

# *Identity in the Philosophies of Dewey and Freire: Select Analyses*

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**ABSTRACT:** Identity, even if it has not been separately treated in the educational philosophies of John Dewey and Paulo Freire, remains, nevertheless, an important component of the teaching and writing of the two philosophers. This paper first presents a limited discussion of some theoretical and conceptual points on identity, followed by a general discussion of identity as it has been, either directly or indirectly, located in the educational philosophies of Dewey and Freire. The importance of identity, whether at the community, national, or even international stages, and as an educational and social development construct, is being rendered more fluid, dynamic, and therefore, probably less tangible by such transnational and trans-continental forces of globalization, information technology, and the electronic media. The paper ends with the acknowledgment that, while observations in this short article could only be the beginning of an interesting debate, a vigorous undertaking in re-examining questions and issues of identity (against the backdrop of Deweyan and Freirean philosophies of education) should be appreciated.

**RÉSUMÉ:** L'identité n'était pas traité séparément dans les philosophies de John Dewey et Paulo Freire, et pourtant, elle restait un élément très important de l'enseignement et de l'écriture de ces deux philosophes. Après avoir présenté une discussion limitée sur quelques points théoriques et conceptuels concernant l'identité, l'article porte l'attention sur une discussion générale sur l'identité ce qui était présent d'une façon directe ou indirecte dans les philosophies d'éducation de Dewey et Freire. L'importance de l'identité soit au niveau local, national ou même international vue en tant que construction d'éducation et du développement social, est perçue plus souple, dynamique et probablement pour cette raison moins tangible par les forces transnationales et

transcontinentales de la globalisation, la technologie de l'information et les media électroniques. Ce texte se termine par l'admission que- si les observations de ce court article soient le début de la discussion intéressante il faudrait sûrement apprécier l'entreprise vigoureuse de réexaminer des questions et des issues de l'identité (par opposition au «paravent» inclus dans les philosophies d'éducation de Dewey et Freire.

The importance of identity to the individual as well as to the community can hardly be underestimated. At the most primal sketch of definitional and analytical platforms, the focus of identity is who the person is, or who a group of people are. So the general question, who are you or who am I, forms a basic compositional understanding of identity. Identity is, therefore, a product of several personal and/or group characteristics such as socially constructed categories of race, gender, nationality, professional status, social position, and even personal history. While examining identity under the philosophical rigour of Dewey and Freire's writings would always be relevant for educational researchers, the general theoretical discussions would also be pertinent to the temporal as well as locational exigencies that are currently situated in today's globalizing institutional and learning spaces.

In these socially fervent and relatively identity diffusing post-Cold war situations, it should be apparent that a number of formerly coherent national spaces would be subordinated to fast moving economic interests that may force us to reformulate the discursive premiums we are placing on identity debates and analysis. It would be important to note here, therefore, that all the political, economic, and identity configurations that are, either voluntarily or involuntarily, harvested by different communities in the world would, *ipso facto*, powerfully impact on educational programs and will, in the process, highly influence specific cases of social development or underdevelopment. Beyond the temporality of these and other global implications, identity, at the personal level, is either of authentic source or arbitrarily given. In his seminal essay, "The Politics of Recognition" (1994), Charles Taylor affirms that there is a fundamental relationship between identity and recognition where

Identity is partly shaped by [the right] recognition or its absence, often by the *misrecognition* of others and so a person or a group can suffer real damage, real distortion if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Non- recognition or *misrecognition* can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. (p. 75)

In attempting to make actual sense of Taylor's arguments, one could think of perceiving a situation where *via* the source of identity, one may contemplate, deliberately or situationally, the possible outcomes of an educational program in the context of an authentic identity or uncentered identity. Taylor (1994) would permit (based on my reading) a deductive analysis that any "right recognition" will situate and sustain authentic representation which could, in turn, lead to emancipated self, raised existential awareness, and conscientious attachment to the surrounding physical and social environment. All of that will be presumably more conducive to realizing (in graduated time alignments) the potential for community and individual advancement. On the other hand, the consequences of an imputed identity could precipitate new and continuing schemes of misrecognition selectively sustained by imposed self-perceptions that are capable of perpetuating false representation, oppressed self, low self-esteem, as well as a restricted capacity to change situations and/or harness life opportunities. An underlying assumption in the role of identity as an agent of change is that identity is not static, but dynamic with our self-conceptions selectively, but constantly changing (Hartman, 1997; Ghosh, 1996). Ghosh notes that "identities are always in the making [as they are] an individual's history and culture, class, and ethnicity" (p. 7).

As we examine the educational philosophies of Dewey and Freire, it is clear that theirs were projects that were consciously aware of the important relationship between identity and individual/social development. As Hook (1971), for example, points out, for Dewey "intelligence was at home in the natural world and not a mysterious intruder bringing its own standards from a realm beyond the skies" (p. 3). This important observation actually connects well with Sternberg's interesting "contextual sub-theory" (1988) where intelligence, beyond so many untenable preferences elsewhere, represents our individual capacities to

specify our goals and achieve them in a given situation. That is, intelligence should be linked to the way we define ourselves, situationally comprehend and selectively respond to the world around us, and experientially make choices that ameliorate our chances of positively exploiting moments as well as spaces of our existence. Moreover, Chickering and Reisser (1993) affirm that "establishing identity certainly involves growing awareness of competencies, emotions and values, confidence in standing alone and bonding with others, and moving beyond intolerance toward openness and self-esteem" (p. 173). The intertwinement of identity and recognition, and therefore, the desire for protection and association is also supported by West (1995) who sees identity:

As a desire for recognition; quest for visibility; the sense of being acknowledged; a deep desire for association. [Identity] is the longing to belong, a deep, visceral need that most linguistically conscious animals who transact with an environment participate in. And there is a profound desire for protection, for security, for safety, for surety. (pp. 15-16)

While personal identity can be authentic in the sense that the person who is being identified is the source of that identity, national identity is almost always artificially or opportunistically, purposefully created to conceive and maintain a given structure of a nation, a state, or a community (Gellner, 1997, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990; Anderson, 1983). But there is a notion of credibility or lack of it in the formations as well as the deformations of national identities. A good example in this case, may be the relationship between identity and colonialism. In pre-colonial, traditional societies, even if national identities were not authentic in the purest sense of the term, it is, nevertheless, possible to say that a minimum of psychologically-based common identities were forged *via* cultural and linguistic similarities.

During colonialism, on the other hand, the colonized were misidentified by colonial anthropologists and administrators who facilitated the process of colonization as well as the formation of unequal relationships between colonizing Europeans and colonized natives. Resulting from the *problematiques* of this process and from subsequent upheavals, the consequences for the misidentified have been economically destructive, culturally debilitating, and developmentally disabling (Mandela, 1994; Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1993, 1978; Memmi, 1991; Van Sertima,

1991; Rodney, 1982; Nyerere, 1968; Fanon, 1968, 1967; Achebe, 1958). Selectively responding to the problems of identity deformations and topically corresponding to the works of Dewey and Freire, the late President of Tanzania Julius Nyerere (1968) saw education as a counter-offensive platform where post-colonial spaces could re-establish certain measures of authentic identity for socio-cultural emancipation and economic development. Connecting Nyerere's points to the learning and pedagogical observations of existential and pragmatic philosophers of education will not be difficult. Freire's critical construct of education or *conscientização* (to be discussed more expansively later) was, indeed, affirming the possibility of acquiring a positive and enduringly real self-concept, that is, authentic identity. Freire's analysis was, of course, and especially *vis-à-vis* Dewey's, more focused on a dominant-subordinate case with disenfranchised peasants finding themselves in a quasi-colonized relationship with the more powerful segments of their societies.

In Dewey's case, some of his emphasis on "congruentizing" the learner's background with the facts of the school environment were instigated, at least partially, by the experiences of the children of European immigrants at the turn of and in the early 20th century. Glazer (1997) points out that Dewey's "culture of learning" observations were, more or less, exclusive to European groups and, therefore, were not multicultural in the sense that we use the term today. In Freire's case on the other hand, the pedagogy of liberation he was advocating was to sustain itself *vis-à-vis* a system of continuing serfdom, as mentioned above, where landowners were exploiting both the labour as well as the identity of landless peasants. In that sense, Freire's program was a bold attempt to equip these peasants with new authentic identities that were to liberate them from the false, oppressive identity in which they were psychologically imprisoned.

The importance of identity formations and deformations in educational milieus and programs should be obvious. Education involves, more than anything else, a process of social development where the young and adults are either formally, informally, or non-formally taught, socialized, or trained to acquire specific/specialized or even random knowledge and skills for personal and community advancement. It would also be possible especially in informal educational situations, that the outcome of

education will be socially destabilizing. The introduction of Dewey and Freire's philosophies of education presented new trends of arguing for, and deliberately demanding a new praxis of critical awareness, inclusion, and enhanced democratic citizenship in learning situations. In the following pages, I will examine some streams/threads of identity in select cases of the two eminent philosophers' writings (observationally corroborated, of course, by other related works) in education and social development. Here, I am already assuming, and primarily as a result of the above discussion, that the right identity (in Taylorian terms, authentic identity), is important, in effect, indispensable, for social development.

### *Dewey and the Question of Identity in Education*

John Dewey (1859-1951) has been called, primarily because of the breadth of his analyses and the pragmatism of his philosophical writings, America's 20th century philosopher. Whether that should have been the case or not, it is quite practical to recognize Dewey as one of the eminent world philosophers in the first half of the last century. Perhaps Dewey's experiences in both the 19th and 20th centuries were catalysts in shaping his analytical positions and, in general, his worldview (his *weltanschauung*). That will be so, for many governance, technological, educational, and other aspects of literally ground shifting changes have taken place in the lives of people around the world in the last 100 or so years. It is quite understandable, therefore, that thinkers, whether they be philosophers, physicists, or political leaders are hugely influenced by the times in which they live. In Dewey's case, for example, he has done his graduate work at Johns Hopkins University under professors who "expounded absolute idealism, experimental psychology, formal logic, and the philosophy of science" (Baker, 1966, p. 9). It might have been expected, therefore, that he at first supported idealism even if Dewey is now universally seen as a central figure in the philosophy of pragmatism.

While Dewey may not have directly treated the issue of identity in his teachings or philosophical writings, it is, nevertheless, practical to situate this concept and its *praxis* in the thick of his theoretical promulgations. When Dewey talked about the importance of experience as well as the indispensability

of the school environment reflecting certain or all aspects of the child's background, he is both analytically and observationally at the center of identity as a practice and right. Hickman (1998) notes that Dewey, especially after his move to Columbia University in 1905, turned almost all his focus to the paradigmatic configuration of what could be called "a philosophy of culture." In one of Dewey's seminal works, *Democracy and Education* (1916/1966a), Dewey's emphasis is clearly responding to the temporally based need to examine the best way in formulating and realizing a citizen-wide decision making process that is deliberative, informed, and responsive to the needs (personal, communal, or even national) identified and desired. As Boisvert (1998) notes,

Where dualism (in the Cartesian sense) was the great Deweyan foil, allowing him the path to be avoided, democracy provided the ideal which allowed him to identify the trail to be charted .... Democracy for Dewey identifies a way of life, an ideal of social association that can not be identified with any historical embodiment. As such, democracy is an ongoing experiment, open always to the possibility of amelioration. (p. 105)

In Dewey's analysis, the relationship we form with our environment, especially the social environment, enhances or hinders the benefits or lack of these that we harness as we grow up or even as we re-examine our priorities as fully functioning beings. That again affirms the importance of the identity we assume and/or we are given in shaping not only what we do in life, but also how or to what extent we understand our physical and other living surroundings. Hence, the importance of education, in Dewey's thinking (Dewey saw all philosophy as the general theory of education), as a social function that affirms our identity. That identity, in the general terrain of human history and expectations, could be assumed or exercised in socio-political programs that may be totalitarian (e.g., Nazism, Fascism, communism, one party rule, feudal/modern monarchs, family dynasty, etc.), or democratic.

In a democratic system, as Eze (1998) points out, the legitimization as well as the management of continuously competitive desires are sustained. Dewey (1938/1963), in fact, raises the question of why we prefer democratic and humane arrangements to those that are inhumane, harsh, and dictatorial.

But by equating democracy with humane systems of government and calling the rest harsh and indifferent to people's opinions, values, rights, and expectations, Dewey has already answered the question. And it should be expected that as people, we will identify with, in effect, seek out, democracy and consensus. Deriving from this also, it may be assumed that the type of education that is formulated and implemented in democratic systems will have different aims than that which is practiced within the political confines of totalitarian regimes.

Moreover, going back to Taylor (1994), human dignity, when it is itemized *via* inherited prestige, is stunted, and in the process, identity, by and large, becomes distorted, non-original, assumed, and even forcefully imposed. The serfs of the feudal lord, the subjects of the modern monarch are, at least in their social, occupational, and other potential roles, partially identified and controlled by the lord and the monarch. When, on the other hand, education serves as an attainable vehicle for social development (for all), it could play the role of a liberator where, as we shall see in Paulo Freire's powerful pedagogy, the educated, at any level, could become the masters of their destinies. Dewey (1916/1966) looks at the nature of education that democratic societies require for effective citizenship:

Upon the educational side, we note first that the realization of a form of social life in which interests are mutually interpenetrating, and where progress, or readjustment, is an important consideration, makes a democratic community more interested than other communities have cause to be in deliberate and systematic education. The devotion of democracy to education is a familiar fact. The superficial explanation is that a government resting upon popular suffrage can not be successful unless those who elect and who obey their governors are educated. (p. 87)

The focus in this context is on political philosophy that is complimented by a relevant educational program and outcome. This again involves identity which, even if it is at the political and ideological levels, still fulfils a cluster of secondary identities that although they may not be essentially personal, are, nevertheless, capable of not only influencing individual and group perceptions, but also could define and shape the dispositional as well as the character/interest based *comportment* of the persons concerned. In *Experience and Education* (1938/1963), Dewey

emphasizes the role of education as a powerful agent that affirms and enhances the experience as well as the need for freedom. In this case, the most potent site of this freedom is the mind of the learner who becomes the primary beneficiary of the said freedom. Valuing, seeking, and practicing the experience as well as the actualities of freedom are both existentially and relationally connected to the personal and social milieus upon which we situate ourselves, and, therefore, identify ourselves to belong. Here, it may be important to note that one of Dewey's aims in educating the child is to create a new, but most importantly unalienating identity in the school environment. That identity is not only spatial or personal, but also educational and knowledge based. In his monograph, *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902/1966b), Dewey says:

The child lives in a somewhat narrow world of personal contacts. Things hardly come within his experience unless they touch, intimately and obviously, his own well-being, or that of his family and friends. His world is a world of persons with their personal interests, rather than a realm of facts and laws .... As against this, the course of study met in the school presents material stretching back indefinitely in time, and extending outwardly indefinitely into space .... [To help lessen the potential learning turmoil for the child], let the child proceed step by step to master these separate parts, and at last he will have covered the entire ground. The road which looks so long when viewed in its entirety, is easily traveled, considered as a series of particular steps. (pp. 5, 8)

Dewey's then revolutionary observations on taking the school and learning to the world of the child which are important points of centering the pupil's identity, were also corroborated in his book, *The School and Society* (1900/1923). In this work, Dewey likens the transformations that were to take place to a cosmological re-organization where the child replaces the school as the center of the educational universe. In the new configurations of educational reform, the learner becomes the sun, that is, the focus as well as the sustaining power of the pedagogical relationships. With that, the freedom of experience thus accorded, selectively cemented by new positive and constructive identity formations will help sustain, in the long run, sustainable educational and social platforms for self and community development.

In Dewey's philosophy of education, the harmonization of the school/learning environment with that of the community so as to ease the continuum of learning was an important experience that was to be upheld by teachers and education managers. As Hickman (1998) observes, for Dewey, schools were not simply sites for preparing life in the community, but were themselves viable communities where social progress and moral duty were to be exercised. In *Schools of Tomorrow* (1915/1962), co-written with his wife Evelyn, schools would conform to the original meaning of the term as it was derived from Greek, that is, spaces/time for leisure. In these spaces of leisure, the young are fully supported by adults so the former could pursue non-manual and physically non-demanding learning pleasures that should relieve them of many of life's chores and burden. In *Education and Experience*, Dewey (1938/1963), says:

A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of actual experience by environing conditions, but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth. Above all, they should know how to utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worth while. (p. 40)

Here, and selectively extractable from Dewey's observations, is the clear link between experience as past, present, and even predicted life objectives, or current identity and future expectations. It is also important to note in these lines that while experience may represent for some an already lived context, experience is also the future of the present which should be manipulated, as Dewey instructs, so as to harness all the good things that could happen as a result of what we essentially do with our actualities. Garrison (1998, pp. 65-66) discusses how experience, in the Deweyan analysis, simply represents our transactions with our environment with the inherent senses of doing (*praxis*) and being done to (*pathos*) coming into play. Garrison adds that "there are two ingredients that are necessary for educational experience: interaction (or more exactly transaction) and continuity. Transaction between us and our environment is experience, and experience determines a situation" (p. 66). In a nutshell, experience is always present.

After all, as Dewy says, "education should derive its materials from present experience and should enable the learner to cope with the problem of the present and future .... and achievements of the past provide the only means at command for understanding the present" (1938/1963, p. 77). In that sense, the possibility of continually enhancing what Dewey, in his *Philosophy of Education* (1946/1966c, p. 191), calls "the plasticity of human nature," that is, the possibility of enhancing people's capacities by furnishing the necessary tools within the right context, would be, at least selectively, optimal.

### *Paulo Freire and the Pedagogy of Identity Liberation*

The late Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire (1921-1997) has been called the quintessential philosopher of liberation pedagogy (McLaren, 1997; Torres, 1998). Let me add something to that: Freire was also the centennial intellectual of the "pedagogy of identity liberation." Where Freire may have had his most powerful impact were his attempts to equip the oppressed with the means to free themselves from false identity and, in the process, from unwarranted economic and political imprisonment in a "no-go" deprived landscape and culturally/existentially demeaning borderland.

Among Freire's works, the one most treasured by many who are still searching for the rightful return of usurped histories, robbed cultures, and ontologically fractured identities, is *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/1993). This revolutionary and best-selling book takes critical consciousness as an essential educational blueprint for human emancipation and social development. Critical consciousness, in this case, involves understanding yourself (your identity) and the world around you, acquiring the necessary intellectual and physical tools to effect change in your situation, and fully becoming aware of your history, achievements, and capabilities.

The term Freire used to describe this situation is *conscientização* which he defined "as the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all awareness" (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 101). Or in McLaren's understanding of Freire, "a deep or critical reading of commonsense reality" (1997, p. 52). *Conscientização*, roughly close to, but not exactly similar to its now commonly English translation of *conscientization* and even

more deep in its ontological implications than its nearest [sic] linguistic equivalent, the French *prise de conscience* (see Feitlowitz, 1998), has instigated a new focus on the urgent manifestation of deformed identities that are plaguing the lives of so many. It has, therefore, fully established itself as an analytical primer, first in the borderlands and then in the hinterlands of educational theory and practice. In the possibility of modifying their perceptions of themselves, that is, re-evaluating their identities to become conscientized, the oppressed, according to Freire (1970/1993), would have to discern or even problematize the following:

In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation they must perceive the reality of oppression not as closed world from which there is not exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform. This perception is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for liberation; it must become the motivating force for liberating action. Nor does the discovery of the oppressed that they exist in dialectical relationship to the oppressor as his antithesis – that without them the oppressor could not exist – in itself constitute liberation. The oppressed can overcome the contradiction in which they are caught only when this perception enlists them in the struggle to free themselves. (p. 34)

This actuality of Freire's analysis should not entice us to falsely believe or even expect that *via* overhauled perceptions or refined identities, Latin American peasants or other marginalized populations will immediately implement structural changes in the political and economic arrangements that are prevailing in their countries. What it should guide us to encounter, on the other hand, is Freire's praxis of liberating education where in order to attain authentic identity, the deprived masses must begin shedding, even slowly but steadily, what I would contextually call "consciousness dependency", that is, a worldview that arbitrarily depends on others' perception of reality. As Freire said not long ago (1998d, p. 507), "the emergence of the popular consciousness implies, if not the overcoming of the culture of silence, at least the presence of the masses in the historical process applying pressure on the power elite." In transforming the masses into possible agents of their *historia*, new stocks of liberating education which "consist in acts of cognition, not

transfers of information" (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 67), would beget praxis, that is, "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 36). Freire relates more of this in his *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1973):

As men relate to the world by responding to the challenges of the environment, they begin to dynamize, to master, and to humanize reality. They add something of their own making, by giving temporal meaning to geographic space, by creating culture. This interplay of men's relations with the world and with their fellows does not (except in cases of repressive power) permit societal or cultural immobility. As men create, re-create, and decide, historical epochs begin to take shape. And it is by creating, re-creating and deciding that men should participate in these epochs. (p. 5)

It is, in essence, the global response to these and other observations by Freire that have revolutionized many aspects of educational relationships. Men and women have questioned their surroundings, examined their self-perceptions, and scrutinized their identities (more in what they wanted to be *vis-à-vis* how others identified them). In these new processes of exhaustive self examination, people saw the possibility of acquiring new learning and achievement schemes (new praxis), and boldly dared predict the potential for social development. In "concretizing" these possibilities, the required but not yet fully realized systems of education "would enable people to discuss courageously the problems of their context – and to intervene in that context .... [which] would lead them to take a new stance toward their problems" (Freire, 1973, pp. 33, 36).

The above points are centrally located in Freire's perception of education as "never being neutral or indifferent with regard to the reproduction of ideology and its unmasking" (1998a, p. 91). For Freire and other critical theorists, therefore, education is an ever present and powerful political instrument that can either affirm or deny the needs of the community, thus engendering the move toward emancipatory self-perceptions or the "permanentizing" of the status quo. In the latter, the forum may be set for what Freire calls "*historical amnesia*," in which one loses the idea of "tomorrow as a possible project" (1998b, p. 48).

To avoid losing tomorrow as a possible project, a discussion of Freire's programs of literacy, especially adult literacy, as a potential site for conscientizing pedagogy and identity liberation

will be important. In *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* (1987), co-written with Donaldo Macedo, the message is clearly stipulated where language and literacy are presented not simply as media of communication but as making meaning of the world through the interactions upon which it envelops itself and over ourselves. Moreover, literacy, as language, could also become a catalyst for social transformation. Giroux (1987), in his Introduction to *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, points out that "central to Freire's approach to literacy is a dialectical relationship between human beings and the world on the one hand, and language and transformative agency on the other" (p. 7). Giroux continues:

Within this perspective, literacy is not approached as merely a technical skill to be acquired, but as a necessary foundation for cultural action for freedom, a central aspect of what it means to be a self and socially constituted agent. Most importantly, literacy for Freire is inherently a political project in which men and women assert their right and responsibility not only to read, understand, and transform their own experiences, but also to reconstitute their relationship with the wide community. Moreover the issue of literacy does not begin and end with the process of learning how to read and write critically; instead, it begins with the fact of one's existence as part of a historically constructed practice within specific relations of power. (p. 7)

This concise but powerful capturing of the essence of Freire's projects of literacy speaks volumes in terms of identity, recognition, selfemancipation, community transformation, social justice, and development. The presence of arbitrarily binary based identities such the case of either being the oppressor or the oppressed could be maintained *via* the conventional literacy of reading and writing. In the conventional state of affairs, one would simply acquire the mechanical capacity of identifying numbers and connecting letters without the possibility of using these new skills as transformative agents that may effect novel and desired ends in life. In Freire's critical literacy on the other hand, programs of dialectical literacy will contain processes of interacting with, reacting to, and acting on nature as well as on self, with all facilitating the vertical as well as the horizontal reading of the world and the word. Also, critical literacy, as a

proactive vision of education, is inherently performing a function that places it at the centre of power and power relations.

Power, Walter Rodney (1982) reminded us, is, indisputably, the most important variable in human relationships. Power represents the internalized possibility of one's or a group's prerogative to defend a set of given interests accompanied, where and when necessary, by the imposition of one's preferences on others. Critical literacy, in the Freirean paradigm, intends to confront, *tout court*, current patterns of power diffusion that render an overwhelming majority of Earth's inhabitants educationally and, therefore, economically and politically powerless. Freire's learning and identity restitution programs would, therefore, involve the acquisition of new identities that are established and entrenched through proactive systems of critical literacy, that is, not just reading and writing but attaching meaning to, and absolutely manipulating the meaning of the word and the world to render both centennial and even millennial mechanisms of marginalization initially vulnerable, attrititionally untenable, and eventually obsolete. As Freire says in his, *Letters to Cristina* (1996), "literacy education is an act of knowing, an act of creating, and not the act of mechanically memorizing letters and syllables" (p. 128).

Freire would understand, as much as anyone else, that language and power, and literacy and power, as well as all of these and the world they relate to, are, in universal time, intertwined. In a recent article, Freire (1998c) presents an interesting conjuncture of language, thought processes, action, and the social environment: "in so far as language is impossible without thought, and language and thought are impossible without the world to which they refer, the human word is more than mere vocabulary – it is word-and-action" (p. 485). Moreover, Giroux (1987) observes that for Freire, language is the "real stuff" (p. 8) in constructing meaning, situating culture and reclaiming plateaus of domination and subordination. Or as Gramsci (cited in Giroux, 1987, p. 8) says, "language is both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic, instrumental in both silencing the voices of the oppressed and in legitimating oppressive social relations." Language, therefore, becomes a repository, signifier, and a guide for the meaning we make of our world and essentially the identities we assume in relation to that world. In justifying my

point on the importance of how reading (understanding and making meaning of) the world establishes and eventually affirms one's identity, I could selectively rely on Freire's own estimation of how his views on his environment were not only formed early in his life, but were, in effect, precursors to what was to come later. Freire attests to the fact that reading the world, that is, interacting with our environment as children, precedes reading the word which, of course, requires some kind of achievement in age and instruction. Freire says:

Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world. As I suggested earlier, this movement from the world to the word is always present; even the spoken word flows from our reading of the world. In a way, however, we can go further and say that reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but by a certain form of *writing* it and *rewriting* it, that is, of transforming it by means of conscious practical work. For me, this dynamic movement is central to the literacy process. (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 35)

Freire's multi-procedural and multi-directional way of reading the world and the word affirms the non-mechanical and non-vertical realities of identity formation, evolution, and devolution which become clearer as we experience more of the world as well as more of the word. The intermittent results of these experiences, as life goes on, should be a continuing challenge and critical questioning of global unequal relationships that are affecting the distribution of wealth, desegregation of the political platform and office, as well as the deliberate de-eschewing of the empowerment graph where many could assume a meaningful role in the management as well as the necessary re-arrangement of resources, programs, and development possibilities. All of that should enhance the chance for critical citizenship and democratic governance which should constitute the central components of current political and economic systems.

The drive for informed, critical citizenship is, perhaps, where Dewey and Freire actually, objectively and programmatically meet. Both are emphasizing informed, culturally sensitive and democratically oriented systems of learning that strive for, and attain critical citizenship. But, of course, the two philosophers have had to travel on different and physically detached analytical terrains, and had to investigate economically, politically, and

socially unrelated subjects for their observations and conclusions. American students and European immigrants in the United States in the early 20th century, despite any difficulties they were experiencing, were never as disenfranchised as Latin American peasants or Africa's poor even 60 or so years later. Which brings us to the fact that Dewey and Freire were also selectively responding to disparate epochal exigencies, with Dewey's most important works covering the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and Freire's, the second half of the same century. It is not a coincidence, therefore, that both Dewey and Freire could be presented as selectively epochal, but essentially pragmatic philosophers of education.

### *Conclusion*

In this essay, I have selectively and relatively briefly focused on identity as it is analytically and/or observationally situated in the writings of John Dewey and Paulo Freire. While neither Dewey nor Freire may have explicitly declared any special project that exclusively looks at the constructive or deconstructive points of identity, it is, nevertheless, critically clear that the direction of their intellectual programs were fully responsive to the question of identity as a means of socialization, learning, and overall development. In Dewey's case, the required congruence between the child's background and the school environment were strong recipes for what this philosopher wanted to characterize his American compatriots: practically productive, and critically oriented citizens who could enhance progressive life chances for all.

In the case of Freire, what I have called "pedagogy of identity liberation" in this paper became his analytical trademark. By introducing the concept of *conscientization*, Freire has instantly stirred the inner consciousness of disenfranchised millions who should now be searching for, successfully or otherwise, the still promised land of authentic identity, affirmed cultural possibilities, and acutely needed development programs. Finally, with this preliminary essay on identity in the philosophies of Dewey and Freire, it is my understanding that more research as well as more informed sets of identity analyses on the multi-focused works of Dewey and Freire are needed. That would be so, for no matter how much we have learned from the cogent

observations of the two philosophers, so much more remains to be harvested from the intellectual legacy of these brilliant and, in *sensu stricto*, socially conscientious thinkers and theorists of education.

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