# The Safety of Theory: Working with Educators in a Squatter Community

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Based on the experience of recent educational work in a squatter community on the outskirts of Cape Town, South Africa, we examine the difficulties and problems encountered in trying to develop a critical pedagogy amongst teachers. We show how sedimented the dominant class's ideology is within the consciousness of oppressed communities and hence how inadequately the process of developing a critical pedagogy is understood. We argue that the empowerment of oppressed teachers is a complex process and that we need to take seriously the specific circumstances which confront these teachers.

En s'appuyant sur l'expérience d'un récent travail en éducation dans une communauté de la banlieu de Cape Town, Afrique du Sud, nous examinons les difficultés et les problèmes recontrés en tentant de développer une pédagogie critique parmi les professeurs de cette communauté. Nous montrons à quel point le niveau de conscience de la classe dominante, en ce qui regarde les communautés d'opprimés, est défaillante. C'est ainsi que le processus de développement d'une pédagogie critique est très inadéquatement compris. Nous croyons donc que la possibilité d'octroyer plus de pouvoir aux professeurs opprimés est un processus complexe. Nous devons alors prendre très au sérieux les circonstances particulières dans lesquelles sont impliqués ces professeurs.

> The oppressed, who have adapted to the structure of domination in which they are immersed, and have become resigned to it, are inhibited from waging the struggle for freedom so long as they feel incapable of running the risks it requires. (Freire, 1972, p. 24)

Placed into the politically charged environment of the black South African classroom, "progressive" education/critical pedagogy and its methodology (à la Paulo Freire), particularly in its rejection of the presumed neutrality of education, is frequently assumed to have found its natural medium. In this article we draw on the experience of recent work with teachers at an independent community school in a squatter community to argue that critical pedagogy cannot simply be adopted, no matter how sensitively, and that there is much that we have yet to learn about assisting in the emergence of critical consciousness.

We set out to show how sedimented the dominant structures of thought are in oppressed communities and how inadequately the process of critical pedagogy is understood. This discussion is particularly important as educators struggle to

define their tasks in the emerging new South Africa. We argue that a theory of change through and in education in South Africa needs to be grounded in the specificity of the South African situation. We evaluate the complex dynamic inherent in bringing to the task of teacher education a progressive approach. Thus, we seek to make sense of the encounter between an interpretation of progressive theory and the specific context from which the teachers come. The aim, borrowing from Lather (1986), is to assist in the formation of a theory that possesses "evocative power" which with "resonating with people's lived concerns, fears and aspirations . . . serves an energizing role" (pp. 266-267). Much of our concern, therefore, is understanding what *empowerment* is all about.

The argument that we employ is that the teacher plays a critical role in the formation of student thought and that student empowerment is, as Ayers (1986, p. 50) suggests, fundamentally dependent on teacher empowerment. Unlike Ayers, however, we argue that empowerment needs to be understood as a complex experience which is shaped in the specific ideological and material conditions confronting the teacher or student. These conditions are always tension-filled ones. Bringing together teachers and students creates a terrain which, as Giroux and McLaren (1986) say, is far from "an iron-clad system of rules and regulations" (1986, p. 229). Rather, it is characterized by "resistance, compromise and contestation" (p. 229). A sense of the complexity of this experience is reflected in Delpit's (1986, pp. 382-383) deeply self-conscious account of her passage through the schooling mill: accommodation of the symbols of the dominant culture, rejection of the subordinate culture, and in the end a rediscovery of the political significance of traditional strategies employed by disenfranchised communities.

Much of the material for this article was acquired in the course of Wendy's work as a mathematics tutor in a teacher training project in the squatter settlement called KTC on the outskirts of Cape Town. She also spent an extended period of observation with a family in the community during the middle of 1989 and several afternoons for many months. In terms of method, this immersion raises many problems, not the least of which is the reliability of the information which it has yielded. While we agree with Wilson and Ramphele (1989, p. 15), we would argue that this immersion has served to draw attention to aspects that might "neither be noticed nor measured, let alone assessed" (p. 15). For our purposes this closeness has also given us a perspective of the community and has made it easier to understand the voices on the ground. The article is divided into three parts. In the first part we provide a very brief description of the community, paying particular attention to elements of home and school routines. In the second part we describe our involvement with the teachers at the school and in the third part we draw on discussions of empowerment as we critique our own practice.

*KTC Squatter Community, the People, and the Stormont Madubela Community School*

KTC is one of a string of shack settlements strung along a rough north-south axis approximately 15 kilometres east of Cape Town. Products of waves of urbanization from the Transkei and Ciskei begun in 1978 (Bernstein, 1986, pp. 36-37), the image these settlements project is one of intense hardship. Of comfort there is little evidence to be found. Dwellings are improvised structures constructed from such materials as corrugated iron and cardboard. Infrastructural facilities barely exist. Roads cut by pedestrian traffic snake between shacks, taking their own unpredictable courses; drinking water is scarce and sanitation facilities hardly available. Life in winter is hazardous, particularly for children for whom pools of stagnant water dammed around their homes are a major reality in their lives.

It is this very impoverishment which has made scarce resources the cause for intense strife in the community and the basis on which immense power is wielded. Like squatter communities elsewhere in the Western Cape and indeed in the country (French, 1989), KTC has had to contend with the peculiar ensemble of contradictions which the apartheid system has bestowed on such communities. Ever-present among these has been the emergence of powerful local figureheads dispensing such patronage as right to sites in return for other favors, not excluding financial payments. A complicating factor has been the association of these figureheads with such competing political organizations as the wider Democratic Movement, the African National Congress (ANC), or the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) as well as those perceived to be supportive of state structures. This leadership has had different effects in different areas.

In KTC it led to a conflict in 1987 which, after a series of traumatic attacks and counter-attacks in which homes were burnt, facilities (such as the primary health care clinic with which Crain had been involved) destroyed, and people beaten, resulted in the splitting of the community (SACHED Education Worker, personal communication, April 23, 1990).

Immediately prior to this split, the area occupied by KTC was approximately 51 hectares in extent, accommodating an estimated 5500 structures (Urban Foundation, Western Cape, 1986). Within this area were approximately 50,000 people; many of these were recent immigrants from the homelands of the Ciskei and the Transkei. Based on research conducted by the Urban Foundation (1986) in the Western Cape, it was estimated that there were between 66 and 100 dwellings per hectare.

Finding evidence to illustrate the degree of deprivation in the community is difficult but can be inferred indirectly from a few sources. Statistically, it is suggested from unemployment level estimates made by the National Manpower Commission that anything between 9.5% and 55% of people are involved with

informal sector activities (National Manpower Commission, 1984). Other indications can be gleaned from income levels. While this information is sparse, that of hawkers, who one may argue are relatively better off than most, averaged out to R100.000 per week in 1984 (Urban Foundation, 1986, p. 9). Prinsloo, cited in Wilson and Ramphele (1989, p. 67), also found that the proportion of households living below minimum living levels (which was R345.00 in 1985) in the squatter settlements in Cape Town was approximately 30%.

The story of Nomsa, an untrained teacher at Stormont Madubela School, has its own eloquence in illustrating the impoverishment of the community. As an untrained teacher with 12 years of formal schooling Nomsa is considered by the community to be one of its most highly educated and privileged persons. She has a two year old son, Ncedo, and shares her shack with her mother and younger sister. The shack consists of two rooms, an anteroom which serves as a kitchen and a living area and a bedroom The walls of the bedroom are lined with strips of cardboard. In the room which serves as the kitchen are all the utensils required for preparing meals. The dwelling is kept very clean; it is swept five or six times daily.

Ncedo has one toy, a broken lorry. His play is invariably made up of sitting digging in the dirty sand with his hands. He wanders around seemingly aimlessly and follows his mother everywhere she goes. Ncedo occasionally entertains the family by telling them about the things he learned at the creche he attends daily. Put in Nomsa's own words, "I get through the days by thinking to myself, 'Nomsa, you were born to suffer.'" She feels so disempowered and inferior that she says, "I spend most of my day wishing I was white."

The history of the school and the experiences of teachers and pupils reflect the accumulated ravages of this deprivation Prior to the split in 1987, and in contrast to neighboring squatter communities like Crossroads which are led by traditional headmen, the KTC community introduced a democratic administration for itself, sustained by a democratically elected leadership. This leadership solicited the assistance of several educational and health organizations to introduce rudimentary educational and health programs for the community.

The KTC community school grew out of the need expressed by members of the KTC committee to establish a place of learning for the large number of children who were not admitted and who could not be admitted into state schools because of lack of space. They approached an independent Cape Town service organization, the South African Committee for Higher Education, to help establish the school. SACHED had been established to support and provide tutoring for disadvantaged black learners. Teachers for the school were to be drawn from the literate, unemployed adults of the community. Initially about 40 people came forward to participate voluntarily in the project as teachers. This number was reduced as people found other interests and employment. Such

sponsorship as was obtained helped the KTC committee acquire shipping containers which became the school building. The school took its name from a prominent community leader who was killed in the conflict of 1987, Stormont Madubela.

The school has eight members of staff, none of whom are certified teachers. Their education ranges from 10 to 12 years of formal schooling. They serve approximately 189 children housed in the seven containers which are the buildings of Stormont Madubela. Raising finances to run the school has proved to be a problem; this continues to be a factor in virtually every aspect of the school's existence. Beyond the efforts of the community itself, sponsorship has been sufficient only for buying materials. Apart from relatively small endowments made by foreign benefactors, local agencies have been reluctant to invest money in the project. As a result, teachers have frequently gone many months without remuneration.

Nevertheless, teachers have taken the initiative and have begun their own fund raising schemes. For instance, with the support and encouragement of the others, one of the teachers often took the school choir to the city center where they stood at a busy intersection and sang; passers-by put money into a collection box for them. This meant that she had to organize transport for herself and 60 students to and from Cape Town. This money was used to provide funds for the teachers as well as to buy equipment for the students and the school.

School invariably begins with the singing of religious songs. Every morning the students line up in front of the biggest container and sing a number of these songs. The teachers (those who are at school at about nine o'clock) stand in front of the students and announce which song is to be sung next. The last song is a marching song and the students then march to their various containers. Deviations from this routine are seldom made.

The students settle themselves in their classes and wait for the teachers. During the period of our observation and subsequent visits it was apparent that the teachers arrived late and were frequently absent. Reasons for their absence were mostly of a personal nature.

Generally, we observed that teaching took place during the first hour of the day. Thereafter, the nature of the school day changed. The main role of the school seemed to become one of custodial care. For example, after the first break the teachers continued sitting quietly in the containers chatting to each other and only occasionally to students. The students, mostly unsupervised, sat around paging through magazines, talking to each other, and generally amusing themselves. When the teachers were asked why they continued to run the school the reply was always the same: "Where will these children go otherwise?" Given the lack of child care facilities within the community, this can be seen as an important function for the school.

*Working With the Teachers*

During December of 1987 Wendy was invited to work with the teacher training project. Her work was to help the teachers prepare and teach mathematics/basic numeracy to students between the ages of five and 16. A number of other people, including a mathematics lecturer at a local College of Education, also joined the project. Other focuses of the work were language and general science. In launching the project, SACHED envisaged that it would be guided by the ideals of People's Education, a popular movement which grew out of the national student rebellion of 1985 and which sought to generate an alternative educational system guided by the principles of antiracism, antisexism, and democracy.

Project workers sympathetic to this perspective (of whom some were full-time teachers) were invited to participate in a series of meetings to discuss the program for the project. From these meetings, as well as from the work of Freire (1972) and recent "alternative education" experience, some guidelines were set:

- There would be no principal.
- Teachers would be encouraged to timetable their day as it suited them and their students.
- There would be no need to write formal examinations; a written examination would be developed only for those students who were ready to go on to the eighth year of schooling (standard six) at a Department of Education and Training (DET): the government department responsible for black education — secondary school.
- Teachers would be made aware of ways of moving away from the traditional pencil and paper exercises and shown that painting, drawing, writing a poem, or producing a drama are also ways of recording learning.

The project workers envisaged a radical education being put into practice at the community school. We operated on a number of assumptions:

- Teachers can be empowered to work with students' knowledge bases and strengths and weaknesses; these will inform their practice.
- Teachers can be encouraged to find a variety of ways to record student work.
- Teachers are representative of the most oppressed; they have suffered immeasurably and will surely do anything to change their powerlessness. Thus, they are ready to be politicized and will support our idea of a radical education for the children of the community. This assumption is based on Freire's (1972) statement

> that (those) hands — whether of individuals or entire people — (need) be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work, and which by working, transform the world. (pp. 21-22)

- Teachers will like our different and creative teaching ideas for teaching language, mathematics, and science.
- Teachers will prefer a school without too much formal structure: no principal, no uniforms, no set school hours, and no rigid teaching periods.
- Teachers and parents within the community will be enthusiastic about being involved in all the decision-making that takes place; this includes not only administrative decisions but also those concerning the curriculum to be implemented.

The project workers met once a week with the teachers to prepare for the basic numeracy/mathematics sessions. The teachers were involved in one workshop per week at SACHED in Cape Town; these were held in the afternoons after school. The focus of the workshops was language and basic numeracy/mathematics. At the same time other organizations and individuals were also contributing to the teachers' training. The teachers from the KTC community school attended workshops on other topics including teaching reading, Montessore educational methods, art, and music.

In the sessions dealing with numeracy we asked the teachers to start introducing basic concepts of size, number, and shape. The workshop methodology required teachers to work in small groups and to manipulate concrete objects before they started with abstract, written exercises. It also encouraged them to begin exploring mathematics in an investigational way. This meant that we started by working through such open-ended mathematical situations as the following:

Consecutive Sums

$15 = 7 + 8$

$9 = 2 + 3 + 4$ OR $4 + 5$

$10 = 1 + 2 + 3 + 4$

These three numbers can be written as the sum of two or more consecutive integers.

Are there numbers which cannot be written like this?

Starting with any number, say 42, can you decide whether and how it can be written in this way?

Which numbers, like 9 above, can be split up in more than one way?

(Brombacher & Breen, 1985, p.5)

This methodology was chosen to challenge the teachers' assumption that mathematics is a given and finite body of knowledge of basic algorithms.

Unfortunately, all our well-worked out, thoughtful theory and practical applications of methodology and subject content were met with the strongest resistance by the teachers. They listened politely to us but ignored our inputs completely. We discovered that they continued in their classes to follow very traditional chalk-and-talk methods. As well, the teachers felt that very strict corporal punishment was necessary.

After about three months the SACHED project coordinator also became concerned about this continued emphasis on traditional, authoritarian teaching. As well, those of us in the project concluded that there had been little, if any, observable movement away from authoritarian, traditional methods. When talking to the teachers we detected contradictions: While teachers said they liked what we were doing, when asked why they were not using many of the suggestions regarding methodology which cropped up in our discussions at workshops they shrugged and would not answer us directly. We interpreted this as a rejection of our methodologies. Their beliefs and assumptions had somehow not been expanded to include a more learning-centered vision of education.

We decided that interventions from too many different sources, organizations, and people were confusing the teachers rather than helping them expand their educational beliefs. All workshop sessions were suspended for about six weeks. However, after this break Wendy was asked by the SACHED project coordinator to continue preparing support for the teachers of mathematics and basic numeracy.

Wendy decided to continue the workshops but, instead of having the teachers come to SACHED in Cape Town, she held the workshops in KTC at the school. She decided that the school was a better venue because the teachers would not have to travel and mathematics education could be discussed within the context of the actual classrooms. In cooperation with the project worker for language she planned workshops on topics such as comparison, (e.g., "larger than and smaller than"). The language tutor followed these mathematics/numeracy sessions with others on complementary topics for language.

Wendy and the language tutor tried to problematize politically the topics with which they were dealing. For example, when responding to questions regarding the lack of such teaching materials as metre sticks and teaching blocks, they referred to differing expenditure for the various racially defined education departments where the annual amount spent on white children is far more than amounts spent on colored or Black children (Christie, 1985).

During the June 1988 vacation, the SACHED coordinator and Wendy ran a full course of daily workshops. Topics included planning of the school day, providing alternatives to traditional assessment, and integrating subject material and teaching aids made from ordinary household things. However, despite all of the work during October, the teachers at the school asked Wendy to stop running

the workshops as they wanted to prepare for the final examination that they as teachers had decided was to be a crucial part of their school calender. Again, the project workers became painfully aware of how little impact they were making.

As she reflected on her practice, Wendy became aware of the discrepancy between the amount of energy going into workshops and interaction with the teachers and their professional growth as defined by the project workers. She felt that if she gained more insight into the teachers' lives at the school and within the community she would be able to address this perceived lack of growth. So she started visiting the school and the teachers on a very informal basis. Often, she just stood around chatting with the teachers. A very important thing happened when she started doing this: She was forced to start listening to them rather than their listening to her. She became more aware of their utter rejection of her "newfangled" ideas of mathematics/basic numeracy teaching as well as of their desperate desire for a "proper" school with a proper school uniform, proper timetables, proper exams, a proper principal, etc. She also became aware of the inappropriateness of the assumptions on which the project had been based.

As well, it was becoming obvious that not much was being taught at the school. One teacher said that the teachers did not teach well or regularly because there was no principal to check on them. That the pupils were not receiving much in the way of an education really bothered Nomsa; she spoke about it quite often. It seemed that she did not know what might be done to remedy the situation.

However, help was still being sought. This encouraged Wendy to persevere into 1989, when she made one more attempt to facilitate a program for the teachers. During the first week of January one of the authors contacted the mathematics lecturer again and discussed the work at KTC. The lecturer was very willing to resume involvement in the project. So they planned that senior student teachers specializing in mathematics would also become involved.

*Broadening Contact*

By now the way that the teachers had organized themselves to teach had changed dramatically. They felt that the teachers who had the most formal education and who were therefore judged by the staff to be cleverer than the rest of the staff should take responsibility for teaching mathematics; therefore only three were now involved in this. The teachers at the school were asked whether the student teachers from the college might be involved and they readily agreed. On reflection Wendy felt that the project workers operated from a power and authority base that stood in the way of open communication concerning teaching practice. It was hoped that the student teacher involvement would erode this power base and that channels for talking about teaching and mathematics education would be opened.

Each week the students gathered ideas and resources for the specific topics that they were asked to teach. Together the students and teachers drew up worksheets or lessons the next week. The student teachers then taught the lessons in a nearby white school and the lecturer from the college evaluated them. The teachers at Stormont Madubela School told Wendy when they wanted her to observe their lessons and she went to their classrooms to provide feedback. Then they all — Wendy, the college lecturer, the student teachers, and the mathematics teachers at the school — met to reflect on the lessons and to suggest improvements for future instruction.

The first few sessions appeared to work well. Both students and teachers were busy talking, sharing, and generally being very involved in each workshop session. They easily described what had taken place in the lessons which they had taught. This involvement and interest began to wane, however, as lack of salary began to anger and depress the teachers. Pressures of time and professional commitments also caused the college lecturer to withdraw.

This led to a phase of deep reflection about the KTC involvement. It seemed to Wendy that everything possible had been done to encourage an honest and critical engagement around the issue of mathematics/numeracy education but that this critical discourse had never become a reality for those involved in the project.

*Knowing and Understanding the Context*

Wendy still felt that she did not know enough about the teachers and the constraints with which they dealt from day to day. She decided that, if she were to work intimately with the teachers, she should have a better idea of what was happening in the classrooms. She chose to work with Nomsa because she was teaching the senior mathematics course and because they shared an interest in mathematics for the senior primary phase. However, when she arranged with Nomsa to observe the class, she found that only carefully rehearsed traditional lessons were presented. So, on invitation from Nomsa, she decided to stay and attend school with her in order to get a better idea of life in the squatter camp and the school.

This period of intense involvement in the community, school, and family life at KTC proved again that intervention by outsiders had brought about very little teacher growth, development, and awareness. They had not become the empowered teachers who, after critical reflection on their teaching practice, would be able to make informed decisions regarding their classroom practice. The only meaningful instruction that Wendy observed happened when the SACHED literacy worker came to the school and worked with older learners.

Somehow the transformative teacher training to which we all had aspired and for which we had worked very hard for never materialized. Our pedagogy,

which we had hoped would result in people who were no longer the oppressed or oppressors but rather were in the process of achieving freedom (after Freire, 1972, p. 25), did not help us to facilitate this transformation.

As Britzman (1986) argues, we learned that, in the hard reality of the real world, "theory counts for little" (p. 447). Our assumptions were inaccurate; moreover, they were very problematic in terms of our relationship with the teachers. Our expectations were different from those of the teachers; somehow we had failed to clarify these expectations.

It became apparent that the expectations of the teachers included the following: They wanted school uniforms and a set timetable with the school day divided into set periods. They wanted desks, blackboards, and all the formal structures that are found in conventional state schools. Their main concern was that the children of the community should have proper education but this was the same traditional and conservative education that white learners in this country receive.

The contradiction between their views and ours was apparent in the teachers' feelings about the ways in which the school was being managed. Because they were worried about their homes and families, their paramount concern was whether they would receive payment for their work. This placed them in an extremely ambiguous situation vis-à-vis the DET. Having heard that another community school had received official DET recognition and therefore assistance with the payment of salaries for teachers, they decided to explore similar possibilities. While negotiations with the DET offered the possibility of funding, they were not certain that they wanted to be controlled by it. They perceived the DET as a threat to their independence, bringing with it racist inspectors and administrators who stood for the "Bantu education" and its apartheid ideology. (Bantu education was a policy introduced by the state to school black people into subservience.)

*Empowerment: Constraining Factors and Concerns*

Several important observations can be made about this experience. There appears to exist a "common sense" among the teachers which has its own specific theoretical structure. In our view the process of empowerment is about more than just introducing another model which has new theoretical imperatives. Empowerment is about articulating the common sense of the teachers and developing this into concepts which they can examine critically. This common sense is reflected in a diversity of ways (e.g., a strong belief in proper education). Much of this is informed by experience in the formal settings of state schooling. While contact with progressive activists has introduced notions of democracy, the discourse of control symbolized by wanting a principal as leader is pervasive. The idea of a democratic approach to teaching is also spurned in favor of very traditional discipline - driven methods.

This reveals the extent to which the universe of the teachers is dominated by symbols of the broader society. While they seek to align themselves with alternative type structures such as SACHED, they resist the values for which these structures stand. Interpreting the significance of the resistance is not easy; however, there does appear to be an anxiety about the desirability of the alternative. For example, on many occasions, teachers and members of the community expressed a desire for the school to be incorporated into the mainstream structure or the Department of Education and Training (DET) "because that is proper schooling." What it suggests is that they fear the risks involved in taking the alternative route; they are also concerned with the degree to which the alternative would provide access to the same opportunities as proper schooling and their status in the community would be maintained.

It is appropriate here to expand on our notion of empowerment. In our view, empowerment transforms a person from one who is fatalistically despondent to one who is engaged with those factors in his or her life, such as the dominant culture, which are determinative. It means reconstituting the person (and the class) as active subjects in reality. It begins from a common sense world-view and proceeds through one or a multiplicity of engaged experiences which assist students in "broadening their understanding of themselves, the world and the possibilities for transforming the taken-for-granted assumptions about the way we live" (Giroux & McClaren, 1986, p. 229).

There were times when the teachers obviously felt competent, confident, and empowered to initiate projects of their own. For instance, when the teachers decided to raise funds for their school they required very little help from any of the tutors or from the SACHED coordinator. This stands in stark contrast to the unwillingness they displayed when it came to implementing a different way of educating themselves and the learners in their care. In a noneducational setting the teachers felt that they could do something about the situation and became initiators of change; however, this successful experience did not spill over into their daily activities in the classroom.

How empowerment occurs in real life, in the space between the cognitive and affective domains, does not appear to be reducible to pat formulae. Undoubtedly, however, in appropriating new knowledge it means not only understanding that knowledge but understanding its deep contradictions too. In dealing with the question of color, Ellsworth (1989, p. 305) argues that to call on students of color to justify and explicate their claims in terms of the master's tools — such as rationalism, fashioned precisely to perpetuate their exclusions — colludes with the oppressors in keeping the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns.

We propose that there are important elements of personal experience which this common sense wisdom manifested by the teachers has served to subjugate. Much of the lack of initiative of the teachers and even the children in moving

beyond the limitations of their environment can be ascribed to the dislocation of experience which has accompanied the migration from the rural environment to the urban. The real apathy of the teachers reflects for us how the subjugation of any other enriching educational experience, and the elevation of the common sense, has disempowered the teachers. They are caught in a mind-set within which success and achievement are only attainable through compliance with the rules of that framework. However, entry into the framework, given their social location, is only from the very bottom of society, a route which is a disempowering one. The young children who come from the rural areas of the Transkei, for example, usually have a wealth of experience because of the responsibilities they are expected to undertake and their interaction with other siblings. Unfortunately, it would appear that this experience is lost or negated as herding goats or collecting kindling for fires is not seen as important or dignified work within the urban context in which the children now find themselves.

There are a number of difficulties in trying to rescue the significance of empowering kinds of experience. Much of this difficulty is about the very pervasiveness of powerlessness which characterizes squatter-community life. Self-reflectiveness is a way of overturning that powerlessness (Colyn, 1986). However, what we fear, based on our experience, is that the image subjugated people look for, and much less seek to understand, is not their own but that "(of the) oppressor. This is their model of humanity" (Freire, 1972, p. 22).

How then does one begin this process of empowerment? Answers are not self-evident. Clearly, one has to help students, adults as well as children, to reconstruct their social environments. As a very modest contribution to this process, students have to be brought to understand their own social construction. This would serve to bring them to the vantage point of understanding their location in an environment, central to which is the capacity to accept themselves, or as Aronowitz says, "appreciating and loving oneself" (Giroux & McLaren, 1986, p. 229). The self-interrogation implied in this process, however would appear to involve ways of knowing which critical pedagogy can only partially provide. Along with Ellsworth (1989) we would argue that empowerment cannot be considered an approach which "treats the symptoms but leaves the disease unnamed and untouched" (p. 306). Working with teachers in KTC we are deeply conscious of this and would therefore argue that the political and social struggles for housing, health, and other basic demands are intrinsically part of the KTC teachers' realization of their social construction. It is as teachers that they express their empowerment but it is as subjects in a universe broader than the school that they become fully human.

We now wonder if it should not have been our role to support the teachers at KTC in establishing the kind of school that they wanted and to facilitate their reflection on the process as it unfolded. This reflection might have ensured that the teachers codified their experience in one way or another. Working from this

code we could have sought to bring about those changes that the teachers really wanted.

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