

## Chapter Two

# Encounter and Dialogue in EFL Classrooms

### *Interculturalism in Praxis*

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**I**n 1964, McLuhan predicted a series of phenomena linked to the advent of the so-called ‘global village’, such as ‘globalization’, ‘new economy’ and ‘information technology revolutions’. Today, these phenomena are still causing a strong physical, intellectual, and cultural nomadism that involves unprecedented moments of confrontation between individuals on an ethnic, linguistic, and cultural level. This process has led to the creation of current multi-ethnic and multi-cultural societies. Besides, it has prompted an existential ambiguity due to the simultaneous desire of staying where someone feels a real sense of belonging and, at the same time, the need of ‘going away’. In this chapter, this nomadism is explored in the context of EFL classrooms and in relation to the contemporary challenge of bringing together individual peculiarities with universal features, combining local and global aspects. The pedagogical task resulting from this process requires to avoid an oppressive standardization, a phenomenon that denies the possibility of being ‘different’ or thinking ‘in another way’; and at the same time it requires to keep the rightful protection of individual peculiarities away from

the traps of localism or the glorification of one's roots, attitudes that can lead to harmful kinds of 'identity obsession', main cause of violent divisions, clashes, and discriminations (Pinto Minerva 2002).

This chapter aims therefore at highlighting the teleological value of the critical-intercultural education that takes place in EFL classrooms and its role as promoter of a 'humanizing' path that rediscovers, respects, and recognizes the true face of the Other as individual and resource, making it a completely different process compared to all possible forms of hidden cultural neocolonialism.

### Interculturalism in EFL Classrooms: The Praxis of Encounter and Dialogue

In today's complex and continuously changing society, the importance of the dialogical-intercultural approach in the field of pedagogy is under careful investigation. The dialogical-intercultural approach highlights the salience of mutual respect and recognition of otherness and eliminates the use of hierarchical categories, in order to promote a pedagogical encounter that creates relationships and synthesis among differences.

Today's globalized world is composed of so many cultures that there is an increasing need to adopt an intercultural approach. The value and functionality of this approach is linked to the fact that it represents a new and disrupting device to understand how teaching and learning in EFL classrooms can create a maieutic-educational space open to engagement, dialogue, and understanding. In other words, a space that boasts the potential of creating a new *modus vivendi* which requires the acquisition of a new mentality that goes beyond the limits of sense of belonging and opens up, instead, to the resources of a space of cultural pluralism.

According to Franco Cambi, the current generation 'must devise a series of strategies to evaluate and review interculturalism in its whole complexity, integrity, and in its articulated and dysmorphic physiognomy' (Cambi 2006, p. 15). Interculturalism is therefore to be considered as a theoretical model and a historical-social objective. It must be tackled as a challenge to mental habits, prejudices, cognitive and axiological criteria. It should help us overcome identities without nullifying them and bring us in a new moral

universe built on encounter and dialogue. A universe where the rule is to interact with and develop common spaces that respect difference and its value. It is important to recognize, strengthen, articulate and support this idea of interculturalism (Cambi 2006, p. 7).

As it becomes clearer and clearer that our societies are becoming more and more multicultural, it is more and more urgent for this multiculturalism to turn into an interculturalism characterized by encounter, dialogue, engagement, and understanding in a climate of diversity, but where difference is respected. Clearly, interculturalism is a challenge in itself: it goes against the common mental habits of the average Western and European man, but also against cultures in general, since they normally are defensive and ready to fight against the 'enemy' model. On the one hand, interculturalism requires therefore a new *forma mentis*, which should be pluralistic, dynamic, and open. On the other hand, it requires also a new *ethos*, which should be dialogical and fair.

Therefore, as previously stated, interculturalism requires a 'space of encounter', a complex and dynamic space that should be carefully built and protected, hence pedagogically managed. In this landscape still in the making (*in fieri*), pedagogy represents, both at a community and individual level, the best means to promote a change in mentalities, relationships, roles of the economy or of the states; while at the same time, it declares and supports values, attitudes, and mental habits that should be implemented with time. This kind of pedagogy should aim at guarding against possible drifts or dangerous forms of pessimism, to relaunch instead an axiological, critical, and even utopian idea of pedagogy, which could tackle and unveil the defects and lacks of functional, technical, adaptive, and conformist pedagogy.

As a matter of fact, interculturalism is one of the key pedagogical devices of our age, an era characterized by globalization, pluralism, and difference. This age requires a pedagogy that must be able to take on the challenge represented by the difficult, open, and flexible structures that are still in the making and keep getting renovated in contemporary life. Interculturalism deserves therefore a structural 'place' in the current educational system. It is indeed a challenge rooted in multicultural societies, but it is also a pedagogical exercise that defies the typical mentalities and identities of monocultures by relaunching values like dialogue, peace, and solidarity as basis

to build a cognitive and moral education that could provide the sound and useful foundations needed to support the new rules of societal co-existence. 'A global society rocked by deep and shocking injustices; terrible inequalities; asymmetrical lifestyles and rights; a too-much-widespread, sneaky and repetitive barbarity' (Cambi 2006, p. 8). As previously stated, interculturalism is the creation of a new frame of mind, free of all ethnocentric concepts and instead dialogical, open to listening to the other, and ready for the encounter. A new, unstructured frame of mind that sees the mixing of cultures as a resource. Nevertheless, this type of mindset is not easy to create, assimilate, embrace, and use in daily life and social activities. In other words, as Franco Cambi (2006) explains, to activate and trigger this new frame of mind it is necessary, on the one hand, to employ some key concepts of cultural anthropology, like the autonomy of cultures, relativism, pluralism, non-hierarchization; and on the other hand, to employ pedagogy with the aim of bringing to the society and its individuals the principles/values of dialogue, understanding, deconstructionism, and solidarity, which are the engine and result of the 'space of encounter'.

Today, it is therefore necessary to consider the 'space of encounter' as the key factor of the educational and pedagogical effort that interculturalism entails; a theoretical and practical effort to raise awareness, create new models, promote introspection, and create a new way of 'stay in' and 'live' a culture. A training and educational effort that involves individuals, communities, and cultures that 'encounter' and 'live' the complex and dialectic space represented, for example, by EFL classrooms.

All this leads to the conclusion that the 'space of encounter' is a space distinctly pedagogic, built through educational practices and fully expressed in the theory of education. Therefore, this space resembles an endless building site, always in the making. 'It is a space that must be protected and built, devised and wanted; built, devised and wanted as a space inhabited by individuals that can be educated right there, find there their places, change, develop a *habitus* and an identity; and at the same time the space must assign them a place, identity, and meaning. A space that is simultaneously educational and pedagogical, where an intercultural practice is implemented and there is a theory of interculturalism, and where these elements interact with each other to influence the individuals, cultures, institutions, and so-

cial groups, changing their identity processes and their sense of belonging' (Cambi 2006, p. 27).

The intercultural interpretation given to the dialogical approach of the education effort described above might represent a true breakaway from the past and it might turn the risky and troubling multiethnic and multicultural co-existence into a growth and enrichment opportunity. In the current era characterized by a crisis of values and a widespread sense of disorientation, it is crucial to point out the topicality and urgency of a thorough pedagogic reflection and recognize the value of critical-intercultural education. This acquires even a bigger importance in the practice of education in every situation, for example in the context of EFL classrooms.

In this situation of historic renewal and fight between different cultural models that originate forms of racism, ethnic closure and fundamentalism; the Western world must recognize its duty, necessity, and main objective: recalibrate itself to get away from centuries of domination, colonialism, and self-celebration, while moving instead towards pluralism and diversity, assigning a crucial and decisive role to education. The educational effort must be widespread and capillary to make it possible to design and build new values, new mindsets, new social co-existence models, the development of individuals, and the collaboration among people and cultures.

In this brand-new framework that only recently has started to be implemented, only education can lead to the creation of a globalization process that can build the 'common foundations' of that future world where we are already living, as individual and groups. Nevertheless, this will be possible only if we consider education as an educational effort carried out among individuals and communities to raise their awareness and help them shouldering their responsibilities in a culture of dialogue and recognition, as part of a real empowering process. Only education 'can save us', because its processes are the only ones that can foster a change *in interiore homine*. Because only education has the possibility to work on that thin and complex line that transforms values, models, and mindsets; devising and implementing 'anthropologic changes'.

Pedagogy must therefore take on the role of devising and interpreting the future. It must read the signs of the future in the present and assign to

the future an organic identity and a feasibility structured in political-social strategies and *ad hominem* strategies (Cambi 2006).

In other words, there is a need to educate, to shape mindsets, consciences, and individuals in such a way that they consider their own existence as a value, a rule, a limit that the society or its mechanisms cannot breach. The first step, therefore, is to educate people to understand and valorize the human being; to teach people that every individual has a 'value in itself' and a 'value for all of us', since everyone represents a remarkable and unique individual, full of potential and importance. Obviously, in all this process, dialogue plays a fundamental role: it should not hide the tensions existing between individuals belonging to different cultures, but instead it should be built on them and by them, avoiding self-referentiality, skipping ethnocentrism, and continuously working to develop a common space.

Besides, it is necessary to educate people to recognize, embrace, and spread human rights as new vision of global co-existence and its main rule. Human rights that go beyond cultures and traditions, becoming the new common dress of global co-existence; human rights that must be defined, codified, learned, and lived; in other words human rights that must be embraced with total resolution and critical sense. Above all, these rights must be promoted through dialogue, by placing cultures one in front of the other and asking them to radically confront each other, with the aim of postulating and expanding a common concept of humanity and devising the institutions that should protect it. This concept should be diffused and become a habit in this new global culture of humanity. Another fundamental aspect is to educate people to the value of equality, tolerance, and dialogue, which are the principles that create the 'space of encounter' and that represent also the launching pad of every intercultural adventure. It is important to educate people to consider diversity as a resource that helps overcoming the limits of the self and that asks for a reevaluation of the self, the identity, and the sense of belonging. It is necessary to educate people to consider integration as a process that requires mutuality, recognition, participation, and a positive welcoming attitude that must be active, participated, and mutual.

Then, as Latouche (1992) stated, it is necessary to educate people to '*décoloniser l'imaginaire*'; to avoid every *imperium*; to get rid of all forms of bias or prejudice, limitation, closed rule or identity; and to open up instead to

reevaluation, de-construction, re-interpretation and demystification. Only in this way, it will be possible to enter in an open democracy characterized by encounter, dialogue, and shared built integration.

This proximity and reciprocity among individuals gives naturally birth to dialogue, which requires the ability to listen. This ability promotes accordance, understanding, and sharing among thinking and speaking individuals that during this process associate with each other. Dialogue therefore means listening, understanding, and engaging in a mutual recognition of being individuals and faces. This means that, in a space where differences meet, the encounter will truly happen only in presence of four fundamental components: confrontation, deconstruction, dialogue, and understanding.

Confrontation means standing one in front of the other and activating, in particular, the listening skill. Deconstruction instead means to take an attitude that allows getting rid of prejudices and of cognitive, ethical, or religious rigidities. Then, there is dialogue, which requires listening and the need to give a face to the individual we are talking with, to see him/her *in primis* as a person, before seeing him/her as someone with beliefs and habits. All this, on the one hand, promotes understanding, which allows for full recognition and mutual respect; while on the other hand, it opens the 'space of encounter' to a new dimension. A new playing field that fosters co-existence and recognition, and which must be cultivated as the frontline of a new cultural model, where the values of humanity and democracy consider the multicultural and intercultural inputs in a more critical and open way.

Such an intense dialogue becomes therefore the crucial model of the multicultural society in which we live, characterized by the strong need of understanding, reciprocity, and mutual recognition which are required to organize the 'space of encounter'. A space where cultures can find their place and at the same time build it, occupying and considering it as their main task.

The 'space of encounter' is therefore the fruit of the mutual dialogical tension that listening activates, which prepares the individual to hear the ideas of the other and understand their roots, creating spaces of common understanding and common *ethos* of communication and existence, which in its turn creates a real democratic community that has the ability to give birth to values of justice, solidarity, and shared accountability.

It results clear that the identification of dialogue as the key technique of the 'space of encounter' and its promotion as an open, critical, and self-critical process, leads to the idea and the implementation of a global citizenship of individuals, ethnic groups, and cultures that thrives on solidarity, irenic values, human rights, and laicity.

The complex blueprint of interculturalism that has been outlined in the previous paragraphs needs to be reviewed and developed with perseverance and vision, with audacity and resolution, because it is still *in nuce* and *in fieri* and, therefore, it requires to be accompanied in its theoretical development and in the establishment of a categorial and cognitive framework that animates it in the institutional, historical, and political project that it entails.

The 'space of encounter' is therefore a challenging space, which is and always will be the support mould used for building the multicultural society in which we live and that will have to become more intercultural; with the aim of developing, without domination purposes, a global model adapted to the age of globalization, a phenomenon that seems to be completely irreversible.

Obviously, this will be possible only through education, which is characterized by tensions and combinations between theory and practice, between planning and implementation, between the need of facing an issue and opening up to the other: an open process always *in itinere*.

The aim of education must therefore be to educate and train global human beings, global citizens that can reach this status only through dialogue and openness, by avoiding all forms of closure while keeping their own identity and embracing the ethical, dialogical, collaborative, and pluralistic principle of democracy. According to Franco Cambi, this is a true necessity in order 'to live without ideas deriving from colonialism, racism and imperialism in the geographical, demographic, political, plural, and polymorphic space represented by today's and tomorrow's world' (Cambi 2006, p. 75). A world that, after all, represents also the space that we have and we will have to occupy more and more in the future, with great respect for that universe of values ruled by the guiding and inspiring principle of unity-diversity; hinged on the square-shaped structure composed by tolerance, dialogue, integration, and rights that leads to the recognition of democracy as value.



## Critical Engagement through Dialogue: Freirean Notion of Conscientization

Considering the aspects mentioned in the previous pages, EFL classrooms are to be considered the educational space and pedagogical collection of a pluralistic philosophy that defines the teleological horizon of education, which consists in rediscovering an anthropological vision based on the undying respect of the individual. In other words, the educational process should be a 'humanization practice' that promotes the 'conscientization' of the subjects involved in order to develop their ability to overcome all forms of oppression, subjugation, and discrimination, by leading them on the path of 'humanization'. This kind of 'problem-posing education', a term coined by Paulo Freire, is based on the theory of dialogical action. According to Freire, dialogical action allows the 'oppressed' to become aware of their condition of mental subjugation. It empowers them and helps them free themselves of the 'false myths' created by the leading class and reject the fatalism that they used to justify their condition of outcasts (Freire 2005).

The practice of this 'pedagogical credo' in EFL classrooms helps in conveying the idea that English is not anymore the 'language of the empire' which tries, through subtle and hidden strategies of democratic teaching-learning processes, to label things as different or belonging to the 'Other' by manipulating ideas and identities in order to mortify the masses and their culture. Instead, English becomes the language of interculturalism that embraces common spaces where difference and its value are respected. Hence, it is considered a language that promotes a pedagogical paradigm of critical reflection about cultural pluralism, which must be enhanced and turned into a resource and growth opportunity for the values of peace, justice, equality, legality, human rights, and solidarity. Considering this aim, the concept of 'problem-posing education' proposed by Paulo Freire highlights its topicality and value. It is indeed a type of practice that gives birth to a process which is fruit of the use of a new '*forma mentis*'. According to the Brazilian educator, it is '*praxis*', in other words a simultaneous reflection and action that gives birth to a '*habitus*' and a '*habitat*' of dialogue, confrontation and mutual understanding. This creates the '*forma mentis*' and the principles-values of the individual, with the aim of building a society democratically open and

ready to take charge of the responsibility of community life, asking at the same time for the concrete involvement of the individual in a dimension of solidarity and respect for the Other.

According to Freire, this type of education is based on dialogue. As a matter of fact, the value and topicality of this pedagogical paradigm is fully understandable by focusing on the ‘essence of dialogue’, which for the South-American educator must be considered the basis of education. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire affirms:

as we attempt to analyze dialogue as a human phenomenon, we discover something which is the essence of dialogue itself: the word. But the word is more than just an instrument which makes dialogue possible; accordingly, we must seek its constitutive elements. Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed—even in part—the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world. An unauthentic word, one which is unable to transform reality, results when dichotomy is imposed upon its constitutive elements. When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter, into *verbalism*, into an alienated and alienating ‘blah’ (Freire 2005: 87).

According to the Brazilian educator, dialogue is an existential necessity and the way that human beings must follow to achieve significance as human beings. It is the encounter in which the ‘reflection’ and ‘action’ of individuals combine, as they are addressed to the world which has to be transformed and humanized. According to Freire, since dialogue is an act of creation, it must necessarily take place through love, humility, faith, hope, and critical thinking.

In his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the South-American educator explains that ‘love’ is the foundation of dialogue and commitment to others. He affirms that dialogue cannot exist in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people, since the naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not caused by love. Besides, he notices that dialogue cannot exist without ‘humility’, because dialogue is the encounter of those committed to the common task of creating and re-creating together, and it is broken if one of its parties lack in humility. Freire considers also people who believes in the existence of an elite and a second-

rate group and affirms that people lacking humility or who have lost it do not have that 'human authenticity' which is required to get in touch with the *'Other'*. Freire explains also that dialogue cannot exist in the absence of an intense 'faith' in human beings. Faith in their power to make and remake; faith in their vocation to be more fully human, which is not the privilege of any man, but the birthright of all. According to Freire, dialogue cannot exist without 'hope', which is rooted in 'men's incompleteness' and their 'dehumanization'. These are the reasons why it is useful to fuel hope, because it leads to the incessant pursuit of the humanity denied by injustice. Finally, dialogue cannot exist unless individuals engage in true thinking, 'critical thinking', which perceives reality as a process still in the making, where the presence of each individual is not seen as a massive presence that must adapt, but an active element and player in a field that takes shape as the individual acts upon it (Freire 2005). Therefore, in the words of Carlo Nanni, the pedagogic paradigm of the South-American educator owns a value and topicality that strongly affects also EFL classrooms:

it assumes an essential ethical and ontological value thanks to its role of «ethical charge» that requires strictness, critical sense and moral honesty. An 'ethical charge' that strengthens the commitment and effort for the search of new information, perspectives and functional methods that have the aim of developing education projects with a high human and democratic dimension, on the basis of everything that is ontological in the human reality and existence. In particular, it is a provocation that asks to go beyond today's limits, to look for new ways and unprecedented action possibilities, to give voice to those excluded or alienated from a society that has decided to proclaim itself a democracy, while it is still characterized by high levels of exclusion, social and cultural discrimination (Nanni 2002:100-01).

### Critical Engagement Through Encounter: The Basis of Interculturalism

In this unique multicultural framework, the 'space of encounter' acquires a pivotal role. A thorough analysis of its profile, with the aim of stripping it down to its bare components, becomes therefore crucial.

The first device of the 'space of encounter' is the metaphoric structure of 'the view from afar', identified by Lévi-Strauss. This device is particularly useful to get in touch, know and understand 'other' cultures. It makes it pos-

sible to overcome the absoluteness, exclusivity, and defense of one's own culture. This mental structure, typical of anthropologists, is hinged on the need that everyone must deconstruct one's own self, with the aim of overstepping the borders of one's own culture and its prejudices. This must be done in order to venture in a new dialogical identity that is ready to undertake an encounter-listening-dialogue process with the identity of the 'Other' and that will allow for a complete ideographical understanding of its uniqueness and individuality.

This point of view puts things in a highly constructive perspective, because it identifies the value of difference and otherness and it gives a new way of understanding the humanity to which we all belong. A humanity that is not only made up by identity traits that are universal or general, but also by experiences, unique characteristics, and faces; besides traditions and concrete stories.

The second device of the 'space of encounter' is 'otherness'. Otherness represents a challenge, a simultaneous unsettlement and integration process that openly defies the anthropologic hierarchies of the individual, with the twofold ambition of frightening and at the same time promoting, in the 'space of encounter' that exists in every individual, confrontation, self-criticism, and the ability to re-evaluate and create a new ranking of values. Otherness brings other values, life-styles, and types of social life into the identity and this creates a 'rupture from' and a 'bond to' difference that enhances its value and makes it an alternative to our convictions.

Therefore, the discovery and recognition of otherness as value and target in this space requires the rejection of all forms of ethnocentrism and monoculturalism, accompanied by the will of taking up the challenge and opening up to other cultural models and hierarchies of values. This process leads to a rapprochement to difference and, at the same time, it helps starting a review of one's own identity, which gets enriched and strengthened by the points of view, values, and principles of the other.

Another useful device to create and protect the 'space of encounter' is 'deconstruction', which is a critical practice based not only on tolerance, but especially on the mutual exchange that takes place between two interlocutors that, through their confrontation, dialogue, and interaction, listen to each other, recognize the main components of each other's identity and

unveil all manifestations of bias or prejudice. Successfully using this device, hence, means to open up one's own identity to difference, to accept the existence of difference and to be willing to meet it, whatever nature or look it might have.

Clearly, such a deconstructionist attitude is a challenging practice that goes very deep and even unsettles one's own convictions. It delegitimizes all logics of domination that might become rule or reference point. It asks those with the strongest identity and who belong to the dominant culture to commit themselves to a deep self-critical practice that might put their own identity into a brand new perspective (Cambi 2006, pp. 19-24).

### Identity and Difference as Building Blocks of the Encounter

Normally, identity and difference are concepts ranked in hierarchical order: the greatest importance is given to the former; while the latter is considered an annoying factor, something that should be controlled or even deleted. Nevertheless, luckily, today's societies are trying to go beyond these guidelines. Differences are seen indeed as legit and they are given the possibility to spread around, while identities have become more complex, nuanced, and locally bounded. In this way, a need for a cultural and socio-political integration arises and it leads to a dialectic balancing act that redefines and combines these two categories. This leads to the creation of a new landscape: the 'space of encounter'. This space promotes a culture of pluralism based on universally recognized common rights that generate a mutual understanding founded on the respect of difference (Cambi 2006).

The 'space of encounter' is an intercultural place (Callari Galli 1996), made up and regulated by an interculturalism that goes beyond multiculturalism and creates a *habitus* and a *habitat* of dialogue, debate, and mutual understanding. According to Franco Cambi (2006), it is a space characterized simultaneously by a high level of complexity and tension. Its complexity is due to the fact that it is a space that features plural and asymmetric cultural models regarding their identities and roles; while its high level of tension is due to the fact that the encounter with differences and dissimilarities originates a sense of disorientation and identity crisis requiring deconstructions. This 'space of encounter' is therefore a space where it is possible to find

plural identities that occupy it on a physical level and define it on a mental level. It represents therefore both a physical and inner space and, because of its nature, it is highly dynamic and always in the making.

For these reasons, the 'space of encounter' has become a pivotal and urgent task for today's society, since it teaches a vision of cultures installed in a space of encounter and dialogue, where dialogue acquires a functional and regulatory role that leads to the development (and not the disappearance) of a sense of belonging. Besides, it promotes mutual recognition and, therefore, the beginning of a new stage of redefinition.

## Conclusion

The dialogical-intercultural approach described in the previous pages might seem as a new and disrupting device, nevertheless it is also necessary and full of potential, since it is very useful in order to deconstruct and reorient the practice of education and the theory of pedagogy with the aim of fully considering the thousand facets of diversity existing in the world and that represent the main asset of mankind.

Considering the fact that our future will become more interethnic and globalized, making the world a place where identities will intertwine with difference and difference will fuel identities in a continuous dialectic interplay, it is crucial for education to become a tool to avoid getting stuck in front of barriers linked to ideas of a single way of thinking or monoculture; and instead learn how to identify and respect the dignity of the *Other*, and promote an improvement and enrichment of each and everyone's humanity through a series of continuous interactions that involve and held individuals accountable in the eyes of themselves, the others, and the entire world. Hence, the need of a pedagogical responsibility which

falls on those who are interested in the future of education and pedagogy, particularly those who believe that there is still place for a commitment to fair social justice, against all forms of political domination or cultural discrimination or economic exploitation or political subjection. Considering all these problems and issues, Freire's pedagogy can help in overcoming all forms of historical fatalism and pessimistic passivity. His pedagogy therefore could bring about a committed kind of hope, which respects the personal limits and the «dialoguing» respect for differences. It could spur the wish to leave behind the interior mutism and the

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one-size-fits-all and mass-media standardization approach, allowing students to rediscover their ability to critically interpret reality and commit to their world and common destiny (Nanni 2003: 37).

Obviously, this will be possible only if we reject the idea of ‘cultural self-sufficiency’ and we start asking ourselves the questions that Freire highlighted in his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own? How can I dialogue if I regard myself as a case apart from others—mere “its” in whom I cannot recognize other “I”s? How can I dialogue if I consider myself a member of the in-group of “pure” men, the owners of truth and knowledge, for whom all non-members are “these people” or “the great unwashed”? How can I dialogue if I start from the premise that naming the world is the task of an elite and that the presence of the people in history is a sign of deterioration, thus to be avoided? How can I dialogue if I am closed to—and even offended by—the contribution of others? How can I dialogue if I am afraid of being displaced, the mere possibility causing me torment and weakness? (Freire 2005: 90).

Probably, at least once in our lives, we have felt like we were conditioned by some particular genetic, cultural, social factors. Yet, this fact should make us understand that we might be conditioned, but not determined, and that history is a time filled with possibilities and not inexorably determined, and that the future is problematic and not already decided (Freire 2001).

For these reasons, as Freire highlights often in *Pedagogy of Freedom*, the practice of education must take strength from the belief that it is worth fighting against all hinders that might hamper the individual-student from becoming ‘more fully human’, since the ‘what-to-do of the teacher’ is a practice addressed to people who might be incomplete, curious, smart; people who might know, but who might also ignore; people who cannot live without ethics and therefore have learned contradictorily how to transgress it. As Freire states, what helps us in holding fast to this belief is the fact that history is a time filled with possibilities and not something that is inexorably determined.

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