

**EDUCATION AS A POLITICAL ACT: DEWEY, FREIRE AND THE  
(INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE)  
THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE CURRICULUM**

by

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## Abstract

Active learning should be the ultimate aim of education. I argue that it is a three interrelated-step model of curriculum: one which promotes critical thinking, involves dialogue and ultimately indicates growth. It is a model intertwined in an intricate web of ideas borrowed from John Dewey and Paulo Freire.

In this thesis, I analyze the International Baccalaureate (IB) Theory of Knowledge (TOK) curriculum as an example of a document that seeks to foster active learning. To be able to analyze whether the IB TOK curriculum promotes active learning, I dissect the curriculum in terms of its philosophy and objectives.

Curriculum theorists do not agree on a universal definition of curriculum. Therefore, I explore four distinctive theories of curriculum and theory in order to find a definition that best fits the IB TOK curriculum and philosophy: 1) curriculum as a body of knowledge to be deposited, 2) curriculum as a product theory, 3) curriculum as a process, and 4) curriculum as praxis.

I argue that in order for active learning to take place, the three components of active learning need to exist together. Active learning needs to promote critical thinking as a means to understanding one's self and others. And, active learning needs to involve dialogue to enable people to become fully aware of their own position within the community and the world, and that of others. Critical thinking and dialogue in turn ensure growth. Growth is defined in terms of *conscientização* and Praxis; this is premised on two conditions: 1) to become aware of the realities in one's life; and, 2) to take informed and practical actions to change these assumptions. It is then, I argue, that learning

becomes active. It is indeed, as Freire would say, breaking away from ‘silence’ imposed on us by oppressors and attaining “the freedom of the learner” in Dewey’s words.

It is only through active learning that individuals can critically think, enter a meaningful dialogue with others, and ultimately have the courage to act, and as a result create a life which is meaningful—not just for themselves but for everyone.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

*The true test of the American ideal is whether we're able to recognize our failings and then rise together to meet the challenges of our time. Whether we allow ourselves to be shaped by events and history, or whether we act to shape them.*

*(Barack Obama)*

The purpose of this thesis is to advocate active learning as a three interrelated-step model of curriculum: one which indicates growth, involves dialogue, and promotes critical thinking. It is a model intertwined in an intricate web of ideas borrowed from both John Dewey and Paulo Freire. I argue that it is necessary for these three components to exist in congruity with each other, for neither one on its own can ensure active learning and an ideal life which may, in due course, lead to common good—a good and meaningful life.<sup>1</sup> I believe that active learning takes place when students, through dialogue and critical thinking, understand the inequalities and injustices in their lives and in so doing take practical action in order change these oppressions—and this change denotes growth. The International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) philosophy and the IB Theory of Knowledge (TOK) curriculum seek active learning through communication and critical thinking; however, I suggest that this notion of communication is not active in nature: although the IBO recognizes that there exist inequalities and injustices, it does not actively commit to taking practical action to challenge oppression.

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<sup>1</sup> Plato discusses this idea of the good life in The Republic, Apology and Gorgias, while Aristotle's argument comes from Nicomachean Ethics and Politics. The debate about the idea of 'good life' entails two variables: 1) what is good life? and 2) how do we attain it? Because philosophers have different answers to the two questions, the end is often not the same. In this paper, my focus is the importance of education in attaining a good life—based on the democratic ideals of Dewey and Freire.

I begin my analysis with the discussion of Plato's and Aristotle's philosophy of education. Next, I assess how Dewey and Freire add to these theories to promote active learning. Then, I present the philosophy of the IBO and the (IB) TOK curriculum and suggest that although it promotes critical thinking, communication and democratic ideals, it does not actively pursue its commitment to active learning.

Plato (428/427 BC – 348/347 BC) suggests that “the unexamined life is not worth living” (Plato 1981, p. 41, 38a). In *Allegory of the Cave* (Plato 1892, Book VII), he symbolically presents the cave to tell us that our perceptions are tied by our belief systems, our cultural-up-bringing, our traditions and values, and so on. He claims that in the cave men “have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them being prevented by the chains from turning around their heads” (Plato 1892, 514a). He further states that in the cave people can only see the shadows of reality projected on the wall. Plato argues that only through cross-examination can we (the true philosopher) be free and know reality.<sup>2</sup> According to Plato, then, it is the educator's task to help the youth to learn to discover the truth—even if it means doing things the students do not want to do. Hence, to be able to break away from traditions and belief systems in order to learn the truth, one needs to embrace the *Elenchus*—intellectual knowledge.<sup>3</sup> However, it needs to be explained that *Elenchus* “does not [sic] actually increase knowledge, but only prepares the ground for it” (Robinson 1953, p. 12). Furthermore, the

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<sup>2</sup> Dewey believes that “The statement of Plato that philosophers should be kings may be best understood as a statement that rational intelligence and not habit, appetite, impulse, and emotion should regulate human affairs. The former secures unity, order, and law; the latter signify multiplicity and discord, irrational fluctuations from one estate to another” (Dewey 1961, p. 263).

<sup>3</sup> Also referred to as *exetasis*; see Meno's Paradox and the slave boy example (Meno 79-84) which describes the effect of *Elenchus* (see John Sallis 1996, p. 76-91)

Socratic *Elenchus* leads to his dialectic: “the idea that truth needs to be pursued by modifying one’s position through questioning and conflict with opposing ideas. It is this idea of the truth being pursued, rather than discovered, that characterizes Socratic thought” (Hooker 1999).<sup>4&5</sup> Therefore, key characteristics of Plato’s theory of education are dialogue and *logos* (reason) as a means to enabling the youth to be able to cross-examine one’s beliefs and ideas.

However, although this theory may seem ideal because it supports life-long-learning, only few can become critical thinkers in Plato’s *polis*. He believes that people are born into three different estates: Guardians, soldiers and citizens. He holds that only Guardians should be chosen as the rulers. For Plato, once you are born into a class, you remain in that class no matter what (Plato 1892, Book II, III and IV).<sup>6</sup> Only a select few can become critical thinkers and hence know the *truth*. This Platonic belief, I understand, does not leave room for growth. If we are pre-determined to be who we become, then what is the point of education?<sup>7</sup> Through education, everyone, not just the Guardians, should be able to transform their lives. Education should, as I believe, ensure growth for everyone. I will, later in this chapter, draw upon the educational philosophies of Dewey and Freire to further explain this concept of growth.

Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC) also believes that “life according to reason is best and pleasantest, since reason more than anything else is man. This life therefore is also

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<sup>4</sup> The Greek term *διαλεκτική* (or dialectic) means controversy: the exchange of arguments and counter-arguments (Ayer and Grady 1994, p. 484).

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/GREECE/SOCRATES.HTM>

<sup>6</sup> In terms of transformation of their situation in society.

<sup>7</sup> This goes against the egalitarian belief that every individual is capable of becoming a critical thinker.

the happiest” (Aristotle 1985, 1177b). It is, in fact, this “activity of reason,” Aristotle believes, which leads to *eudaimonia* or the “chief good”.<sup>8</sup> Unlike Plato, Aristotle believes that everything has a *telos*;<sup>9</sup> for instance, the *telos* of a knife is to be able to cut; likewise, the *telos* of a human being is to contemplate: it is this function which distinguishes human beings from other animals (Aristotle 1885, Book II). Therefore, for Aristotle the final-end is most correct. The aim of education, which he describes in chapters VII and VIII of Politics, is to instill in the young practical knowledge; since human beings are rational animals, the aim of education, Aristotle believes, is to bring about individuals who can reason. Therefore, he considers reason to be essential for us to utilize our *telos* the best. Aristotle suggests that the intellectual virtues should be taught over a period of time. He states, “reason and understanding are developed as [pupils] grow older” (Aristotle 1885, 1334b24-25). However, it is also important to point out that he believes in learning by habituation. He says, “men become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts” (Aristotle 1985, 1103a33). This means that someone of higher authority, say, the ministry of education or the school boards, specifies what students ought to learn—the teachers will implement the agenda and the students will *gain knowledge of* what needs to be learned.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “Always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else” (Aristotle 1985, 1097a24-b7). Also, see Plato’s Republic (505a) for his argument that *knowledge is the chief good*.

<sup>9</sup> *Telos* is a Greek word which means purpose, function, goal or final-end

<sup>10</sup> Both Plato and Aristotle agreed that the system education, they proposed, was perfect, beyond the rational scrutiny of everything else. This really means that students need to learn and perform their duties in the polis or reach their *telos* without even questioning the system.

Plato and Aristotle do not sufficiently provide a model which ensures the “freedom of the learner,” as intended by John Dewey and Paulo Freire. Education has largely endorsed Plato’s and Aristotle’s educational philosophy, and that these attitudes (of theirs) are the ones we need to overcome (through Freire and Dewey).

For Plato, the members of the three estates always followed the status quo. It was only the *Guardians* who could become philosopher kings or queens. Dewey rightly criticizes Plato’s educational theory stating that “while [Plato] would radically change the existing state of society, his aim was to construct a state in which change would subsequently have no place. The final end of life is fixed; given a state framed with this end in view, not even minor details are to be altered” (Dewey 1961, p. 91). Aristotle also believed that only certain citizens could become thinkers. He believed that women and slaves could not become critical thinkers. He agrees with famous Greek poet, Sophocles, who once said, “silence is a woman’s glory” (Aristotle 1885, 1260a30). On the contrary, both Dewey and Freire argue for the growth of every learner. In the Deweyan and Freirean communities, as opposed to ones suggested by Plato and Aristotle, everyone can grow. Particularly, for Freire, education is a political act through which learners become able to choose sides and eventually attain their freedom. This concept of the freedom of the learner will be further discussed in chapters 3, 4 and 5.

Educational Philosophers who believe that students are empty vessels to be filled “imperial gallons of facts” deem students unintelligent, incapable, unwise and foolish

(Dickens 1996, p. 42).<sup>11</sup> I argue that no educational system should start with such a negative perception of an individual. The basis of our educational system should, however, be one of love, respect, care, humility and cooperation. In the absence of such ideals—the basis of *democracy* described by Dewey and Freire—it is impossible for one to actively learn. Active learning takes place *only* when we treat our students as Subjects and not as objects to be acted upon.<sup>12</sup> Students do not learn when they cannot relate to the subject-matter; therefore, by choosing the subject-matter from their experiences we provide them with the opportunity to grow: to understand their experiences and to act in order to modify them. This does not happen in traditional schools where students are considered *empty vessels to be filled*—a key characteristic of passive learning. Therefore, to create a society where individual can reach their *'αρετή (arête)* or maximum potential, the educators need to provide their students with opportunities to be involved in active learning rather than learning that is passive in nature.<sup>13</sup>

Active learning, I claim, should be the ultimate aim of every curriculum.

Although active learning needs to focus on the process, it is the outcome that makes learning active (as opposed to passive). The goal of ensuring such a system is to have individuals who can, by means of acquiring skills such as critical thinking, become able to engage in dialogue and in so doing critically analyze the realities in their lives and

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<sup>11</sup> In Dickens's novel, one of the main characters, Thomas Gradgrind, believes that pupils are like empty vessels that need to be filled with facts, statistics and data. Their emotional needs and matters of heart are not important to him, for he is obsessed with facts.

<sup>12</sup> According to Freire Subjects take action in order to modify their experiences, while objects are “things” incapable of performing any meaningful acts (Freire 2000, p. 57).

<sup>13</sup> *Arête* means both virtue and *optimum potentiae*. In this passage, I use the definition *maximum potential*.

eventually take action to modify or change them. It is the ‘freedom of the learner’— borrowing the term from Dewey and Freire—which is at the heart of active learning.

Both Dewey and Freire believe that education is the only means to social reform and eradication of injustices. Both argue for an education system where students are not mere spectators but active participants in the classroom. They believe that it is only through active learning that a democratic society can be ensured. Dewey argues that “the child is at the starting-point, the center, and the end. His development, his growth, is the ideal. It alone furnishes the standard. To the growth of the child all studies are subservient” (Dewey 1902, p.9). For Dewey, growth means self-realization. It does not happen as an individual pursuit, rather as a result of communication with the environment and the community.<sup>14</sup> This idea of growth is evident in Freire’s arguments as well. Freire believes that the oppressed live in a “culture of silence” (Freire & Macedo 1987, 159). He argues that a good curriculum or educational model focuses on helping individuals overcome this silence imposed by traditional education and “this overcoming is growth”. One central theme of Freire’s pedagogy is what he calls *conscientização* or critical consciousness. *Conscientização* is not only the act of becoming aware of one’s position in the oppressed society, but it is also the means to praxis: breaking away from these chains, as Plato describes in *Allegory of the Cave*.<sup>15</sup> The theme of *growth* is, of course, at the core of Dewey’s and Freire’s educational philosophy. However, although Dewey deems realization for both individual and community necessary, he shies away from this

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<sup>14</sup> For both Dewey and Freire growth cannot be aimed at without the use of child’s personal experiences. It is important that the experience of the child is at the center of study, for if the subject of discussion is something the child is unaware of it will not make sense.

<sup>15</sup> This to some extent resembles Dewey’s theory of self-realization.

concept of Freirean *praxis*. In chapters 4 and 5, I will present detailed argument for the inclusion of Freirean *praxis* in both the curriculum and pedagogy.

In order to build a society where people will aim at living a good life—one that seeks ‘common good’ and is critical of injustices—I argue that the curriculum should provide students with opportunities for growth using their own experiences as a cornerstone in their development. Growth can be analyzed through its tendencies for self-realization/*conscientização* and practical action/*praxis* (Freire 2000, p. 103-124).<sup>16</sup>

This process will eventually prepare the pupils for the world where they constantly reviews what happens around her and where she becomes able to bring about or propose change. This inner change will also lead to new dispositions such as active participation, good listening habits, and virtues such as courage and care. Instead of focusing on memorization and hard facts, learning, I believe, will depend on development of skills, prominently critical thinking skills, by involving students in the process of textual analysis, for instance, and its relevance to their lives and experiences. To be able to reach this goal of *conscientização*—which aims at attaining a good life—the curriculum planners need to create, and classroom teachers need to implement, strategies that relate directly to the life of the pupils—a key ingredient to active learning.

*Critical thinking* is also an important component of active learning, because it is through discourse that one can participate in the process of decision-making. Although concrete knowledge is important, schooling is meaningless if students are unable to draw connections and extensions to the texts read or issues discussed. Dewey, in Democracy

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<sup>16</sup> The nature of self-realization and practical action differ in Dewey and Freire. This will be discussed in chapters 3 and 4.



and Education, suggests that it is not memorization that helps thinking; rather, it is “doing” that enables the students to become critical thinkers (Dewey 1961, p. 184-186).<sup>17</sup> Once students get involved in the process of doing, such as building the model of a house, they learn to research, communicate with their peers, ask questions, think and finally understand how it works—all these actions involve or improve critical thinking skills. I believe that if critical thinking is introduced in education and practiced regularly, students will learn to reason and make ‘informed’ decisions on a regular basis.

Like Dewey, Freire considers critical thinking essential to education. Rejecting the *banking model* of traditional education, in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire advocates for critical thinking as an essential aspect of teaching and learning (Freire 2000, p. 73-81).<sup>18</sup> He places the onus on the institutions and the educators to ensure that students are better equipped as they enter the world of constant decision-making. This cannot be attained without critical thinking. Through problem-posing, Freire believes, educators can motivate students to think critically.

In addition, dialogue is at the heart of their educational pedagogy. Dewey argues that “the attitude of listening means, comparatively speaking, passivity, absorption” (Dewey 1902, p. 32). Freire believes that when dialogue takes place, learners are “no longer docile listeners” but “critical co-investigators” (Freire 2000, p. 81). “Tell me and I’ll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I’ll understand” is a Chinese proverb which represents what Dewey and Freire are after: the idea of involvement

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<sup>17</sup> Here, I do not deal with the issue of whether people make the right choices or not, I am concerned about whether students are given the opportunity to make choices.

<sup>18</sup> Freire believes that traditional education treats students as bank accounts in which facts are deposited for later use.

through dialogue is what Dewey and Freire believe to be active learning. Freire argues that through dialogue one can “denounce the structures of oppression” and aim for a less unjust world (Freire 1993, p. 115). Dewey deems *communication* or *dialogue* necessary in “the process of sharing experiences” (Dewey 1961, p. 9). It is here that Dewey and Freire differ. For Freire, dialogue is an important step to becoming critically conscious and to taking practical action— *conscientização* and praxis-- in order to fight oppression in one’s life.

I, then, define active learning as a process that promotes critical thinking, dialogue, and growth; I also claim that growth cannot be measured except by praxis—by understanding the realities in your life and committing to change. I will explain this fully in chapters 4 & 5.

To fully understand these theories and their impact on curriculum design, I analyze thoroughly the IB Theory of Knowledge course, for the IB philosophy seeks to encourage “curiosity, inquiry, reflection and critical thinking” (IBO 2002b, p. 4). It further states that “[curiosity] and a spirit of discovery is stimulated through encouraging an eclectic, creative and independent approach to inquiry and learning; engagement with a broad range of knowledge domains; [and], opportunities created for transdisciplinary learning” (IBO 2002b, p. 14). Therefore, it is fair to state that its underlying theory and practice cannot resemble one that is presented by curriculum as knowledge-depositing. A brief history of curriculum theory is presented in chapter 5 to enable us to adequately analyze the nature of the TOK curriculum.

To evaluate the TOK curriculum with regard to active learning (using Dewey and Freire) and the educational aim it intends to promote, it is necessary that we are familiar with the IBO history and its philosophy. The next chapter will help us understand these.

## Chapter 2

### History and Overview of IBO & the TOK Curriculum

*The aim of general education [is] not the acquisition of general knowledge, but the development of the general powers of the mind to operate in a variety of ways of thinking.*

*(Alec Peterson 2003)*

The International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) Diploma Program was established in the late 1960s to “cater for the educational needs of globally mobile students in international schools” (IBO 2002a, p. 3).<sup>19</sup> IB provides its students with “internationally recognized pre-university qualification” (IBO 2002a, p. 4). At the International Conference in Sevres, 1966, the IBO proposed “curricular pattern and syllabuses in two languages [as well as] proposals for the nature of the examination with specimen examination questions” (Peterson 2003, p. 30). Some International Schools “agreed to start teaching the [IB] syllabuses and enter candidates for trial examinations” (Peterson 2003, p. 30) after a number of universities agreed to “co-operate in the experiment by giving at least provisional recognition to the IB diploma as an entry qualification (Peterson 2003, p. 30). Peterson recalls that soon “France and Sweden had agreed to co-operate, as had some autonomous universities, 14 British, 3 Swiss, and many American. By 1970, after two years of trials, the first 29 students used the official IB examinations for university entrance” (Peterson 2003, p. 31). Soon IB diploma was

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<sup>19</sup> Alec Peterson, the first director general of the IBO, discusses the origins of the Diploma Programme in *Schools Across Frontier*

officially recognized by many well-known universities, including the Ivy League Universities in the United States. Marilyn McGrath Lewis, the director of Undergraduate Admission at Harvard, states, “IB is well known to us for excellent preparations. Success in an IB programme correlates with success at Harvard” (IBO, [ibo.org](http://ibo.org)).<sup>20</sup>

There are social and cultural forces that played a major role in the creation of the IBO. One such factor was the mobility of population from one area to another, which led to the creation of the IBO. Its goal was to provide students with education which was recognized by most universities around the world. Soon after its creation in the late 60s, expatriates around the world started to send their children to the IB schools, for its diploma was highly respected. Therefore, the migration of people from one area to another area, either because of political, social, cultural or economic reasons founded a two-year rigorous program called the IB Diploma for grade 11 and 12 students. Since all the IB schools followed the same curriculum, it ensured that children of these expatriates had continuity in their education. It did not matter if the parents had to move from one country to another because of their postings. These children would not have a problem adjusting to the new educational system.

The IBO also realized that most schools relied on education-as-fact-depositing to prepare students by filling them with information that would make them competitive in the job-market. Peterson points out that “an encyclopaedic general education leaves no time for the student to make any ways of thinking his own before he hurries on to the next one-hour session of absorbing unrelated information about chemistry, French, or

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<sup>20</sup> Also see <http://www.shawneemissionib.com/curriculum/default.htm>

geography in his crowded week” (2003, p. 39). The organization wanted to help change this traditional philosophy of education. The IBO emphasized critical thinking and questioning instead of depositing facts. It also asked for the promotion of other democratic ideals, such as tolerance, respect, cooperation, deliberation, etc.

To carry out this agenda, to equip students with thinking skills, the IBO introduced a subject called *The Theory of Knowledge*. This subject is not like any other school subject in which the focus of learning is the content of that particular course. TOK focuses, mainly, on thinking skills using the knowledge pupils have acquired in their other school subjects. In addition, at the core of the TOK is the belief that learning does not only take place in schools; students are motivated to bring their knowledge of their communities, families and environment to their classrooms and together learn from one another. In the IBO mission statement it is stated clearly that the aim of this subject is “to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect” (IBO 2007, p. ii). Seeing what has happened over that last century or so—all the wars, conflicts, civil right movements, disappearing role of citizens in society, prejudice, racism, etc—the TOK curriculum adopted the message of peace, tolerance, love, care and, most importantly, responsibility (IBO 2002a, p.7). The curriculum’s notion of responsibility appeals to environmental concerns, diseases, starvation and human rights (IBO 2002b, p. 8).

The IBO also recognizes individual cultures. It understands that people come from different backgrounds and have different religious affiliations. Therefore, teachers

have been given the freedom to choose teaching material from the lives of the students and their communities (cultures and traditions). They are asked to connect these experiences to the teaching material in order to enable students to make further connections between their experiences and the experiences of others in their communities and the world. This eventually leads the students to see the importance of their experiences and its relevance or irrelevance to the experiences of others or the world. In so doing, it is expected that students will enter the world of communication with their own existence and their community members.

Therefore, the movement of people from one city to another city or from one country to another, the message of peace, the ideas of tolerance, respect, cooperation and deliberation, and the notions of responsibility towards the environment, starvation and well-being of human race are some of the social and cultural forces that have affected the IB curriculum.

Peterson states that the educational aim of the IB programme is “to develop to their fullest potential the powers of each individual to understand to modify and to enjoy his or her environment, both inner and outer, in its physical, social, moral, aesthetic, and spiritual aspects” (Peterson 2003, p. 33). He further claims that “what is important in this statement of aims is the concept of general education as process rather than content which is implied” (Peterson 2003, p. 34). Peterson argues that the intent of the IBO is not to bring up pupils who are encyclopedias of “facts” or receptacles of knowledge. He then says that “the aim of general education was not the acquisition of general knowledge, but the development of the general powers of the mind to operate in a variety of ways of

thinking” (Peterson 2003, p. 41).<sup>21</sup> Learning about the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution or the Chinese Revolution is not about “acquiring general information”; rather, the point is to learn to think historically (Peterson 2003, p. 41). To this extent, the IBO approaches learning as an active process: to think, instead of to acquire. This concept of thinking critically is directly transferred to the Theory of Knowledge (TOK) curriculum.

The second section of the IB (TOK) Curriculum, *TOK Diagram*, expresses explicitly that the course is “centered on student reflection and questioning” (IBO 2007, p. 6).



***Diagram 1: The TOK Diagram (TOK Guide, IBO)***

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<sup>21</sup> Peterson also says, “we sought not to ensure that as ‘generally educated men and women’ our students should have acquired a wide range of knowledge, but that they should have developed, as far as they were able, their power and desire to engage in a wide range of what Montaigne called ‘ways of thinking’” (2003, p. 41).

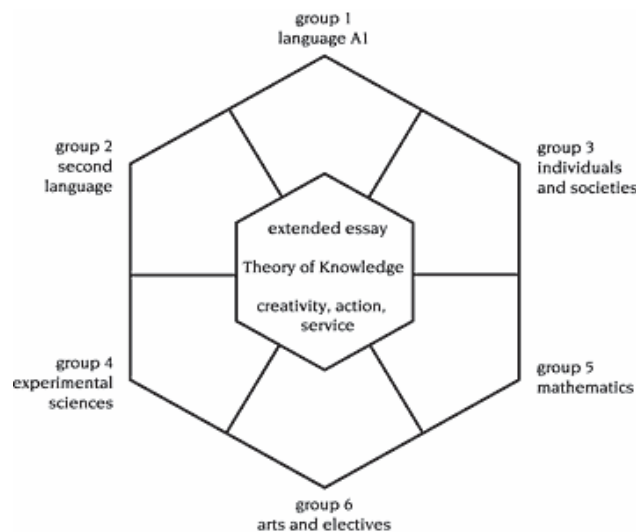


The Ways of Knowing (WOK) surrounds the knower(s) in the traditional TOK diagram which permeates “an exploration and interpretation of the world: the receipt of stimuli through sense perception, affected, perhaps, by an emotional spiritual dimensions labeled as emotion, formulated and expressed through language, and shaped by attempts, through reason, to seek order and clarity” (IBO 2007, p. 6). The Areas of Knowledge (AOK) surrounds the WOK in the TOK diagram. The IBO maintains that the WOK and AOK interact and therefore the division is marked by dotted lines and not a solid barrier (IBO 2007, p. 7). In A Basis for Practice: the Diploma Program, it is stated explicitly that “as a thoughtful and purposeful inquiry into different ways of knowing, and into different kinds of knowledge, TOK is composed almost entirely of questions. The most central of these questions is ‘How do we know?’”(IBO 2002a, p. 6).

In the Theory of Knowledge course students use their knowledge of the ways of knowing to question or to understand the AOK. For instance, students discuss *Perception*—one way of knowing—through activities such as a reading of Descartes’ *Meditations*, Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave* or Dr. Asch’s experiments on *peck-mentality*—these topics directly deal with the Arts (an Area of Knowledge). Students learn, through the readings and discussions, that one ought to not always believe one’s senses. They also understand that people may have different perceptions and understandings of their world because of their cultural biases, familial upbringing, their circle of friends, material learned over the years, TV programs watched, and their own experiences. The pupils realize, through class discussions, that their peers may have different experiences and therefore different ideas, opinions, and hence perceptions. I believe that the IBO

recognizes that one needs to be critical of one's perceptions in order to be able to think. Links to critical thinking can be easily seen in such exercises.

The Diploma Programme consists of six subject groups (Language A1, Second Language, Experimental Sciences, the Arts, Mathematics and Computer Sciences and Individuals and Societies) which encircle three core elements (Theory of Knowledge, Extended Essay, and Creativity, Action, Service—also known as CAS) at its centre—one cannot obtain the Diploma without successfully fulfilling the criteria for the core elements.<sup>22</sup> The Diploma programme offers Higher level (HL) and Standard level (SL) courses to its students. The Diploma students have to take at least three, but no more than four, courses at higher level; the other courses have to be at standard level. 240 and 150 teaching hours are allocated for the higher and standard level subjects respectively (IBO 2002a, p.5).



**Diagram 2: The IB Diploma Hexagon (IBO Profile, IBO)**

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<sup>22</sup> Students are to choose one Language A1 (first language) and one Language A2 (second language). For instance, a student who wishes to take English as their first language need to be proficient in all the three components of language: reading, writing and oral. It is not mandatory to take English A1, however.

Student assessment in the Diploma Program measures student performance “in relation to the stated objectives of [the course]” (IBO 2002b, p. 12). IBO recognizes that although generally the focus is on “higher order cognitive skills, such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation, there is always a role for the recall and routine application of knowledge as well” (IBO 2002b, p.15). Throughout the two years of study, students are graded based on their internal and external assessments. The internal assessments are graded by the teachers while the external assessments are marked by external examiners. Each external examiner is asked to submit “a sample of work to a senior examiner who checks it for accuracy and consistency. Where examiners are found to be overgenerous or harsh in their marking, adjustments are made to their marks. Where examiners are found to be inconsistent or unacceptably inaccurate, their total allocation is re-marked by senior examiners” (IBO 2002a, p.16). Both the external and internal assessments are graded on a scale of zero (the lowest) to seven (the highest). 42 points is the maximum one can obtain in the six subjects (a combination of HL and SL) in addition to a maximum of three points for the core elements (see Table 1 to understand how bonus points are calculated). Students do not receive a diploma if they score less than 24 points (IBO 2002a, p. 17).

		Theory of knowledge					
		Excellent <b>A</b>	Good <b>B</b>	Satisfactory <b>C</b>	Mediocre <b>D</b>	Elementary <b>E</b>	Not submitted
Extended essay	Excellent <b>A</b>	3	3	2	2	1	N
	Good <b>B</b>	3	2	1	1	0	N
	Satisfactory <b>C</b>	2	1	1	0	0	N
	Mediocre <b>D</b>	2	1	0	0	0	N
	Elementary <b>E</b>	1	0	0	0	Failing condition	N
	Not submitted	N	N	N	N	N	N

**Table 1: Bonus Point Conversion Chart (TOK Guide, IBO)**

The TOK curriculum consists of three important sections: 1) Aims & Objectives, 2) Content and activities, and 3) Evaluation. I deal with each of the three sections in the following.

### **1) Aims & Objectives:**

Most aims and objectives of the curriculum focus on learning rather than memorizing. For instance, the TOK curriculum states that students by the end of the year will be able to “analyze critically knowledge claims, their underlying assumptions and their implications” (IBO 2007, p. 5). It further states that the students will be able to “generate questions, explanations, conjectures, hypotheses, alternative ideas and possible solutions in response to knowledge issues concerning areas of knowledge, ways of knowing and students’ own experience as learners” (IBO 2007, p. 5). It is obvious from the terms, such as ‘*generating questions, explanations, conjectures, hypotheses, alternative ideas and so on*’ that the aim of the course is to produce individuals capable of thinking critically. Also, it is clear that the curriculum aims at using student experiences as a means to knowing—it is however not the only means to knowing as acknowledged by the IBO (IBO 2002a, p.6).

Most of the TOK objectives, in William Doll’s words, “direct the flow of thought and inquiry in areas of learning” (Doll 1996, p. 160). For instance, one of the objectives states that the students should be able to “draw links and make effective comparisons between different approaches to knowledge issues that derive from areas of knowledge, ways of knowing, theoretical positions and cultural values” (IBO 2007, p. 5). Although

most of the aims and objectives of the TOK curriculum promote understanding of the subject-matter, memorization or passive learning is the focus of some. One of the objectives, for instance, asks for the demonstration of “different perspectives on knowledge issues” only (IBO 2007, p. 5). There is nothing wrong with this objective though, for it is necessary to know the important concepts and the similarities or differences between them. The core of the curriculum, however, does focus on learning in terms of critical thinking and student experiences.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, it is obvious from the above discussed aims and objectives, the core of the TOK curriculum is to enable students to use critical thinking skills in dealing with the acquired knowledge and in creating new knowledge or experiences.

The TOK objectives also require the students to be sensitive towards their and the world culture and values. For instance, one of the aims of the course is for students to make connections between “academic disciplines and between thoughts, feelings and actions” (IBO 2007, p. 5). In so doing, they are to actively listen to what others have to offer, and to understand that people can have different points of view on various political, social and economical issues (IBO 2002b, p. 8-10).<sup>24</sup>

## **2) Content and Activities:**

In this section of the curriculum, the content of each unit is briefly described. The issues concerning the main topics are discussed and examples are provided in order to

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<sup>23</sup> The TOK curriculum fulfills almost all four of Hilda Taba’s levels of knowledge (Taba 1962).

<sup>24</sup> For example, the IBO states, “To enable students to develop an awareness of themselves first, while recognizing that others are different and that others ‘can be right in being different’” (IBO 2002b, p. 10).

help understand the key issues. After that, a set of questions about each of the major sub-topics is provided to help the teacher organize the unit and the activities. At the end, a set of linking questions is provided to connect all the major sub-topics to the main topic.

Each topic is selected using particular criteria. The “possibility of illuminating the content with data from other fields of knowledge” is, for instance, one example of the criteria used to select the topics. The TOK curriculum deals with topics in the area of natural sciences, human sciences, mathematics, history, language, the arts, and ethics in particular (see the TOK diagram). The curriculum states, “connections may be made between knowledge encountered in different Diploma Programme subjects, in CAS experience or in extended essay research; distinctions between different kinds of knowledge may be clarified” (IBO 2007, p. 3). Another criterion used in choosing content is “the durability or lasting quality of the elements of content that are being emphasized”. The TOK curriculum deals with critical thinking, deliberation, habits of mind, citizenship and other such topics; therefore, its durability or lasting quality is inevitable if and only if the teacher is successful in getting her student to exercise these qualities. For instance, using critical thinking skills students can analyze all the knowledge they have attained in their lives whether it is experiential or non-empirical. A third important criterion in the selection of content is “the relationship of facts and other minor content to main ideas and concepts” (IBO 2007, p. 3). The curriculum aims to ensure that the facts or definitions learned in the course are connected to the main idea of critical thinking, in the case of TOK.

The set of questions provided in the curriculum about the major sub-topics help in connecting the ideas to the main topic. For instance, after a lesson on belief, students could be asked ‘*How do “believing that” and “believing in” differ? How does belief differ from knowledge?*’ The questions not only help in making the definition of *belief* clear to students, but it also connects it to the topic *knowledge* discussed in the class or the lesson before. Other criteria, such as *the learnability of the content and the appropriateness of the content to the pupil need and interests*, are also taken into account while designing the TOK curriculum. The curriculum, however, does not provide a structure to deal with the order in which the major topics should be taught. Nonetheless, it is clearly stated in the curriculum that “Teachers may wish to structure their TOK courses” as they please<sup>25</sup> (IBO 2007, p. 7).

### **3) Evaluation:**

The TOK curriculum contains only two summative assessments: 1) oral presentation, which is graded by the teacher (worth 20 marks), and 2) the TOK essay, which is graded by the IBO examiners (worth 40 marks). The assessments are clearly described and a descriptive rubric is provided for each of the assessments. Initially, the curriculum provides a general overview of the assessment. Then, the document discusses how each assessment needs to be graded. The importance of acknowledgement, references and bibliography are also highlighted. The length and other necessary requirements of the essay are then discussed. Lastly, the role of the teacher and the

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<sup>25</sup> The italicized phrases in this section come from (Doll 1996, p.165-165) & (IBO 2007, p. 9-11)

students in the process are clearly stated (IBO 2007, p. 44-51). On pages 49 and 50 of the TOK curriculum document some examples of presentation topics are provided for students to be able to see what constitutes a “good” TOK presentation.

A thorough examination of the TOK curriculum points to several criticisms. For instance, for a course to be taught over a period of two years, the number of assessments does not seem reasonable.<sup>26</sup> I believe that it is difficult to predict the ability of a student based on only two assignments. Therefore, I firmly believe that the assessment should be changed in a way that the work of two years should be marked over the period of two years. In fact, I believe that because critical thinking is a skill and that it develops over time, *growth* should be judged by the teacher or by the external examiners appointed by the IBO. Their thinking skills should be evaluated regularly through videoconferences, for instance, in which students from different cities and countries are asked to participate. This will not only ensure *learning from others*, but it will also help in learning through interaction with others—a goal set by the IBO. The more they practice communication and critical thinking skills, the better they will get at these skills. More opportunities of formative assessment, such as mandatory TOK journals or leading a debate on cultural or social issues on a number of occasions might also translate into learning through inter-communication. Although, I understand that teachers may assess their students formatively as many times as they want, the students might not pay attention because they might want to wait for the second year of the IB when students are asked to do their presentations and when the TOK essays are due.

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<sup>26</sup> The course is designed to be taught over a full-academic-year. However, some schools teach it in two.



However, although on the surface the TOK curriculum aims to promote critical thinking, dialogue and growth, it is necessary to discuss whether the IBO and the TOK curriculum promote active learning, based on Dewey and Freire's pedagogical theories. It is important to understand the key characteristics of their educational models. Chapters 3 and 4 will deal with Dewey and Freire respectively. Each chapter will provide an analysis of the key elements of active learning: Growth, critical thinking and communication or dialogue. In chapter 5, these elements will be discussed in relation to the IBO philosophy and the TOK curriculum. In my conclusion, I will deal extensively with the IBO philosophy and the TOK curriculum to determine what it means by active learning.

## Chapter 3

### John Dewey's Philosophy of Education

Dewey discusses traditional and progressive education as opposites in his educational theory. For traditional education, Dewey recognizes, learning is the “acquisition of what already is incorporated in books and in the heads of the elders” (Dewey 1963, p.19).<sup>27</sup> He asserts that “old” education focuses too heavily on the subject matter rather than learning. In such an education model he claims, “the child is simply the immature being who is to be matured; he is the superficial being who is to be deepened; his is narrow experience which is to be widened. It is his to receive, to accept. His part is fulfilled when he is ductile and docile” (Dewey 1902, p. 8). Traditional education, Dewey maintains, is “fixed and rigid” (Dewey 1961, p. 110) which brings about the “attitude of listening” (Dewey 1902, p. 32). Since listening is the act of receiving, Dewey believes that this translates into passive learning.

Dewey argues that in traditional schools everything is decided by the educators. This, therefore, Dewey asserts, limits “the intellectual and moral development of the young” (Dewey 1963, p.22). He blames the traditional education for placing emphasis on studying “facts and ideas [...] bound up with the past” (Dewey 1963, p.23). He stresses that this does not help the student “in dealing with issues of present and future” (Dewey 1963, p.23). Dewey acknowledges that although the “knowledge of the past and its heritage is of greater significance” (Dewey 1961, p. 75), the past should, he emphasizes,

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<sup>27</sup> He uses the term “old” education to refer to the traditional education model.

“be seen as the past *of* the present, and not as another and disconnected world” (Dewey 1961, p. 76).<sup>28</sup>

Dewey claims that we should “never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment” (Dewey 1961, p. 19). Then, for Dewey “the environment consists of those conditions that promote or hinder, stimulate or inhibit, the *characteristic* activities of a living being” (Dewey 1961, p. 11). Since Dewey also recognizes that education is a social function (Dewey 1961, p. 81)<sup>29</sup>, for him “a being connected with other beings cannot perform his own activities without taking the activities of others into account (Dewey 1961, p. 12).<sup>30</sup> The “old” education fails, Dewey alleges, because “it neglects this fundamental principle of the school as a form of community life” (Dewey 1966, p. 49). Traditional education, then, focuses mostly on the ideals of competition, not cooperation, which does not align with democracy. Dewey argues that since education “is a process of living and not a preparation for future living” (Dewey 1966, p. 48), education needs to promote cooperation—a key component of his education for democracy. I discuss Dewey’s concept of democracy later in this chapter.

Dewey, through his discussion of the traditional and progressive educational systems, highlights “the organic connection between education and personal experience” (Dewey 1963, p.25). Dewey claims that traditional education does not contribute in student’s growth, for it imposes its standards of *teacher knows all* and that students know

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<sup>28</sup> So, the problem is teaching the past as an end in itself, rather than an end in view—to problems of the present.

<sup>29</sup> “To say that education is a social function, securing direction and development in the immature through their participation in the life of the group to which they belong, is to say in effect that education will vary with the quality of life which prevails in a group” (Dewey 1961, p. 81).

<sup>30</sup> Dewey believes that “It is truly educative in its effect in the degree in which an individual shares or participates in some conjoint activity” (Dewey 1961, p. 22).

less than the teacher. This entails that traditional schools operate based on the philosophy of “rejection and sheer opposition” (Dewey 1963, p.21) which denies the link between experience and education. Dewey states, “to the growth of the child all studies are subservient” (Dewey, 1902, 9). In fact, he insists that “the child [is] the sun about which the appliances of education revolve” (Dewey 1943, p. 34). Then, it can be argued that Dewey asks for a curriculum which considers the needs and interests of the child ahead of everyone else’s. In addition, Dewey avows that “the aim of education is to enable individuals to continue their education” (Dewey 1961, p. 100).<sup>31</sup> For Dewey, then, education does not end when students graduate from schools or universities. Education and learning is a life long commitment. Only through such an education can we help the students grow, for Dewey believes that only “new” education “is in harmony with principles of growth” (Dewey 1963, p.30).

It is apparent that, for Dewey, growth is not the acquisition of more information; rather, it is the improvement in capacities, such as reflective thinking, so that one is able to process the information one holds through interaction with the environment.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, more information does not translate into more growth, except when “it raises and responds to intellectual problems in the minds of the pupil” (Skilbeck 1970, p. 26). Dewey sees growth as the “reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience” (Dewey 1961, p. 76). Eric Boyer observes that, for Dewey, growth “does not

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<sup>31</sup> Dewey says, “the object and reward of learning is continued capacity for growth” (Dewey 1961, p. 100).

<sup>32</sup> “Growth requires much more than fulfillment of hereditary capacities in a given social and physical environment. It requires that the individual actively judge and choose those alternatives which promise to expand the opportunity for the greatest long-range value” (Axtell and Burnett 1970, p. 262-3).

mark a fixed state of fulfillment to be attained, but rather denotes a process of continual improvement and progress. Because it does not rise above experience, rather denotes the enlargement of experience, Dewey claims that growth is the only end that can be referred to as an end-in-itself” (2007, p. 19). It can, therefore, be concluded that education for growth promotes active learning (Dewey 1902, p. 9).

In short, learning happens only when educations aim toward growth. Growth happens when experiences are constantly reconstructed and reorganized as a conjoint activity. The reconstruction and reorganization of experiences happen only by means of communication and reflective thinking. Communication happens only in a democratic society.<sup>33</sup> For Dewey, this is what guarantees “the freedom of the learner” (Dewey 1963, p.22).

In order to understand why Dewey considers active learning necessary in his educational theory, I discuss the importance of experience, the role of communication and reflective thinking, and the necessity of democratic modes of living for growth. Finally, I discuss the significance of growth and experience in relation to the development of the child and the society.

Dewey believes that progressive education offers students the opportunity to grow by offering them the “expression and cultivation of individuality,” “free activity” and “learning through experience” (Dewey 1963, p.19). Progressive education also builds on their experiences and as a result forms “later experience of a deeper and more expansive quality” (Dewey 1963, p.47). In doing so the school guides the pupils toward a better

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<sup>33</sup> Dewey does not discuss democracy as a form of government, but as a mode of associated living—this guarantees communication (Dewey 1961, p. 87).

future. Dewey reckons that it is important to connect the curriculum to pupils' "everyday life experience [for] all genuine education comes about through experience" (Dewey 1963, p. 25).

Dewey categorizes experiences as either active or passive. An active experience involves *trying* while *undergoing* is the characteristic of a passive experience, he explains. He says, "experience as trying involves change but change is meaningless transition unless it is consciously connected with the return wave of consequences which flow from it" (Dewey 1961, p. 139). He explains that "it is not experience when a child merely sticks his finger into a flame; it is experience when the movement is connected with the pain which he undergoes in consequences. Henceforth the sticking of the finger into flame *means* a burn" (Dewey 1961, p. 139-40). Therefore, "to 'learn from experience' is to make a backward and forward connection between what we do to things and what we enjoy or suffer from things in consequence. Under such conditions, doing becomes a trying; and experiment with the world to find out what it is like; the undergoing becomes instruction—discovery of the connection of things" (Dewey 1961, p. 140). Using this line of reasoning he concludes two things: (a) that experience "is not primarily cognitive" and (b) that "the value of an experience lies in the perception of relationships or continuities to which it leads up" (Dewey 1961, p. 140). Dewey explains these propositions in terms of educative and mis-educative experiences.

Dewey states that although all knowledge "comes about through experience, [it] does not necessarily mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative" (Dewey 1963, p.25). He suggests that some experiences are mis-educative. The

experiences that have “the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experiences” are what he calls mis-educative experiences (Dewey 1963, p.25). These experiences, he further claims, restrict “having richer experiences in the future” (Dewey 1963, p.26). He points out that students “in traditional schools do [in fact] have experience” (Dewey 1963, p.27). However, the problem “is not the absence of experiences [in the traditional classrooms], but their defective and wrong character—wrong and defective from the standpoint of connection with further experience” (Dewey 1963, p.27). Dewey asserts that “it is not enough to insist upon the necessity of experience ... Everything depends upon the quality of experience which is had” (Dewey 1963, p.27). Therefore, the main dilemma “of an education based upon experience is to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences” (Dewey 1963, p.27-28).

Dewey presents his principles of continuity and interaction to deal with this dilemma of mis-educative experiences. He says, “the principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after” (Dewey 1963, p.35). Therefore, “the principle of continuity in its education application means, nevertheless, that the future has to be taken into account at every stage of [the] education process” (Dewey 1963, p.47). Dewey points out that “experience does not occur in a vacuum” (Dewey 1963, p.40); therefore, through the principle of interaction, he suggests that “education is essentially a social process” (Dewey 1963, p.58). He states, “an experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an

individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment” (Dewey 1963, p.43). Thus, for Dewey, the principle of interaction refers to objective and internal conditions that influence one’s experience. It is through these two principles that we can distinguish experiences that are educative from those that are mis-educative.

It is continuity and interaction together that provide “the measure of the educative significance and value of an experience” (Dewey 1963, p.44-45). Ultimately, as Dewey states, “in a certain sense every expression should do something to prepare a person for later experiences of a deeper and more expansive quality. That is the very meaning of growth, continuity, [and] reconstruction of experience” (Dewey 1963, p.47). Hence, experience is judged based on its impact on a pupil’s present, future and how it influences a pupil’s contribution to her society.

Since “every experience is a moving force” (Dewey 1963, p.38), Dewey believes that “its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into” (Dewey 1963, p.38). It means that “every experience affects for better or for worse” (Dewey 1963, p.37). It is, then, as Dewey suggests, “the business of the educators to see in what direction an experience is heading” (Dewey 1963, p.38). Dewey deems teachers responsible in seeing what experiences “are actually conducive to continued growth and what are detrimental” (Dewey 1963, p.39). Dewey considers teachers as “the more mature ... elders” (Dewey 1963, p.41); therefore, he argues that it is their responsibility to guide the less mature in understanding their experiences and into leading them towards the acquisition of experiences that instill growth. Unlike traditional education, progressive education demands teachers become “intimately acquainted with the



condition of local community, physical, historical, economic, occupation, etc., in order to utilize them as educational resource” (Dewey 1963, p.40).

Dewey’s intentions and (experiential) educational philosophy lead him in presenting an argument for experience which if followed could lead to creating a better school atmosphere and ensuring a better future for the child and the society. Teachers play an essential role in designing the subject-matter; in doing so, they should take into account pupil’s experiences from the past to influences their growth and in effect their contributions to their societies. Dewey believes that we gain experience when we interact with our environment. Therefore, for experience to develop it is necessary that there is communication between the individuals and the environment. I outline Dewey’s argument for communication in light of reflective inquiry and dialogue in the following.

Dewey states that “animals learn (when they learn at all) by a ‘cut and try’ method; by doing at random first one thing and another thing and then preserving the things that happen to succeed” (Dewey 1910, p. 109-110). However, for human beings learning does not happen randomly. He claims that human beings “live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to [know they] possess things in common” (Dewey 1961, p. 4). For Dewey, normal communication is “that in which there is a joint interest, a common interest, so that one is eager to give and the other to take” (Dewey 1961, p. 217).<sup>34</sup> Dewey believes that communication is “a wonder by the side of which transubstantiation pales” (Dewey

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<sup>34</sup> For Dewey, Axtell and Burnett say, “Communication is thus one foundation of social life, one single achievement which allows man to remake himself and his environment” (Axtell and Burnett 1970, p. 261).

1960, p. 166). We learn by thinking and exchanging the results of our thoughts with other members of the community.

For Dewey communication happens through reflective thinking and interchange of ideas through dialogue within a community.<sup>35</sup> However, Dewey also realizes that not all communication leads to the betterment of life and the society. This leads to two conclusions: 1) that reflection leads to inquiry or finding “the relation between what we do and what happens in the consequences” (Dewey 1961, p. 144-145); and, 2) that thinking leads to intercommunication or dialogue through which “one learns much from others” (Dewey 1961, p. 186).<sup>36</sup> In brief, Dewey believes that we learn by thinking in the process interaction with the environment and other members of the community.<sup>37</sup> It is, indeed, our ability to think that distinguishes us from other animals (Dewey 1961, p. 212).

Dewey claims that often students, under the current system, study to meet school or teacher expectations, which does not actually help in learning. As a result, students face challenges in their lives when they come across the same problem (Dewey 1961, p. 156). He says, “in manipulating symbols so as to recite well, to get and give correct answers, to follow prescribed formulae of analysis, the pupil’s attitude becomes mechanical, rather than thoughtful” (Dewey 1929, p. 178). Dewey argues that “so far as schools still teach from textbooks and rely upon the principle of authority and acquisition

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<sup>35</sup> “Active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends, constitutes reflective thought” (Dewey 1910, p. 9).

<sup>36</sup> Since our needs in a community are common, they “demand a growing interchange of thought” (Dewey 1943, p. 14), which leads to necessity of dialogue.

<sup>37</sup> “To consider the *bearing* of the occurrence upon what may be, but is not yet, is to think” (Dewey 1961, p. 147).

rather than upon that of discovery and inquiry [it fails to see the wider scope of learning]” (Dewey 1961, p. 280). This suggests that ideas should not be transmitted merely from a teacher to students, for these ideas are meaningful only if they are incorporated into the personal experiences of the child (Skilbeck 1970, p. 16). Thus, for Dewey, Skilbeck points out, subject-matter can be “effectively taught as a contribution to growth” only if it “it raises and responds to intellectual problems in the mind of the pupils” (Skilbeck 1970, p. 26).

Dewey suggests that “the chief source of the ‘problem of discipline’ in schools is that the teacher has often to spend the large part of the time in suppressing the bodily activities which take the mind away from its material” (Dewey 1961, p. 141). He emphasizes that because “the child has not much instinct for abstract inquiry” (Dewey 1943, p. 44), she should be provided with opportunities where she is asked *to do* things which will in turn demand thinking.<sup>38</sup> It is only then, he maintains, that students can actually learn (Dewey 1961, p. 154). For instance, it is more educative if the teacher assigns a group of students to build a functional catapult instead of telling them how to make one; upon receiving such an assignment, students will decide what to research and who is responsible for what. Also, they discuss their findings and work together to come up with a model or design. Hence, it is this process of *doing* that motivates students to critically think and come up with solutions to the problems faced. Consequently, the process becomes an experience which is essential in learning. Dewey affirms that “we

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<sup>38</sup> “Having to do with things in an intelligent way issues in acquaintance or familiarity” (Dewey 1961, p. 185). And “The knowledge which comes first to person, and that remains most deeply ingrained, is knowledge of *how to do* (Dewey 1961, p. 184).

learn from experience, and from books or the sayings of others *only* as they are related to experience” (Dewey 1943, p. 17). Dewey stresses that “no number of object-lessons, got up as object-lessons for the sake of giving information, can afford even the shadow of a substitute for acquaintance with the plants and animals of the farm and garden acquired through actual living among them and caring for them” (Dewey 1943, p. 11). In effect, students can only become good critical thinkers and hence can only learn if they have first-hand experience in dealing with the problems. He suggests that instead of teaching them about the dead specimen, we should take them outdoors to widen and organize their experience “with reference to the world in which [they] live” (Dewey 1903, p. 202). He, then, concludes that learning-by-doing “keeps [pupils] alert and active, instead of passive and receptive” (Dewey 1943, p. 13). It is, therefore, necessary that student experiences are deemed essential in the study of the subject matter. Learning-by-doing provides students with the opportunity to develop or modify their experiences through their interaction with the environment and the people around them.

In order to build a society where people deliberate and make decisions I agree with Dewey that it is important for educators to engage pupils in the process of textual analysis and its relevance to their lives and experience rather than memorization. Although Dewey realizes that concrete knowledge is important, he recognizes that schooling is meaningless if students are unable to draw connections and extensions to their experiences. Acquisition of knowledge is possible, according to Dewey, only through scientific method or reflective thinking so long as they relate to the experiences

of the pupil.<sup>39</sup> It helps in furnishing “the environment which stimulates responses and directs the learner’s course” (Dewey 1961, p. 180).<sup>40</sup>

In one context, Dewey suggests that the reflective thinking involves five steps. These steps include “(i) a felt difficulty; (ii) its location and definition, (iii) suggestion of possible solution; (iv) development by reasoning of the bearings of the suggestion; (v) further observation and experiment leading to its acceptance or rejection; that is, the conclusion of belief or disbelief” (Dewey 1910, p. 72).<sup>41</sup> Dewey, however, recognizes that these steps do not necessarily guarantee a final solution to the problem, for “the essence of critical thinking is suspended judgment; and the essence of this suspense is inquiry to determine the nature of the problem before proceeding to attempts at its solution” (Dewey 1910, p. 74). This line of reasoning leads Dewey to suggest that growth is the reconstruction and the reorganization of our experiences. In fact, Dewey believes that the reconstruction and the reorganization of our experiences become continuous as a result of scientific method—this is growth.

Dewey believes that “action directed consciously by ideas — by suggested meanings accepted for the sake of experimenting with them— is the sole alternative both to bull-headed stupidity and to learning bought from that dear teacher” (Dewey 1910, p.

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<sup>39</sup> By science Dewey means “knowledge which is the outcome of methods of observation, reflection, and testing which are deliberately adopted to secure a settled, assured subject matter.” In short, “science is the perfecting of knowing” (Dewey 1961, p. 219).

<sup>40</sup> “When one is told that Brutus assassinated Caesar, or that the length of the year is three hundred sixty-five and one fourth days, or that the ratio of the diameter of the circle to its circumference is 3.1415 . . . one receives what is indeed knowledge for others, but for him it is stimulus to knowing. His acquisition of *knowledge* depends upon his response to what is communicated” (Dewey 1961, p. 188).

<sup>41</sup> “No cast-iron rules can be laid down” (Dewey 1910, p. 78).

110). For instance, when an individual thinks, she becomes aware of a certain problem.<sup>42</sup> Once the individual becomes conscious of the problem, she will be able to relate “the problem to wider situation” (Skilbeck 1970, p. 29). The next step involves suggesting ideas that could help solve the problem. This leads to stating hypotheses and predictions. Then, “the mind is carried forward to the likely consequences of taking one form of action or another” (Skilbeck 1970, p. 29). At this stage the learner may choose to reconstruct the original hypotheses. Skilbeck says, “[if] the consequences, as reviewed in imagination, are acceptable, then appropriate action is undertaken, and the hypothesis is critically tested. The problem, in this phase, may be resolved; or it may persist and the whole reflective cycle be re-enacted” (Skilbeck 1970, p. 29). This methodical thinking process, Dewey declares, leads to realization. For Dewey “consciousness of ignorance is the beginning of effective love of wisdom” (Dewey 1961, p. 189).

Dewey believes that teachers should help their students become critical thinkers because only through this skill will students learn to reason and make decisions on regular basis. Modeling through teaching, and generating opportunities to exercise judgment and making decisions is a basic means to instilling critical thinking skills. He asserts that a good teacher connects the subject matter to the needs and desires of the students, so that they can see the connection between the material taught and their lives. Dewey also suggests that teachers must be direct, open-minded, flexible and responsible if they are to attain the goal of producing critical thinkers (Dewey 1961, p. 179).

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<sup>42</sup> Awareness for Dewey takes many manifestations, such as knowledge through intuition or gut-feeling.

It is the responsibility of the educators to “cultivate deep-seated and effective habits of discriminating tested beliefs from mere assertions, guesses, and opinion” (Dewey 1910, p. 27-28). He explains that in order to “develop a lively, sincere, and open-minded preference for conclusions that are properly grounded and to ingrain in to the individual’s working habits methods of inquiry and reasoning appropriate to the various problem that present themselves” (Dewey 1910, p. 28).<sup>43</sup> Dewey emphasizes that students should be provided with ample opportunities to doubt what they are taught and to reflect upon it by logical observation and/or testing so that it empowers their experience. He says, “It is the nature of an experience to have implications which go far beyond what is at first consciously noted in it. Bringing these connections or implications to consciousness enhances the meaning of the experience” (Dewey 1961, p. 217).

Dewey believes that doing does not happen in isolation. It includes “dealings with persons as well as things” (Dewey 1961, p. 185). Hence, for Dewey, “Impulses of communication and habits of intercourse have to be adapted to maintaining successful connections with others” (Dewey 1961, p. 185-86). This is how we learn from one another, Dewey claims. In fact, he says, “in the deepest and richest sense a community must always remain a matter of face-to-face intercourse [...] There is not substitute for the vitality and depth of close and direct intercourse and attachment” (Dewey in Benson et al 2007, p. 45). For Dewey, reflective thinking alone does not guarantee meaningful communication; “face-to-face associations of the local community” is also a must (Axtell and Burnett 1970, p. 270). He says, “dialogue rather than monologue is natural form of

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<sup>43</sup> Dewey calls this the *Training of Mind*.

thought” (Cam, 2003). Thinking alone does not get us far; it only becomes meaningful when we willingly participate within our community—and this participation happens through willingness to enter a dialogue with others or the environment. When we enter a dialogue, we share our experiences and through this sharing we learn from one another: we listen to the members of the community, we learn from their experiences, and then we modify our experiences if necessary. Also, when we enter a dialogue, we share common beliefs of the community: mutual respect, love for knowing or consciousness, our willingness to interact with one another, and wanting prosperity for everyone within the community.

In sum, for Dewey the aim of education is to empower the youth with the necessary tools so they can play a positive and productive role in their communities. Effective communication cannot take place without the ability to think. He says, “Thinking enables us to direct our activities with foresight and to plan according to ends-in-view, or to come into command of what is now distant and lacking” (Dewey 1961, p. 212). We reorganize our experiences, if necessary, when we share them with other members of the community after entering a dialogue. Dewey’s theory on inquiry *is* a means to attaining a community of “free learners”. However, he believes that growth through reflection and inter-communication does not happen in an autocratic society but in societies that firmly believe in democratic ideals.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> For Dewey, these democratic ideals are liberal. It is importance, for Dewey, that people have the choice to make decisions, for instance.



Dewey believes that democracy is “primarily a mode of associate living, of conjoint communicated experience” (Dewey 1961, p. 87).<sup>45</sup> In a society where the consequences of a conjoint activity is “appreciated as good by all singular persons who partake in it, and where the realization of the good is such as to effect the energetic desire and effort to sustain it in being just because it is a good shared by all, there is in so far a community. The clear consciousness of a communal life, in all its implications, constitutes the idea of democracy” (Dewey 1927, p. 149). In the Public and its Problems, he argues, “democracy is not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the idea of community life itself” (Dewey 1927, p. 148).<sup>46</sup> He further states, “the strongest point to be made in behalf of even such rudimentary political forms as democracy has already attained, popular voting, majority rule and so on, is that to some extent they involve a consultation and discussion which uncover social needs and troubles” (Dewey 1927, p. 206). Simply, what Dewey is trying to say is that I am advocating for democracy because it promotes discussion or dialogue within a community and this ensures growth.<sup>47</sup>

Dewey proclaims that democracy ensures a community in which people willingly enter a dialogue and learn from one another. He says, “a society which makes provisions for participation in its good for all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible

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<sup>45</sup> “In order to have a large number of values in common, all members of the group must have an equable opportunity to receive and take from others” (Dewey 1961, p. 84). This democratic society that Dewey discusses, presupposes the existence of *justice*. This might not necessarily be true to societies where there is systematic injustice at its core.

<sup>46</sup> For Dewey social life can be evaluated based on two criteria: “the recognition of mutual interests as a factor in social control . . . [and] not only free interaction between social groups but change in social habit” (Dewey 1961, p. 86-7).

<sup>47</sup> “Social life [is] identical with communication [and] all communication is education” (Dewey 1961, p.5).

readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associate life is in so far democratic” (Dewey 1961, p. 99).<sup>48</sup> It is through dialogue that we reorganize our experiences. In fact, democracy helps in the re-structuring of our experiences in order to prepare us for a better life—a society where democratic ideals, such as *interaction, cooperation, tolerance, open-mindedness and responsibility* are upheld.

Dewey argues that in order to have a democratic community, schools need to provide an environment in which “the process of moral-intellectual development is in practice as well as in theory a cooperative transaction of inquiry engaged in by free, independent human beings who treat ideas and the heritage of the past as means and methods for the further enrichment of life” (Dewey in Dworkin, pp.133-134). Agreeing with Dewey would mean rejection of the traditional educational methods or practices. Democracy helps in the development of individuals as active members of the community who will be conscious of the realities in their lives—a key principle in the progressive model of education.<sup>49& 50</sup> This will enable the pupils to change their situation. However, in order for change to take place one needs to be willing to take part in the process of change. For instance, in our society there are many obese people who are aware of the problem they have. Nonetheless, not many of them take necessary action in order to deal with the problem. The willingness of the individual to enter the process of change is hers.

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<sup>48</sup> As opposed to a society “which internally and externally sets up boundaries to free intercourse and communication of experience” (Dewey 1961, p. 99).

<sup>49</sup> Key attributes of progressive education include “learning by doing,” “learning as a conjoint activity”, and “learning through real-life experiences”--where learning is scientific in nature.

<sup>50</sup> Dewey believes that it is important to connect the curriculum to pupils’ everyday life experience. Deweyan progressive education helps attain this goal by promoting democratic ideals and positive interaction—in effect, it sows the seeds of ideal life which can only take place within a democratic society.

Dewey does not make a commitment to this notion of committed action—which Freire calls praxis.

Dewey states, “I believe that individual who is to be educated is a social individual and that society is an organic union of individuals” (Dewey 1966, p. 47). Since for Dewey democracy is “*primarily a mode of associated living, [and] a conjoint communicated experience,*” then schools have a responsibility in providing pupils with the opportunity to experience it before they leave school (Dewey 1961, p. 87). The vital factor in Dewey’s vision of ideal America then is the preparation of youth in such a way that they are able to become responsible citizens. Hence, education is an essential requirement for attaining a ‘good life’. This education, however, can only be attained in progressive schools, for the seeds of democracy can only be sown in an environment which promotes democratic ideals as opposed to authoritarian beliefs. Dewey suggests that democracy cannot be attained in the absence of the democratic ideals discussed above. He argues that “communication is the process of sharing experience till it becomes a social possession” (Dewey 1961, p. 9). Indeed, education for democracy cannot be achieved unless communication or deliberation is at the core of its philosophy. Dewey believes that active participation is essential in communication, for communication cannot take place unless every pupil and the teacher actively communicate—unlike passive communication where students are passive recipients of information.<sup>51</sup>

Essentially, Dewey believes that traditional education is imposed on students in a way that it makes learning difficult and concepts hard to understand. He argues that the

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<sup>51</sup> This aligns with the traditional philosophy of education.

main business of traditional schools is to transmit information to the students. Therefore, students are, from an early age, trained to become docile, receptive and obedient. Learning, then, is memorization of material “incorporated in the books and in the heads of the elders” (Dewey 1963, p.19). He explains that because the new information is not incorporated into pre-existing experiences of the learner, it is meaningless to the student. Dewey asserts that only in progressive schools are student experiences used to motivate them to think and to act and in due course ensure their intellectual freedom. He also maintains that it is much easier for students to work with their experiences and make connections rather than working with the experiences of the adults. Therefore, growth is possible only when we communicate. ‘Learning-by-doing’ is what ensures communication, for when students communicate it involves their experiences and entails the process of reflective thinking and face-to-face discussion or dialogue. In the process of *doing* students become conscious of their experiences and hence restructure them if necessary. This is what Dewey considers growth.

To sum up, growth is possible only within a democratic community where we are constantly involved in the making and re-making of our experiences. This process involves reflective thinking and dialogue. For Dewey, this is *active learning*.

## Chapter 4

### Freire's Emancipatory Education

*He spoke of social education, of the need for learners to discover themselves, as well as to know the social problems that afflicted them. He did not see education simply as a means toward mastering academic standards of schooling or toward professionalization. He spoke about the need to encourage the people to participate in their process of immersion into public life by becoming engaged in society as a whole.*

*(Freire and Macedo 1998c, p. 18)*

In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paulo Freire states that traditionally education is framed as “an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (Freire 2000, p. 72). The task of the teacher, in traditional education, Freire says, is to “fill the students with the content of his narration—content which is detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance” (Freire 2000, p. 71). This type of education, he believes, is “suffering from narration sickness” (Freire 2000, p. 71). He suggests that in such schools the task of the student is to “receive, memorize, and repeat” (Freire 2000, p. 72). This, he believes, turns them into “receptacles to be filled by the teacher” (Freire 2000, p. 72). In such an environment, teachers are active while students are passive members of the classroom community. Freire argues that the interests of the two are different in such relationship; teachers promote the goal of the oppressors by depositing information into

the students: the oppressed.<sup>52</sup> Freire claims that education based on this model—which he calls the banking concept—annuls “the students’ creative power” and serves the interests of the oppressors (Freire 2000, p. 73). Freire further asserts that “education as the exercise of the domination stimulates the credulity of students, with the ideological intent (often not perceived by educators) of indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression” (Freire 2000, p. 78). He explains that the banking concept assumes “a person [to be] merely in the world, not *with* the world or with others; the individual is a spectator, not re-creator” (Freire 2000, p. 75). He suggests that the banking concept does not see a person as a conscious being—which he calls *corpo consciente*; for the banking concept a person is rather “the possessor of a consciousness: an empty ‘mind’ passively open to the reception of deposits of reality from the world outside” (Freire 2000, p. 75).

Arguing against the banking concept of education, Freire says, “education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students” (Freire 2000, p. 72). It is necessary, for Freire, that the “educational goal of deposit-making [is replaced] with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world” (Freire 2000, p. 79). Education based on problem-posing ensures active teachers and active students within the classroom and the global community. The interests of both the teachers and the students, then, within the problem-posing classroom, become the same. In fact, Freire maintains that problem-posing education aims at the emancipation of those

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<sup>52</sup> Anyone who contributes to the unfair *silencing* of an individual, I believe, Freire would consider to be an oppressor. These could include political institutions within a government, the educational system, bureaucrats and religious institutions and so on.

who have been “subjected to domination” (Freire 2000, p. 86). Freire claims that “to that end, [problem-posing education] enables teachers and students to become Subjects of the education process by overcoming authoritarianism and an alienating intellectualism; it also enables people to overcome their false perception of reality” (Freire 2000, p. 86). This overcoming of the false perception of reality is, I believe, the true measurement of growth. It is thus obvious that, as Freire suggests, the banking concept entails intellectual alienation and prevents growth.

Freire argues that this education—for freedom from alienation—is impossible without “dialogical relations” between the student and the teacher (Freire 2000, p. 80). It is only dialogue that ensures student-teacher relationship in which “the teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow” (Freire 2000, p. 80). The individuals who have been oppressed, he suggests, only through dialogue can “unlearn what society has so far taught them” (Betz 1992, p. 111). This translates into “transforming” or “changing” our realities, or making or remaking of our history, or attaining “humanization”. Dialogue also promotes critical thinking because it is only through questioning the problems in our lives that we can take steps to remake them. Therefore, to be an active participant in the community one needs to be in constant dialogue with the state and within the state, i.e., with the other members of the state. It is through dialogue that we can attain *conscientização* or critical consciousness. *Conscientização* does not only include apprehending the inequalities in one’s life but also taking action in order to change them.

*Conscientização*, then, entails both consciousness and praxis—taking practical action to deal with (oppressive) realities in life. Freire suggests that only when dialogue succeeds, “these adults [can] begin to change society” (Betz 1992, p. 111). Therefore, Freire believes that the problem-posing method along with *conscientização* and *praxis* lead to “education as the practice of freedom” (Freire 2000, p. 81). In sum, the central theme of Freire’s pedagogy is *conscientização* and praxis—the act of becoming aware of inequalities and taking action to change them.

Societies and individuals can only grow where they are provided with such an opportunity. This growth does not favor the oppressor and therefore they manipulate growth through intellectual censorship. Freire believes that freedom from the authoritarian education leads to growth and hence the creation of a “true” democratic society. He says that the “authoritarian antialogue violates the nature of human beings, their process of discovery, and it contradicts democracy” (Freire 1998b, p. 99). Freire argues that “democracy is taught and learned through the practice of democracy” (Freire 1998b, p. 91). Freirean dialogue helps us “denounce the structures of oppression and seek a less-unjust, less cruel, more democratic, less discriminatory, less racist, less sexist [world]” (Freire 1993, p. 115). Antonia Darder points out, “Paulo urged to strive for intimacy with democracy, living actively with democratic principles and deepening them, so they would come to have real meaning in our everyday life” (1998, p. 9).

Education for democracy requires, for Freire, freedom from the authoritarian relationship. It can only happen if we, through dialogue and critical thinking, challenge the oppressor and in so doing create a democratic society where people willingly engage



in never-ending dialogues, listen to each other, ask questions, critically think, take positions in regard to these questions and in so doing oppose the inequalities in their lives. For Freire, this learning is active.

To fully understand Freire's educational theory, and in particular active learning, I firstly discuss what he means by growth. Next, I discuss his need for never-ending dialogue. Then, I present his case for a "true" democratic society. Finally, I assess the significance of his educational theory in relation to the development of the for-ever growing child and society.

Freire believes that the oppressed live in a "culture of silence".<sup>53</sup> He argues in Pedagogy in Process that students in traditional schools "are brought to the learning process, not as persons invited to know the knowledge of the past so that, recognizing its limitations, they can know more. On the contrary, what is proposed for them is the passive acceptance of packaged knowledge" (Freire 1998c, p. 126). He claims that "An education of answers does not at all help the curiosity that is indispensable in the cognitive process" (Freire 1998b, p. 31).<sup>54</sup> He suggests that "only an education of questioning can trigger, motivate, and reinforce curiosity" (Freire 1998b, p. 31).

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<sup>53</sup> Culture of silence is best defined as "...a characteristic which Freire attributes to oppressed people in colonized countries, with significant parallels in highly developed countries. Alienated and oppressed people are not heard by the dominant members of their society. The dominant members prescribe the words to be spoken by the oppressed through control of the schools and other institutions, thereby effectively silencing the people. This imposed silence does not signify an absence of response, but rather a response which lacks a critical quality. Oppressed people internalize negative images of themselves (images created and imposed by the oppressor) and feel incapable of self-governance. Dialogue and self-government are impossible under such conditions" (Heaney 2005, <http://www.debtireland.org/resources/economic-literacy/Freire-background-reading1.htm>).

<sup>54</sup> Also, "authoritarian power is prying, not curious or questioning" (Freire 1998a, p. 99).

Freire defines the world in terms of two distinct classes: the oppressor and the oppressed.<sup>55</sup> The oppressor is characterized as one who domesticates through the banking concept (Freire 2000, p. 72). Through exploitation and unjust treatment, the autonomy of the oppressed and her intellectual freedom are restricted. In this situation, the oppressed are the object upon which the oppressor acts—as the subject. Freire argues that this denial of “subjectivity in the process of transforming the world and history is naïve and simplistic. It is to admit the impossible: a world without people” (Freire 2000, p. 50). He claims that “World and human beings do not exist apart from each other, they exist in constant interaction” (Freire 2000, p. 50).

Freire states:

the ability of humans to plan and shape the world for their future needs is what separates man from animals. The oppressed majority must be taught to imagine a better way so that they can shape their future and thereby become more human . . . Growing to us is something more than growing to the trees or the animals that, unlike us, cannot take their own growth as an object of their preoccupation. For us, growing is a process in which we can intervene.

(Freire 1998c, p. 94).

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<sup>55</sup> This is based on Karl Marx’s dialectic materialism. See Marx’s Thesis of Feuerbach

This means that “we need to challenge our creative capacity and curiosity” (Freire 2004b, p. 111). Freire points out, “the source of knowledge lies in inquiry, in questioning, or in the very act of asking questions” (Freire 1998c, p. 224). This intellectual freedom is not provided in traditional schools because it goes against the philosophy of domination. He states, “the oppressor knows full well that this intervention would not be to his interest. What is to his interest is for the people to continue in a state of submission, impotent in the face of oppressive reality” (Freire 2000, p. 52). He maintains that “in an authoritarian atmosphere, the challenge implicit in a question tends to be regarded as an attack on authority. And even when that is not openly admitted, the experience finishes up with the suggestion that it is not always convenient to ask questions” (Freire 1998c, p. 222). Then, “obviously,” he says, “a power elite will not enjoy putting in place and practicing a pedagogical form or expression that adds to the social contradictions which reveal the power of the elite classes. It would be naïve to think that a power elite would reveal itself through a pedagogical process that, in the end, would work against the elite itself” (Torres 1990).<sup>56</sup> Liberating education, by contrast, provides students with this opportunity.

Freire suggests that emancipatory education raises “the awareness of the students [or the oppressed] so that they become subjects, rather than objects, of the world” (Lyons, Online).<sup>57</sup> He argues that “the proper education worthy of its name is the one that transforms the student from object status to that of subject through problem posing pedagogy (Cho & Lewis 2005, p. 317). This emancipatory education, which is based on

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<sup>56</sup> <http://aurora.iaurora.icaap.org/index.php/aurora/article/view/45/58>

<sup>57</sup> <http://www.newfoundations.com/GALLERY/Freire.html>

problem-solving, Freire argues, assists students in overcoming this culture of silence imposed on them.<sup>58</sup> He says, “education as the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination—denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from people” (Freire 2000, p. 81). Freire argues that we “cannot be fully human with the restriction of [our] freedom (Shim 2008, p. 527). He further argues that “this restriction and oppression make [us] passive robots, who do not have feelings and autonomy” (Shim 2008, p. 527). We need to overcome this restriction to become fully human, he argues.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, we can only grow once we are able to break these chains of silence.<sup>60</sup> This entails two necessary steps: 1) recognizing the inequalities imposed by the oppressor, and 2) willingness to take action to change these inequalities or to oppose oppression. In other words, growth can be judged based on *conscientização* and praxis.

*Conscientização* is “the process by which humans become more aware of the sources of their oppression (Blackburn 2000, p. 7). Freire asks the educators “to challenge the learner’s naïve curiosity in order that they can both share criticalness. That is how an educational practice can affirm itself as the unveiling of hidden truth” (Freire 1998b, p. 97). To arouse critical thinking, students are provided with problems from real-life—not hypothetical ones. In the process of coding and decoding, students concentrate on the

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<sup>58</sup> For Freire, education is an act of freedom.

<sup>59</sup> He says, “The solution is not to ‘integrate’ them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become ‘beings for themselves’” (Freire 2000, p. 74).

<sup>60</sup> “. . . part from inquiry apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human” (Freire 2000, p. 72).

problem.<sup>61</sup> They critically think and ask questions in order to understand the problem, before trying to find solutions to deal with it. However, this is not enough. Freire says, “No one can overcome weakness without recognizing it” (Freire 2004b, p. 23). Once we understand our weakness then we need to take an action in order to deal with the weakness. Therefore, only when we understand and recognize the injustices in our lives can we become conscious of these inequalities. However, it is through consciousness and praxis together that we can attempt to change these injustices and inequalities in our lives.

In short, by growth Freire means both understanding the injustice and inequalities in one’s life, and taking action in order to deal with these injustices and inequalities. One cannot attain *conscientização* just by thinking critically; *conscientização* for Freire also requires realizing the inequalities and injustices in one’s life and then having the will to take action in order to counter these injustices and inequalities imposed.

A necessary element in attaining *conscientização* is dialogue—growth is impossible without dialogue. One cannot attain critical consciousness without dialogue, Freire would say. I will explain the necessity for dialogue in the next section of this chapter.

Freire’s pedagogy seeks pupils to become critical thinkers and prepares them for the world where they constantly review what happens around them, and through this

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<sup>61</sup> By codification Freire means a “learner’s day-to-day situations,” while decodification, for Freire, is the “analysis which takes place through dialogue, revealing the previously unperceived meanings of the reality represented by that codification” (Heaney 2005, <http://www.debtireland.org/resources/economic-literacy/Freire-background-reading1.htm>).

critical thinking questioning oppressive practices. However, one cannot critically think in the absence of dialogue. Dialogue empowers pupils to become aware of the injustices and inequalities in their lives; indeed, it enables them to challenge these oppressive forces once they are conscious of their problems.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, for Freire dialogue plays an essential role in the pursuit of *conscientização* and praxis.<sup>63</sup>

Traditional education or the banking model does not consider dialogue necessary for it is too busy *filling the receptacles to the brim*. Freire explains, “dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming—between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied [to] them” (Freire 2000, p. 88). Freire believes that dialogue is impossible in a system which subordinates the pupil under the umbrella of oppression, for dialogue entails awareness and responsibility. It is Freire’s problem-posing approach, as opposed to the banking concept which “encourages students to adopt a curious, questioning, probing stance in exploring educational issues” (Roberts 2003, p. 335-336). Evidently, then, for dialogue to exist between the teacher and the pupil, it is necessary that one opposes the ideas of traditional methods in education.

Freire argues that when dialogue between student and teacher takes place, it breaks the barriers of docility. Student and teacher become “critical co-investigators” in an environment which promotes dialogue (Freire 2000, p. 81). In this interaction, “the teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration and re-considers her

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<sup>62</sup> In order to be active and responsible members of a society or community one needs to be aware of the problems in their lives and needs to know how to deal with them.

<sup>63</sup> Freire’s critical consciousness entails responsibility—not only moral but also epistemic responsibility.

earlier considerations as the students express their own” (Freire 2000, p. 81). In such an environment, education is not just an act of deposit making, but rather an act of consciousness-raising. Freire argues that “[d]ialogue must be understood as something taking part in the very historical nature of human beings. It is part of our historical progress in becoming human beings. That is, dialogue is a kind of necessary posture to the extent that humans have become more and more critically communicative beings. Dialogue is a moment where humans meet to reflect on the reality as they make and remake it” (Freire & Shor 1987, p. 98).

Freire states, “it would be through knowing and re-knowing together that we would begin to learn and to teach together also” (Freire 1998d, p. 139). He says, “in contrast with the antialogical and non-communicative deposits of the banking method of education, the program content of the problem-posing method—dialogical par excellence—is constituted and organized by the students’ view of the world, where their own generative themes are found” (Freire 2000, p. 109). This eventually ensures *conscientização* and praxis. Freire argues that “only when we understand the ‘dialecticity’ between consciousness and the world, that is, when we know that we don’t have a consciousness here and the world there but, on the contrary, when both of them, the objectivity and the subjectivity, are incarnating dialectically, is it possible to understand what *conscientização* is” (Freire & Davis 1981, p. 62). He further states that “dialogue is meaningful precisely because the dialogical subjects, the agents in the dialogue, not only retain their identity, but actively defend it, and thus grow together.

Precisely on this account, dialogue does not *level* them, does not ‘even them out’, reduce them to each other” (Freire 1998b, p. 101).<sup>64</sup>

It is important to note that for Freire dialogue is “not limited to the single axis educator-participant. Dialogue also takes place between participants and with the world” (Blackburn 2000, p. 9). James Blackburn says, “Freire would prefer to call ‘dialogue’, between individual and society, and most important, between individual and individual an act of mutual conscientization” (2000, p. 6). Freire suggests that “[the] ability to reflect, to evaluate, to program, to investigate, and to transform is unique to human beings in the world and with the world. Life becomes existence and life support becomes world when the conscience about the world, which also implies the conscience of the self, emerges and establishes a dialectical relationship with the world” (Freire 1998b, p. 34).

Freire affirms that “dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person’s ‘depositing’ ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be ‘consumed’ by the discussants” (Freire 2000, p. 89). He then suggests that dialogue is “an act of creation” (Freire 2000, p. 89). In fact, for Freire, “the dialogue that distinguishes critical knowledge and cultural action for freedom is not some kind of conversation, it is a social praxis” (Glass 2001, p. 19). When teachers, through dialogue, “encourage their students to view the world through their own critical lens, and to see how it is related to them,” it is then that the “dialogical co-investigation develops a democratic attitude in learners, which can help them learn to listen to and criticize others as well as to participate in forming public policies and to resist or transform these” (Shim 2008, p.

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<sup>64</sup> “It is no longer an ‘I think’ but ‘we think’” (Freire 1973, p. 135).



528). Giroux observes that only “in this way, learners come to realize their oppressed situation, especially in relation to their own experiences, and to develop a critical consciousness against the social injustice” (Giroux in Shim 2008, p. 528). Because education is a political act for Freire, he believes that teachers are responsible in helping students see the injustices and inequalities in their lives (Freire 1998b, p. 41). Through dialogue the two co-investigate and apprehend these realities better. However, dialogue does not stop here. Dialogue is not just necessary in *conscientização*, but it is also a must for praxis: to take practical action in order to deal with oppression.

In Sum, Freire believes that in traditional schools where the banking concept is used, dialogue does not exist. On the contrary, dialogue is at the heart of emancipatory education which Freire proposes. In order to *unlearn what society has taught* so far one needs to enter the world of persisting dialogue. Moreover, it is only through dialogue that we can learn about the inequalities and injustice in our lives. This means that dialogue is both active and responsible in nature. Hence, Freire’s *conscientização* and praxis based on dialogue “demands a deep commitment to the goal of building a better social world, and necessitates active resistance against oppressive structures, ideas and practices” (Weiler 1996, p. 335-6).

Freire says, “when I enter the classroom I ought to be someone who is open to new ideas, open to questions, and open to the curiosities of the students as well as their inhibitions. I ought to be aware of being a critical and inquiring subject in regard to the task entrusted to me, the task of teaching and not that of transferring knowledge” (Freire 1998a, p. 49). Therefore, I believe that Freirean education demands a deep commitment

to the goal of building a better social world, based on the ideals of democracy. In an interview with Alberto Torres he commits to the goal of creating democratic schools. As he points out to Torres, a democratic school is one “in which teachers and students know together and in which the teacher teaches, but while teaching, does not domesticate the student, who, upon learning, will end up also by teaching the teacher” (Torres 1990).<sup>65</sup>

Freire believes that it is impossible to learn in a system which claims to be democratic but denies people the right to voice the inequalities and injustices in their lives. It is impossible, he asserts, to learn in a system in which teacher acts as an authoritarian and imposes the will of the oppressor onto the students and in so doing promotes the “culture of silence”. Such a system is indeed, he believes, “founded on relations of exploitation of certain groups of individuals by others” (Blackburn 2000, p. 5).<sup>66</sup> He says, “It is not what I say that says I am a democrat, that I am not racist or *machista* but what I do. What I say must not be contradicted by what I do. It is what I do that bespeaks my faithfulness or not to what I say (Freire 1998c, p. 67).<sup>67</sup> He explains:

I do not speak of a democracy that deepens inequalities,  
that is purely conventional, that strengthens the powerful,  
that watches with crossed arms as the small are outraged  
and mistreated, one that coddles impunity. I do not speak of

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<sup>65</sup> <http://aurora.icaap.org/index.php/aurora/article/view/45/58>

<sup>66</sup> Rooted in Marxist critique of capitalism.

<sup>67</sup> He also says, “an educator who says one thing and does another is irresponsible, and not only ineffective but also harmful” (Freire 1998b, p. 90).

a democracy whose dream for the state is for a liberal state that maximizes the freedom of the strong to accumulate capital even if that means poverty, at times total destitution, for the majority. I dream of a democracy whose state, while refusing permissive or authoritarian positions and indeed respecting the freedom of its citizens, does not abdicate its role as regulator of social relations. This is a state that intervenes, for it is responsible for the development of social solidarity. (Freire 2004b, p. 24)

Thus, for Freire, democracy entails a “free” society where everyone is allowed to critically examine her life and bring about change should it be required. If a society is not already based on justice—a society where everyone is morally responsible for each other—Freire holds the government responsible for bringing about such conditions, even if it means regulating certain beliefs. This Freirean notion of democratic education prepares the pupils “so that they possess the knowledge, skills and values necessary for active participation in society” (Ross 2004, p. 249).

Dialogue between teachers and students entails active learning: one that is not based on mere repeating and memorizing. Freire maintains that at the heart of such a relationship is respect. Also, he believes that dialogue “requires an intense faith in humankind, faith in their power to make and remake, to create and re-create, faith in their

vocation to be more fully human” (Freire 2000, p. 90).<sup>68</sup> Indeed, “Paulo consistently identified this respect for and commitment to the oppressed as an essential ingredient to the cultivation of democratic schooling” (Darder 1998, p. 9). In addition, dialogue cannot exist in the absence of love.<sup>69&70</sup> He further says, “ If I do not love the world—if I do not love life—if I do not love them, I cannot enter into dialogue” (Freire 2000, p. 90).

Freire’s concept of love is not individualist; for Freire, love is, I believe, feeling for humanity. Additionally, entering dialogue requires tolerance, for tolerance cannot coexist with intolerance—a quality of the oppressor (Freire 1998c, p. 42).<sup>71</sup> Hence, the democratic ideals of respect, tolerance, and love are apparent in Freire’s pedagogical philosophy—something which is not accounted for in the banking concept. Freire states that dialogue based on love, humility and faith ensures “a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence” (Freire 2000, p. 91). He further claims that “it would be a contradiction in terms if dialogue — loving, humble, and full of faith — did not produce this climate of mutual trust, which leads the dialoguers into ever closer partnership in the naming of the world” (Freire 2000, p. 91). Since both the teacher and pupil are active in an environment where dialogue is deemed

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<sup>68</sup> Freire says, “I do not believe in loving among women and men, among human beings, if we do not become capable of loving the world” (Freire 2004b, p. XLIII).

<sup>69</sup> Freire suggests that “it is not possible to be a teacher without loving one’s students, even realizing that love is not enough. It is not possible to be a teacher without loving teaching” (Freire 1998a, p. 15).

<sup>70</sup> Without this faith in people, dialogue is a farce which inevitably degenerates into paternalistic manipulation (Freire 2000, p. 91).

<sup>71</sup> Freire believes that “The act of tolerating requires a climate in which limits may be established, in which there are principles to be respected. That is why tolerance is not coexistence with the intolerable. Under an authoritarian regime, in which authority is abused, or a permissive one, in which freedom is not limited, one can hardly learn tolerance. Tolerance requires respect, discipline, and ethics . . . Being tolerant does not mean acquiescing to the intolerable; it does not mean covering up disrespect; it does not mean coddling the aggressor or disguising aggression. Tolerance is the virtue that teaches us to live with the different. It teaches us to learn from and respect the different” (Freire 1998b, p. 42).

necessary, the aim of education is then to sow the seeds of a civil society. The result of such transformation of society should be, Freire believes, the overcoming of dehumanizing injustice” (Freire 2004b, p. 35).

A true democratic, for Freire, is one in which people are not treated as “things” but Subjects—those who can through critical thinking and dialogue gain *conscientização*, and by recognizing the injustices and inequalities challenge the oppressor (praxis).<sup>72</sup> In a nutshell, this concept of democracy based on dialogue is deeply rooted in the ideas of equality, humility, tolerance, love, respect, and care.

For Freire educational philosophy is based on several factors including decodification, science and liberatory praxis; however, two of the most important concepts are *conscientização* and praxis. Through *conscientização*—which happens as a result of dialogue and critical thinking—we learn about the oppression in our lives. However, for Freire, this is not enough. Upon realizing the injustices and inequalities, he believes that one needs to take practical action in order to challenge them and in so doing break the chains of silence imposed by the dehumanizing oppressor. Therefore, active learning for Freire takes place when one becomes critically conscious of their livelihood and takes practical action to impose change. Through dialogue students are helped in questioning the inequalities and injustices in their lives. Key events from the lives of the students are shown to them in pictorial form in order to help them understand these situations. In this process students are actively engaged in their own learning; the educator takes a guiding role but also learns about her position in the society as well.

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<sup>72</sup> Freire says, “For the oppressor, ‘human beings’ refers only to themselves; other people are ‘things’ (Freire 2000, 57).

Hence, active learning involves both dialogue and critical thinking. However, this learning does not become active just by engaging in dialogues and by critically thinking; it becomes active *only* when the student takes the next step: to change these inequalities and injustices inflicted by the oppressor. Active learning then translates into the act of freedom or breaking out of the culture of silence. For Freire, the student grows *only* in this manner.

Dialogue plays an essential role in attaining the democratic education Freire seeks. He believes that dialogue can only take place if we respect each other as human beings. Dialogue can only take place in the presence of love. Dialogue can only take place if members within a community or the world cooperate and show tolerance. Dialogue can only take place if there is profound love for the world. Dialogue can only take place if we consider our selves responsible for what happens around us. Dialogue can only take place if there is hope for a better world. Dialogue can only take place if we feel attached to each other. Dialogue can only take place if we consider each other equal within our communities and treat every one the same. These qualities can never be associated with the oppressors. For the dialogue to happen, the willingness to participate in the process of discussion is essential. Freire's emphasis on dialogue and the willingness to engage in such a procedure, I believe, aims to ensure that the oppressed do not take arms against the oppressor as the first resort.

To sum up, Freire's pedagogical theory which emphasizes *change* is deeply rooted in dialogue and critical thinking. It is only through dialogue and critical thinking, he believes, that one can break the boundaries of dehumanization imposed by the

authoritarian oppressor. The result of change and breaking out of the culture of silence is a community based on the ideals of equality, humility, love, respect, care and, above all, social solidarity—this is what Freire calls a true democracy.

## Chapter 5

### Active Learning: IBO and the TOK Curriculum

*The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.*

*Karl Marx*

In this chapter I will briefly present a history of the curriculum theory which will enable us to analyze the nature of the IBO philosophy and the TOK curriculum. Then, I will discuss the TOK curriculum with regards to active learning. I will, subsequently, propose my criticism of the (IB) TOK curriculum based on Freire's notion of praxis.

The definition of curriculum has changed drastically, at least, since the emergence of progressive schooling in the United States.<sup>73</sup> There are at least four curriculum theories that have dominated the educational philosophy over the last 150 years: 1) curriculum as a “system of planned actions for instruction” (MacDonald 1965, p. 4), 2) curriculum as “a document which includes details about goals, objectives, content, teaching techniques, evaluations and assessment” (Marsh 1997, p. 4), 3) curriculum as process; and, 4) curriculum as praxis.

Jerome Bruner recalls, in Learning and Thinking, that he has been shocked by “the passivity of the process we call education” (1968, p. 72). He explains that such schools, where students are passive receivers, stress “upon gaining and storing information” (1968, p. 72). This is what he calls ‘passive knowledge’ (Bruner 1968, p.

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<sup>73</sup> “The progressive education movement was formed by educational reformers who were particularly active in the United States from the 1890s to 1930s, promoting the ideas of child-centered education, social reconstructionism, active citizen participation in all spheres of life, and democratization of all public institutions” (Schugurensky 2007, <http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/research/edu20/moments/1919pea.html>).



73). Donald Willower, Terry Eidell and Wayne Hoy agree that in such passive environments teachers hold a custodial orientation and they “conceive school as an autocratic organization with rigidly maintained distinctions between the status of teachers and that of pupils: both power and communication flow downward, and students are expected to accept the decisions of teachers without question” (1967, p. 5). This is the basis of the first two theories of curriculum. Proponents of such an educational philosophy deem students unintelligent, incapable, unwise and foolish.

Bruner argues that we should “not judge our students simply on *what* they know” (1968, p. 77). We should, rather, “let them be judged on what they can generate from what they know—how well they can leap the barrier from learning to thinking” (1968, p. 77). Jay McTighe and Ronald Thomas add that “essential questions that human beings perennially ask about the world and themselves...should be the primary goal of teaching and learning” (2000, p. 52).

Should the aim be “to move beyond the superficiality of fragmented facts,” then “educational model need[s] to take a more holistic and interactive approach to teacher-student relations” (Doll 1996, p. 510). William Doll suggests that “the teacher needs to be part of the learning process, sharing personal doubts, hypotheses, hopes, and fears” (Doll 1996, p. 510). This aim of “education for thinking” is apparent in two curriculum theories: curriculum as process and curriculum as praxis.

Curriculum as process does not treat curriculum as a physical thing; it relies heavily on the “interaction of teachers, students and knowledge;” therefore, learning becomes “an active process and links with the practical form of reasoning” (Smith

2000).<sup>74</sup> Lawrence Stenhouse defines curriculum as process as “an attempt to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational proposal in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice” (1975, p. 4). Fred Mednick asserts that such a curriculum considers teachers essential players in promoting critical thinking. Teachers, in such a model, have “an understanding of their role and the expectations others have of them; and a proposal for action that sets out essential principles and features of the educational encounter. Guided by these, they encourage conversations between, and with, people—out of which may come thinking and action” (Mednick 2006,). Then, “the learners in this model are not objects to be acted upon. They have a clear voice in the way that the sessions evolve. The focus is on interactions. This can mean that attention shifts from teaching to learning” (Mednick 2006). Here, “learning is looked upon as an engagement in worthwhile activity rather than the passive absorption of facts” (Willower, Eidell and Hoy 1967, p. 46). Lawrence Stenhouse argues that “the most important characteristic of the knowledge mode [in such a curriculum] is that one can think with it. This is in the nature of knowledge—as distinct from information—that it is a structure to sustain creative thought and provide frameworks for judgment” (1975, p. 82). It can be concluded that, as Richard Peters says, curriculum as process focuses on critical thinking rather than mere facts to be learned. He says, “what there is to know throws very little light on much else. In history, science, or literature, on the other hand, there is an immense amount to know, and if it is properly assimilated, it constantly throws light on, widens, and deepens one’s view of countless

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<sup>74</sup> This is what Aristotle calls *Phronesis*.

other things (Peters 1966, p. 159). Lawrence Metcalf believes that the goal of education, in curriculum as process is “the development of children into adults who can steadily modify their beliefs in terms of their adequacy for explaining a widening range of experience” (1963, p. 934).<sup>75</sup> In sum, curriculum as process relies on critical thinking, interaction or communication, student experiences and the notion of change.

These characteristics mentioned are also key components of Dewey’s theory of education and the IBO philosophy. Both encourage using student experiences through interaction or communication to generate new experiences and in due course critical thinking individuals who can play a positive role in the democratic community. Dewey believes that democratic education must be modeled by the teacher so students can experience those ideas first hand.<sup>76</sup> Teachers are to model open-mindedness, tolerance, respect, etc. Student and teachers through deliberation, in such a system, talk about their experiences and connect these experiences to create new experiences. Progressive education for Dewey serves that cause of bringing up citizens who can participate within their democratic communities on a regular basis.<sup>77</sup> Although students under a Deweyan system are able to think and to act, willingness to perform or exert change is not a must.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Curriculum as a process is rooted “in the practical form of reasoning set out by Aristotle” (Smith 2000). See *Nicomachean Ethics, Book VII, particularly chapters 5 and 7*.

<sup>76</sup> Here, I would like to point that while Dewey rejects the traditional model in which teachers deposit knowledge into the students, he, in his progressive educational theory, suggests following the “democratic” teacher as a role model.

<sup>77</sup> Freire, by contrast, does not provide a very clear picture of what kind of society he is after although he believes in democratic ideals for his future society. Through history we know that human and societal conditions change all the time because change is inevitable

<sup>78</sup> For Dewey democracy is “primarily a mode of associated living, [and] a conjoint communicated experience,” then schools have a responsibility in giving pupils the opportunity to experience it before they leave school. Hence, education is an essential requirement for attaining a ‘good life’—possible only within a democratic society.

Mark Smith argues that curriculum as praxis is an extension of curriculum as process. However, he points out one key difference: that curriculum as praxis, unlike curriculum as process, makes a deliberate commitment about the “interests it serves” (2000). He argues that curriculum as praxis “[makes] continual reference to collective human well-being and to the emancipation of the human spirit” (Smith 2000). Hence, for curriculum as praxis “action is not simply informed, it is also committed. It is praxis” (Smith 2000).

Curriculum as praxis is not concerned with the ends but the means—an idea based on Aristotle’s claim that “we deliberate not about ends but about means” (Aristotle 1985, 1112b). Shirley Grundy asserts that “the content of the curriculum draws its meaning, not from its ends, but from its beginnings. The substance of the educational experience is a matter of negotiation between teacher and student” (1987, p. 102).<sup>79</sup> Grundy, further, states that for “Aristotle the goals of morality were not in question. One did not deliberate, for instance, about whether just action was desirable, only about how to act justly. Deliberation is, thus, an essential element of practical action” (1987, p. 63). Practical judgment (*phronesis*), however, according to Aristotle is “a true and reasoned disposition toward action with regard to things good and bad for men” (Aristotle 1976, 1140b).<sup>80</sup> Grundy adds, “[practical] judgment gives rise to interaction (practical action). Practical action (praxis) is not random action; it is action *with regard to human good*”

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<sup>79</sup> In praxis there can be no prior knowledge of the right means by which we realize the end in a particular situation. For the end itself is only concretely specified in deliberating about the means appropriate to a particular situation (Grundy 1987, p. 147).

<sup>80</sup> *Phronesis* is often translated as ‘practical judgment’ (Grundy 1987, p. 61).

(1987, p. 62).<sup>81</sup> Therefore, “knowledge is a component of *phronesis*, but not abstract propositional knowledge, rather knowledge which has its basis in human reason.

Knowledge which is formed on the basis of *phronesis* is knowledge which is ‘owned’ by the actor. By this I mean knowledge which has been made personal...through reasoning and experience” (Grundy 1987, p. 61).<sup>82</sup> This notion of Aristotelian *Praxis* is obvious in Freire’s educational philosophy. However, there is a fine line that distinguishes the two: Freire placed an emphasis on education through dialogue. He says, “[the] act of knowing involves a dialectical movement which goes from action to reflection and from reflection upon action to a new action” (Freire 1970, p. 13).<sup>83</sup> The commitment to *emancipation of the human spirit* and *the collective human well-being* is at the heart of Freire’s pedagogy.<sup>84</sup> Grundy states that Freire’s “problem-posing education encourages students and teachers together to confront the real problems of their existence and relationships

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<sup>81</sup> “Practical action in the Aristotelian sense is generated by practical judgment; a true disposition towards action based upon the interaction of a person but shared *eidōs* of the ‘good’ and a given situation. Thus the practical interest is characterized by a general *eidōs* of ‘the good’, a disposition of practical judgment which gives rise to a kind of action which seeks some improvement in a subject or situation” (Grundy 1987, p.64).

<sup>82</sup> Perhaps the best way of approaching practical reasoning is to look at the starting point. Where the productive began with a plan or design, the practical cannot have such a concrete starting point. What we begin with is a question or situation. We then start to think about this situation in the light of our understanding of what is good or what makes for human flourishing. Thus, for Aristotle, praxis is guided by a moral disposition to act truly and rightly; a concern to further human well being and the good life. This is what the Greeks called *phronesis* and requires an understanding of other people (Smith, adapted from Grundy 1987: 64).

<sup>83</sup> This is where curriculum as praxis differs from curriculum as a process. It is important to state here what Grundy calls the problem with curriculum as a process. She states, “Processes [in curriculum as a process] become reduced to sets of skills - for example, how to light a Bunsen burner. When students are able to demonstrate certain skills, they are deemed to have completed the process” (Grundy 1987, p. 77). Grundy further comments, “the actions have become the ends; the processes have become the product. Whether or not students are able to apply the skills to make sense of the world around them is somehow overlooked” (Smith 2000). Also see <http://schools.gedsb.net/ar/theses/geoff/chap4.html>

<sup>84</sup> In other words, the respective ends do make a big difference.

(1987, p. 103).<sup>85</sup> Hence, for Freire, “the teacher is no longer merely the one-who-teaches, but is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in their turn, while being taught also teach...Men teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are ‘owned’ by the teacher” (Freire 2000, p. 53).

Freire’s educational theory places emphasis on dialogue as a means to communicating in order to attain conscientization which he believes will help in praxis. He says, “for the dialogical, problem-posing teacher-student, the programme [sic] content of education is neither a gift nor a imposition...but rather the organized, systematized, and developed ‘representation’ to individuals of the things about which they want to know more” (Freire 2000, p. 65). For Freire it is important that the teacher understands the realities of the student’s life and picks topics from her experiences in order to confront and find solutions through dialogue. This is indeed a key characteristic of the problem-posing education. If the teacher follows this pattern of choosing problems related to student’s world, then the student “will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge. Because they apprehend the challenge as interrelated to other problems within a total context, not isolated detached problems, the resulting comprehension tends to be increasingly critical and thus constantly less alienating” (Freire 2000, p. 54). Freire believes that it is only then that the “corollary of having

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<sup>85</sup> Critical Pedagogy is the theory and practice of *conscientização*. “It is particularly concerned with reconfiguring the traditional student/teacher relationship, where the teacher is the active agent, the one who knows, and the students are the passive recipients of the teacher’s knowledge (the “banking concept of education”). Instead, the classroom is envisioned as a site where new knowledge, grounded in the experiences of students and teachers alike, is produced through meaningful dialogue. It favor libratory, dialogical pedagogy designed to raise individuals’ consciousness of oppression and to in turn transform oppressive social structures through praxis” (Stevens 2007, <http://mingo.info-science.uiowa.edu>).

students as active participants in the construction of learning is that learning becomes meaningful” (Grundy 1987, p. 102).

To sum up, Freire believes that the poor live in a ‘culture of silence’. He considers education an act of freedom; therefore, education helps in breaking this silence imposed by the oppressor. Consequently, his educational theory is rooted in two steps: Conscientization (to become aware) and Praxis (to act upon). He believes that the goal of democratic education is to create citizens who attain critical consciousness and through their understanding they oppose oppression.<sup>86</sup> Freire's pedagogical theory, unlike Dewey's, seeks pupils to become critical thinkers and prepares them for the world where they constantly review what happens around them and through this critical thinking and questioning they can bring about or propose change.<sup>87&88</sup>

This knowledge of the different types of curriculum helps us understand the IBO philosophy and the TOK curriculum. In the following, I briefly discuss the philosophical background of the TOK curriculum in relation to the components of active learning prescribed by Dewey and Freire.

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<sup>86</sup> “How difficult is the task of an educator. No matter where this kind of educator works, the great difficult—or the great adventure—is how to make education something which, in being serious, rigorous, methodical, and having a process, also creates happiness and joy . . . I had experimented with and abandoned various methods and processes of communication. Never, however, had I abandoned the conviction that only by working with the people could I achieve anything authentic on their behalf. Never had I believed that the democratization of culture meant either its vulgarization or simply passing on to the people prescriptions formulated in the teacher’s office” (Freire qtd. in Paulo Freire Center Finland, <http://paulofreirefinland.org/>).

<sup>87</sup> Although Dewey argues for critical thinking, his focus lies at the heart of modeling democratic ideas so that pupils can follow them in future. This idea of constantly engaging with the society and its citizens is indeed what makes Freire different from Dewey.

<sup>88</sup> Freire focuses more on the social requirements needed to overcome oppression, and this is correct. However, Dewey has built into his philosophy of education the means for self-correction, which allows it to adapt to circumstances in a way that Freire’s with his fixed ends for humanity (Being, dignity, etc).

The TOK curriculum stresses that “[the curriculum’s] context is a world immeasurably different from that inhabited by ‘renaissance man’” (IBO 2007, p. 3). Therefore, it is essential to relate the subject matter to the experiences of the pupils. The TOK curriculum admits that “the course is centered on student reflection and questioning; the [TOK] diagram places the knower(s), as individuals and as groups, at the centre” (IBO 2007, p. 6). The emphasis of such curriculum is on the life activities of students, their knowledge and experiences. The student-centered curriculum “maintains that all learners have abilities that can be developed fairly easily over a period of time” (Doll 1996, 53). In turn, pupils are motivated to build on their experiences and form new experiences to be fully prepared to live and contribute to their communities and the world. Hence, the IBO and the TOK curriculum appreciate the importance of student experience in the process of learning. Both Dewey and Freire advocated the use of student experiences in their theories on education. It does not make sense to begin learning at a point which does not relate to the life of the learner. Once a student knows the subject-matter in relation to her experience, then it is easier for her to understand what it means. Students do not know what is in the head of the teacher unless they can relate to her experiences.

In order to fully appreciate student experiences, the IBO and the TOK curriculum deem communication important. Students discuss the subject-matter in relation to their experiences with their peers and their teachers. Students in small groups or as a class assess the topic under discussion using their previous knowledge or their life experiences. For instance, in the chapter on Ethics (from the curriculum document), students discuss



their position on certain moral questions, such as abortion. They either approve or disapprove of such a practice based on their religious beliefs, the beliefs of their families, the impact of their culture or society, and their own personal beliefs on the subject matter. Some see abortion as a right every woman must have, some discuss the disadvantages of such a practice in terms of the value of life, and others say that it depends on the reasons a woman wants to abort. In the process of such a discussion, students challenge each others' beliefs and as a result they learn from one another. At the end of the session, some students might go home and think about it further and hold their opinions, while some could alter their opinions based on what others said in the discussion. This learning would not have happened without communication or interaction between the students.

The IBO recognizes that without communication critical thinking does not take place. Therefore, students are provided with opportunities to interact. This enhances their critical thinking skills. Critical thinking is then also at the heart of the IB philosophy and the TOK curriculum. The curriculum recognizes that students have been fed information all their lives. Therefore, instead of giving students more information, students are, in the TOK course, given the opportunity to share their ideas with their peers and “to listen to and learn from what others think” (IBO 2007, p. 3). Hence, the aim of the course is to help students be able to critically think and utilize the knowledge they have acquired over time or the knowledge they have yet to acquire. This helps “students' thinking and their understanding of knowledge as a human construction are shaped, enriched and deepened” (IBO 2007, p. 3). In Doll's words, the objective of the course is to teach the pupil “how to think rather than what to think” (Doll 1996, p. 43).

Here, the curriculum is in line with Dewey and Freire’s theories on education. Both Dewey and Freire believe that traditional educational philosophy promote memorization. The aim of education, they suggest, is not the acquisition of knowledge; rather, they believe that education should aim at questioning and critical thinking, as discussed in chapters 3 and 4. The IB philosophy clearly indicates that it aims at stimulating “curiosity, inquiry, reflection and critical thinking” (IBO 2002b, p. 4). It further states, “[curiosity] and a spirit of discovery is stimulated through: encouraging an eclectic, creative and independent approach to inquiry and learning; engagement with a broad range of knowledge domains; [and], opportunities created for transdisciplinary learning” (14). Therefore, it is fair to suggest that learning for the IBO is not an act of filling the student to the brim with facts. To this end, the IBO philosophy and the TOK curriculum aim at cultivating the habits of mind: critical thinking in understanding the knowledge students acquire in schools, using their experiences in relation to the experiences of others.

Dewey emphasizes that students should be provided with opportunities where they are asked *to do* things which will in turn demand deliberation—a key notion in his education for democracy. It is then, he believes, that students can actually learn and become active members of their community (Doll 1996, p. 154). Therefore, in order to build a society where people deliberate, make decisions and contribute positively to their communities, it is important that schools provide their students with opportunities that (a) lead them to think, and (b) lead them to act. The TOK curriculum provides these opportunities to pupils by focusing on critical thinking and deliberation. The IBO also

provides its students with opportunity to build positive attitudes towards their community and other members of the society. For instance, through CAS program, students get involved in the community to help—an act of *doing*—with several projects, such as help at the orphanage, taking care of the elderly, cleaning the beaches, volunteering at the animal shelters and so on. This help within the community leads them to realize some of the common concerns within the community. What students learn in the CAS program can be used to enhance their engagement in the TOK class discussions. The *doing* that Dewey asks for also happens in the TOK classes, indirectly, as they *do* the thinking in the process of questioning and answering.

The goal of the TOK curriculum is not only to produce critically thinking students, but also to bring up citizens who can respect their peers, their environment, other cultures, traditions and religions. Both ideas—the child-centered curriculum and the need for democratic education—are at the heart of the IBO philosophy and the TOK curriculum. In addition, the IBO recognizes democracy as the outcome of education with communication and critical thinking at its core. For the IBO Growth takes place when individuals communicate and critically think, and in so doing uphold their beliefs or modify their experiences. This is active learning for the IBO.

The outcome of class-discussion or communication between two individuals also promotes the democratic ideals that the IBO leans toward. Communication does not take place when individuals do not listen to each other in the first place. Listening entails respect. In the process of communication, students not only listen to others but they also convey their opinions. One cannot openly convey what he or she believes if one does not

have the intellectual freedom or the freedom of speech. These are some of the democratic ideals that communication ensures. This is impossible in a school system or community which does not advocate for democracy as a mode of living.

In sum, the TOK curriculum provides students the opportunities to attain critical thinking skills through communication within the classroom. It also provides students the opportunity to build positive attitudes towards their peers, their community and other members of the planet Earth. In fact, I believe that the goal of the IBO and the TOK curriculum is not only to produce critical thinkers, but also to bring up citizens who can respect both their cultural beliefs and those of others.

Now that we are aware of the IBO and the TOK curriculum and its philosophy, I turn my attention to the criticism of the programme.

IBO states that it aims to develop “in students an ability to appreciate and to evaluate human diversity and its legitimate boundaries can strengthen their motivation to modify their behavior accordingly” (IBO 2002a, p. 14). IBO, then, recognizes that “[an] explicit expectation is that successful inquiry will lead to responsible action initiated by children as a result of the learning process, so that participation in such a programme encourages the translation of knowledge into action and reflection. In all areas of the programme, the principle of developing in young children ‘not just the power to think, but the will to act’, as described by Kurt Hahn, comes to fore” (IBO 2002b, p. 11). However, this *will to act*, I believe, does not refer to *continual collective human well-being* and *the emancipation of the human spirit*. I see the *will to act* principle in the IBO

philosophy as one that is passive in nature. For instance, let's examine the statement mentioned in the IBO philosophy below:

“Giving priority to students knowing and appreciating their own culture first is essential in fostering their sense of identity with their own traditions, customs and mores, and the joy and immense satisfaction that this background provides to a growing child...developing an understanding of culture is critical to promoting and understanding of others and an ability to relate cooperatively to them. This is what each individual programme and the sequence of programmes seek to achieve—to enable students to develop an awareness of themselves first, while recognizing that others are different and that others ‘can be right in being different’ (9-10).<sup>89</sup>

Although the statement asks for critically examining one's situation or position in a culture by grasping values they share within a community and other values described in terms of *exploitation, exerting power and destruction*, it also seems to sway toward the ideals of co-operation—and this cooperation with the oppressors who exploit, exert power and destroy does not align with what Freire believed to be *praxis* or practical action.<sup>90</sup> It is significant that the curriculum promotes critical thinking in terms of developing awareness; however, it does not seek the practical action Freire seeks. This gap, I believe, is because of the lack of dialogue—not one that serves as mere

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<sup>89</sup> Also see (Peel 1997)

<sup>90</sup> See Chapter 4 of this thesis for detailed analysis of *Praxis*.

communication or exchange of ideas, rather one that Freire stresses upon.

As discussed in the previous section of this chapter, the main distinction between curriculum as a process and curriculum as praxis is its intent. Although *curriculum as process*, ‘is driven by general principles and places and emphasis on judgment and meaning making, it does not make statements about the interests it serves’, particularly ‘continual reference to collective human well-being and to the emancipation of the human spirit’. The praxis model of curriculum ‘makes an explicit commitment to emancipation’. It is clear based on the analysis provided that the TOK curriculum pursues the model of curriculum as process. Although they both share three key principles, curriculum as praxis also makes an explicit commitment to emancipation—to confront the real problems in one’s life and in so doing take practical action to change them.<sup>91</sup> For instance, a decade or so ago, to some extent even today, gay and lesbian communities were looked down upon in our communities. However, upon realizing this injustice—through dialogue in which they could freely express their ideas and feelings—the gay and lesbian communities were able to challenge the norms which eventually led to attain certain freedoms. It is this realization together with the necessity for change which makes dialogue effective. Interaction without praxis does not entail a meaningful dialogue, a Freirean would argue. The IBO does not explicitly ask for such a change. Therefore, I believe that the communication which the IBO aims at is quite passive in nature. It is not that the individuals do not engage in a meaningful interaction within the TOK classroom;

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<sup>91</sup> The three key principles entail (a) that learning is not an act of acquisition of information, rather it is an act of knowing how; (b) that learning does not happen in isolation rather learning takes place when there is conversation between and with people; and (c) subject-matter revolves around student experiences.

I believe that the interaction does not take the necessary step of leading to praxis (practical action).

Although through interaction individuals may become aware of the problems, they are not explicitly asked, by the IBO or the TOK curriculum, to take the necessary steps to deal with these problems—this is what Freire calls *praxis*. For instance, through interaction people might come to know that there are thousands of people dying because of AIDS in their communities. However, how have these members of the school community helped the people who are suffering from such a deadly disease? Through our interactions we become aware of the fact that thousands of people are dying of starvation. What have we done to help? Through our interactions we have come to know that we must stand up against terrorism and oppression. How have we done that? I could realize all these things without engaging in a dialogue—particularly, at this time in history when the media covers everything. What is then the point of interaction? Freire says that through dialogue, not mere communication, we not only understand these inequalities and injustices, but we also propose or bring about changes. Unless our dialogue on HIV, starvation, terrorism and oppression leads to some change, it is merely exchange of ideas. The IBO does not explicitly commit itself to such a liberatory education although it realizes that “a school ethos [sic] has a commitment to social justice and equity” (IBO 2002b, p. 10). It also recognizes that we need to take action to change these inequalities however at a passive level. For instance, we could always take care of the orphans, clean the beaches or volunteer at an animal shelter. I am not saying that these are not important; it is that we are passively involved in helping the community. We need to tackle the root

causes of these issues and only Freirean education can steer us towards such a goal, I believe.

Education provided to us today is in line with free market capitalism, which encourages competition. However, the IBO favors cooperation as a democratic ideal (IBO 2002b, p. 16). It seems to contradict the principle of cooperation it promotes, for it does not challenge the status quo: the rich attains the power it has and the poor stay powerless, save but some exceptions. The IBO curriculum, in fact, does not deal with the socio-economic backgrounds of the students. It is perhaps because only members of middle to elite class families send their kids to the IB schools. However, to be consistent with their goals of attaining a democratic society, it is necessary that the IBO look at the socio-economic backgrounds of students. An equal right does not mean all the rights for the rich and almost no rights for the poor. The rich also need to understand that they exercise their power and cause these inequalities present in the lives of the poor. The poor should not be the object to be acted upon, as Freire would say.

Dialogue without commitment to change serves the might; the goal should be to create a society in which people have equal opportunities at all levels. For instance, it is not equal opportunity when we say that everyone can attend Harvard University, for a poor person from Brazil will never be able to afford the tuition fee; however, a rich person from Brazil with even lesser grades will be able to attend the university. We need to understand that we live in an unequal world where poor are always at disadvantage. Some schools might say they would assign quotas for the poor; however, a Freirean would argue that the poor do not want charity. We need to find the root cause of such



inequalities and genuinely attempt to dissolve the barriers through dialogue which results in praxis.

To sum up, the model of active learning I propose in this thesis asks for a three-step model of curriculum: one which indicates growth, involves dialogue, and promotes critical thinking. Such a model is in contrast with passive learning which is promoted by traditional educational philosophy: one which treats students as receptacles to be filled; is anti-dialogical in nature; and, aims to keep the status quo by preparing the next generation to take over. It is quite clear that the model I propose does not live up to the expectations of free market capitalism, for it asks us to defy the status quo: we need to prepare our next generation such that they are willing to attain critical consciousness through dialogue and critical thinking and in so doing take the necessary steps to alter the inequalities and injustices in their lives. This model of learning requires individuals to be treated as subjects rather than objects. The aim is to attain the humanization that Freire asks for; and, it is impossible to attain such a goal without raising our voices against the oppressive institutions. It is only then we can attain a “truly” democratic society based on the ideals of love, respect, care, tolerance, humility and so on. It is only then that we can grow together as human beings and live together, peacefully, in the global village most of us have always dreamed of. This is indeed the dream of having a democratic society where everyone is, without any discrimination, treated equally.

For Freire, the traditional pedagogy offers pupils nothing but silence. In such school systems, students learn to assume the role they have been assigned by their forefathers. The rich will assume the role of the oppressor and the poor will always remain

the oppressed.<sup>92</sup> Dewey through his progressive education and Freire through his emancipatory education challenge these roles imposed on us by the oppressor. They both ask for the *freedom of the learner* which is only possible in a true democratic society. This freedom can only be attained in a classroom where the teacher does not act as an authoritarian or all-knowing, rather when he willingly enters dialogue or communication with the students and in so doing not only steers the students toward a better life, but also learns about his own experiences. Once the teacher and the students learn, through dialogue and critical thinking, they challenge their experiences and in so doing modify them. It is crucial for Freire that the oppressed not only become conscious of the inequalities and injustices in their lives, but also it is important that they take the necessary steps to alter their inequalities and injustices.

Both Dewey and Freire argue for a democratic classroom where students learn to uphold these ideals and become citizens who care for their communities. Dewey believes that democratic education must be modeled by the teacher so students can experience those ideas first hand. Teachers are to model open-mindedness, tolerance, respect, etc. Student and teachers through deliberation talk about their experiences and connect those experiences to create new experiences. Progressive education for Dewey serves the cause of bringing up citizens who can participate within their democratic communities on regular basis. Freire, however, believes that the poor live in a ‘culture of silence’. Education, he argues, is essential in breaking this silence, for Freire believes that education is an act of freedom. This emancipatory education is rooted in two steps:

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<sup>92</sup> There are always exceptions to every rule.

Conscientization and Praxis. For Freire, not only becoming aware of one's position in society is important, but he also deems acting upon these findings in order to change one's position in society necessary.<sup>93</sup> His goal of democratic education is to create citizens who attain critical consciousness and through their understanding they oppose the inequalities and injustices in their lives. Freire's pedagogical theory promotes critical thinking and prepares students to constantly review what happens around them in order to enact change.<sup>94</sup> I believe, Freire's theory does have more value as it leads to constant revision and change in what happens around us.

Therefore, I have suggested, in this thesis, that the IBO should place emphasis on this Freirean notion of conscientization and praxis to truly serve the interests of all human beings. Although I understand that it is not an easy task to incorporate such ideals within the IBO curriculum or any other education system, it has to be done so that we can all work together to deal with the problems of tomorrow.

Like Freire, I believe that education is a political act. We do not engage in a dialogue to find out whether what happened in the Abu Ghareeb Prison was right or wrong, rather to understand and recognize the problems and in so doing take necessary steps to voice our concerns so that such oppressions do not happen again. We do not engage in a dialogue to find out that the racist act against the little Black kid, or Latino kid or the Indian kid at school was wrong; rather we engage in a dialogue to recognize

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<sup>93</sup> Freire stressed social emancipation and liberation from oppression—Dewey stressed the active use of social, deliberative inquiry. They had different ends in view, to be sure, but they both, in their own way, emphasized critical inquiry.

<sup>94</sup> Although Dewey argues for critical thinking, his focus lies at the heart of modeling democratic ideas so that pupils can follow them in future.

that racism is wrong and stand up against it so that we can ensure a racism-free-society.<sup>95</sup>

Racist, sexist and economic inequalities exist and let me assure you that we do know about them—I mean even most of the oppressors know that what they are doing is wrong, they just want to put a blindfold and ignore it—however, not many of us stand up against such inequalities. We say ‘*Oh, well...we need to understand that people are different*’. We let female circumcision happen because we are asked to learn to tolerate other cultural beliefs. We let women burn alive in the fire (*Sati*) because we need to understand that different cultures have different practices and they are right in being different. We let people kill thousands of innocent children because we need to respect every political opinion no matter its intent. We let women get raped, abused and beaten to death because we need to understand that people are different, for they hold different beliefs. How can we be so indifferent to such inequalities and injustices?

Education should not be so passive that it forces us to sit idle and do nothing about such oppressions. We live a communal life. The world is a global village. We need to care for one another, for living together entails wishing well for all. However, it must not be just a wish—we need to ensure that no one faces such inequalities and injustices. Education is the beginning and the end of this goal. *Education is indeed a political act.*

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<sup>95</sup> So, we don't ask whether something is wrong, we assume it is wrong and dialogue to stand against it. This would be quite different from Dewey's approach, which insists on problem-finding first.

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