, it has helped me to survive the many difficult moments in my life. My poetry, my artwork, it is the place where I can just pause, I can vent my frustrations; where I can express myself, beyond systematic and logical expectations. Yet, artistic expression is also a way of reasoning and a forum of reasoning. This has to do with our sensibilities and our more symbolic reading of the world. It can be a very visceral expression that is done through color, shapes, textures. We can express our yearning and dreams, through the way we play with words in a poem; when we're really frustrated and angry, we can express and get it out there with a song. In this way, the rage or frustration isn't just sitting inside of us festering. Somehow, it is the creative process that helps us to survive. We need to be creative in order to mobilize the frustration, anger, and struggles that are so much a part of being human. We do art, rather than letting emotions and our shadow energies get locked away in our body, dulling our capacity to be present and to love. Artistic expression can help us not to become stiff and concerned with protecting ourselves all the time. I believe that the only way to do that is to find the creativity within ourselves. So, whether music, art, dance, poetry, all of it has been my way of trying to express my angst, and sometimes my tragic experiences and struggles.

Sadly, our creativity is an essential aspect of our humanity that so often has been squelched or denied, in favor of both efficiency and the privileging of cerebral readings of the world.

Artistic expression is such a soulful and spiritual expression of life. With this in mind, I believe that we can't really understand consciousness if we don't understand it as an expression of our spiritual faculties. It is tied to the inseparability of our human existence. As such, the spiritual dimension of our humanity also generates our capacity for collective consciousness. When we are able to bring all our human faculties to our work—body, mind, heart, and spirit—the potential exists for a true shift in the culture. The beauty of art is its capacity to empower both the artist who produces it and the participants who embrace it. In this sense, art is a powerful political means for our personal and collective transformation. Moreover, to engage artistically in the dialogical relationship between self and life is like teaching, an act of love. The question often, however, is how do we keep loving through our anger and rage and, at times, frustration. We do this by learning to own all of our humanity—the good, the bad, and the ugly. Owning all of it, owning life and death, owning everything that we are. Owning the light and the shadow, owning the yin and the yang [laughs]. Owning all that we are, because this is precisely what it means to be human. Our humanity is not this perfect thing. Actually, it's not a "thing" at all. We are not "things", we are living, creative organic beings.

Figure 14: *Offering* by Antonia Darder.

I think that art permits us to have a bit more movement in our expression of ourselves, in how we see the world, and how we understand what we're struggling with. That may not be a very clear answer, but that's the way I see it. Making art is a beautiful experience in that we can put it out there for others, but it nourishes us at the same time. Doing a painting, committing color, texture, and lines to a blank space, it's in the very process that we are nourished. I think that so much of life, what is often stripped away from us, are opportunities to have that very organic and sensual experience, where our creative nature has a place to be. And here we can go back to Freire, who understood that our nature, our creativity must have a place to be. We have a right to be, a right to create and express ourselves and be present with each other. And it is through embracing this consciousness, this collective right to be, that we find the possibilities for forging true revolutionary life; and the possibility of creating a different world together. One person alone can't do it, it is something that we must do together.

J.R.: Thank you so much. That was a wonderful insight into your thinking about art. Is there anything that you would like to add?

A.D.: We are at a very difficult moment in the history of humanity. I believe Noam Chomsky has said this [that the world is at the most dangerous moment in human history: Eaton (2020)] and many other people, too. We are truly experiencing a crisis of humanity. Everywhere we look, it

is unbelievable, in that our ability to have conversations that are open, nurturing and nourishing has become more and more difficult—everything seems terribly contentious. Simultaneously, we seem to have lost and sense of ethics and a moral compass. Anything can be made acceptable if it's backed up by even uninformed fallacious public opinion, despite the real consequences it can have on people's lives. There's a relativism that is simply not serving us. Some things in life are not correct; some things are absolutely unacceptable.

Then contentiousness becomes an issue of rights, like 'we have a right to say this'. Oh my! We have some very hard work to do; for in moments of great human contentiousness or disagreement, we are most challenged to find the love and respect necessary to live with authenticity and humanity, in ways that support genuine dialogue. So as long as we continue to create a parasitic culture of destruction that generates paranoia and reinforces fascistic tendencies, it will invade and corrupt our humanity. To derail such corruption, requires that we move past this colonizing culture of destruction, by understanding ourselves as subjects of history, as co-creators of life, and as people of the world who must learn to live together. We cannot create a world in which this planet can survive relying on a culture of capitalist exploitation, extraction and accumulation. The current status quo is not sustainable. It is absolutely not sustainable!

My hope is that there are many people in the world that share these feelings. Unfortunately, many people do feel powerless. This means we have a lot of work to do within our communities, to create the kinds of dialogues and the kinds of opportunities for people to develop their voices and a sense of their social agency. We have so much power collectively. I don't think most people recognize the level of power that we actually have and how we can work together to transform the injustices and inequalities around the world. If we come together to work in a very coherent and integrated way, to struggle against these atrocities, I firmly believe we can transform the world, I don't see any other way possible. I know that I will continue till the day I die [laughs] to resist the oppressive forces that seek to strip us of our humanity. I don't see this as a 'career'. I never have seen my work as a 'career'. My work is my life and my vocation, it has been my vocation to be a part of this larger political project, in which I never feel isolated anymore. Everywhere I go, I find wonderful, strong and beautiful people fighting the good fight. There are people everywhere working to overcome the forces that seek to overwhelm democratic life, and occasionally we see the fruits of their labor: the farmers' strike in India; people fighting in Chile for a new constitution. People rising up gives me hope that our hard work is part of a larger dream for our collective liberation.

I never have seen my work as a 'career'. My work is my life and my vocation.

We have to roll up our sleeves and be willing to do the hard work together. For it is precisely by doing the work together that makes change possible. It is hard work. But when we bring love, our shared labor, and connection of community together, it makes life meaningful. More importantly, it feels wonderful; it gives us life and so we feel truly present and alive. Whenever I've been involved with other people in mobilizing our political efforts, I've never felt more alive. There's a tremendous power that we as human beings generate collectively. I believe it is exactly this great collective power that those in power, invested in our social containment, never want us to fully understand. This is the power that inspires us, nourishes us, and moves us toward creating a more just and loving world. I believe with all my heart that a vision that encompasses global human rights, social justice, cultural diversity, and economic democracy is truly a vision that is worthy of our labor, of our love, and of our life.

J. R.: You're such an inspiration. On behalf of our team, thank you so much!

A.D.: Thank you for your interest in my work and I hope that it will do some good for others.

Acknowledgement

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