

CIE 576 Conceptions of Teaching and Schooling
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A single spark can start a prairie fire—an ancient saying that appears in many forms and in different cultures, carrying a range of shifting implications and meanings. In the version I first heard—from China—it pointed to the power of one action to inspire other actions, which themselves catalyze a cascading chain of actions and reactions. One flint and a single stone struck together in the right direction under optimal conditions can begin a conflagration spreading throughout the countryside. Prairie fires, in this telling, are not always catastrophic; they can be, as well, naturally occurring events, necessary and renewing, removing the thick mat of thatch that suffocates life, releasing the seeds while encouraging the birds and the insects and the other animals, all the flora and fauna, opening and crawling, transforming and lurching to life.

This old saying fits so perfectly, maps so naturally onto teaching because teachers strike sparks within every student every day. There is simply no way to predict with any certainty which will come to nothing, and which spark might just start that prairie fire. We are striving into the unknown, a place where teachers might feel the awesome power they wield, might experience, as well, the unknowable potential of each student, each three-dimensional human creature before them. Teachers might pay closer attention to every aching detail and each overarching circumstance, to sense at every moment that what they do—or, just as important, what they fail to do—has a significance beyond itself, that some act or another may in fact make a mighty and magnificent difference, entirely unforeseen by them, in this life or in that one. Teachers might not change the world in dramatic fashion, but we certainly change the people who will change the world. This single spark could be that long-anticipated catalyst, that historic meeting of flint and stone that releases the flames of change.

All teaching is enacted in a specific here and now, all of it brought to life in the mud and muck of the world as we find it—this prairie or that field, this street or the other one. We don't choose the world as such; rather we are thrust into a world already there, going, going, going, up and running. We need to take the world as it is to start, unvarnished, and plunge forward as participants if we are to live fully, deeply, purposefully—if we are to see both the beauty and the pain of it, if we are to add our little weight to the balance.

It is in this sense that teaching is both an intellectual and an ethical enterprise. It requires thoughtful and caring people to carry it forward—not a head without a heart, and not some vaguely smiling flame without a brain. Teachers need to both think and feel their way into what we're doing. In fact, it's at the crossroads of the intellectual and the ethical where teachers begin to find their bearings. It's here that we crawl toward love—not love as a “throbbing heart or a soulful imploring” as Pat Carini has written, but love as a call to action, an impulse that insists that all human beings matter, even when law or custom or social practice or restriction says otherwise.

We teachers are increasingly deskilled and hammered into interchangeable cogs in a bureaucracy, pressured to reduce teaching to a set of manageable and easily superviseable tasks, and to sum it up on the basis of a single simple-minded metric, to strip it of any moral purpose or intellectual engagement or creative action whatsoever. In these circumstances, at this moment, it becomes even more important to find ways to resist, to fight back, to rescue teaching from the gathering forces of mindlessness and carelessness.

The prophetic poet Audre Lourde wrote: “When we speak we are afraid our words will not be heard nor welcomed. But when we are silent we are still afraid.” It might be best, then, to take a chance, to speak out and to act up. Since all life is a risk, stepping forward affords at least the possibility of a different perspective, the hope of something better. If what is before us is out of balance, if some part of what we see stands as an obstacle to our humanity or if it is in some sense unacceptable or offensive to the better angels of ourselves, we are called to say “no.” It is in this spirit of resistance and hope that we go in search of a humanistic pedagogy.

Lots of schools built for the industrial age look like little factories, and the metaphor of production dominates the discourse—assembly lines, management and supervision, quality control, productivity, and outputs. Students are intermittently the raw materials moving dumbly down the assembly line while value is added by the workers/teachers, or, if the metaphor shifts its angle slightly, students are the workers themselves, workers-in-training, of course.

When a school functions as a prison, and an increasing number of schools do, students become its little political prisoners—the most wide-awake of them know it. Compelled by the state to attend, handed a schedule, a uniform, and a rule-book, sent to a specific designated space of cell blocks, monitored constantly and controlled relentlessly—Pledge of Allegiance: 9:00; No talking; Bathroom break: 10:15-10:20; No eating in the classroom; Lunch: 11:45-12:05; Boys and girls form separate lines; Dismissal bell: 3:10; No running in the hallways. On and on and on, the whole catalogue of coercion under forced confinement—every young body the object of domination and control.

The “Uniform Discipline Code” of the Chicago Public Schools, a case in point, grows, it seems, several pages a year. Its putative goal is “To promote desirable student conduct and behavior,” its approach to “Codify the penalties that shall be applicable system-wide, yet retain administrative flexibility in their application”—a task that could keep a battery of Board lawyers busy for months, with a neat loophole large enough for a yellow school bus full of gang-bangers to drive through.

The book has preliminary chapters on student responsibilities and rights, parents, teachers, and principals—each group divided between rights and responsibilities. Students and teachers are instructed, for example, to “Observe basic standards of cleanliness, modesty, and good grooming,” while principals, interestingly, have no comparable responsibility according to the book. Perhaps it’s assumed that principals, but not teachers, already know how to dress. Maybe that’s how they got to be principals.

Student responsibilities go on and on: “Be honest and courteous,” “Have pride in your school,” “Improve your performance upon notice of unsatisfactory progress”—twenty-one bullet points in all. Parents have only twelve points, the first of which speaks volumes about expectations: “Present to school officials your case/cause in a calm, reasoned manner.” One can feel the gulf, the wall, the antagonism. Teachers are, of course, to “Devote school hours exclusively to official duties”—is this necessary?—and principals to “Notify the Chicago Police Department as necessary.” Really.

“Student Misconduct” is divided into six neat groupings: Group 1 is “*inappropriate* student behaviors” such as “Running and/or making excessive noise in the hall or building,” or “Being improperly dressed,” all of which result in conferences. Group 2 is *disruptive*, Group 3 *seriously disruptive*, Group 4 *very seriously disruptive*,

and Group 5 *most seriously disruptive behavior*, each with its accompanying and escalating sanctions and punishments. Group 6 consists of “Acts of misconduct [that] include illegal student behaviors that not only *most seriously disrupt* the orderly educational process... but also mandate... disciplinary action” from ten-day suspensions to expulsions.

Group 2 behaviors includes “Posting or distributing unauthorized or other written materials on school grounds,” Group 3 “Gambling” and “Forgery,” Group 4, “Extortion,” “Assault,” and “Disorderly Conduct,” Group 5, “Aggravated assault,” “Gang activity, including repeated overt displays of gang affiliation.” Group 6 acts are things like “Arson,” “Bomb threats,” “Murder,” “Kidnapping,” and “Sex violations.” Kidnapping? Murder?

Whew!

The book ends with a convenient 6-page Glossary written by an *idiot savant* with a law degree: “Indecent proposition—An unsolicited sexual proposal”; “Look-alike substance—Any substance which by appearance, representation, or manner of distribution would lead a reasonable person to believe that the substance is an illegal drug...”; “Disorderly conduct—an act done in an unreasonable manner so as to alarm or disturb others and which provokes a breach of the peace.”

Of course, the growing heft of the book speaks only to the failure of officials to really grasp the adolescent and misbehaving imagination, which is both expansive and limitless—it knows no bounds. General commandments like “be courteous” and “dress properly” are both obvious and hopelessly vague; more specific demands—“No running,” “No bullying,” “No display of gang affiliation” are also vague—thank

goodness for that cleverly retained “administrative flexibility.” But the grown-ups want to appear serious, and, as is often the case, they don’t quite get it: the more crimes you catalogue, the more ideas you generate; the more misdemeanors you name, the more creative sins heave into view.

The little prison administrators expect neither uniform compliance nor automatic submission from every inmate, hence the elaborate mechanisms for uprooting deviance, for hammering each one into a model prisoner—obedient, compliant, conforming. It begins with the near-universal assumption that schools are in the business of sorting and labeling—winners and losers, smart and stupid, good and bad. Of course school people are careful not to be so crude—the kinder and gentler employ euphemisms with a medical ring (ADD; BD; TAG) or the sounds of science (“problem with impulse control”). The fog machine is operating at full force, but let just a little air into the room and it comes to this: the good and the smart will walk the runway to the winner’s circle, the bad and the stupid will be cast down and out—losers forever. This is a foundational lesson that practically every school teaches to every/body every day: there is simply no room to recognize the unique qualities of each child nor to support the growth, development, and progress of each.

Another basic lesson is this: school learning is a commodity, traded at the market like boots and hammers. Unlike boots and hammers, whose value is inherently satisfying and grasped directly and intuitively, the value and use of school learning is elusive and indirect—hence, students are asked to accept its unspecified value on faith and to be motivated and rewarded externally. The value of school learning, we’re assured, has been calculated precisely by wise and accomplished people, and the masters know better

than anyone what's best. The pay-off is way down the line, but it's surely there, somewhere, over the rainbow. "Take this medicine," students are told over and over again, day after tedious day, "it's good for you." Refuse the bitter pill, and go stand in the corner—where all the other losers are assembled. Of course, if you were to point out that lots of drop-outs did OK for themselves—Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson and Ben Franklin for starters, Herman Melville, Mark Twain, Joseph Conrad, and Margaret Mead as well, and John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie for good measure—you'd be called an impudent trouble-maker, and put in the corner for sure.

The overt or proclaimed curriculum of schools—the disciplines and subjects, the classes and the readings—is only half the matter. The hidden curriculum—all the unstated assumptions, beliefs, and values that undergird the culture and the structure of every school—works its own mighty will. Because it's opaque, unavailable for comment or critique, it is often an even more powerful teacher than the official and planned curriculum. Here, for example, is Neil Postman on the essential teachings of the hidden curriculum:

Passive acceptance is a more desirable response to ideas than active criticism.

Discovering knowledge is beyond the power of students and is, in any case, none of their business.

Recall is the highest form of intellectual achievement, and the collection of unrelated "facts" is the goal of education.

The voice of authority is to be trusted and valued more than independent judgment.

One's own ideas and those of one's classmates are inconsequential.

Feelings are irrelevant in education.

There is always a single, unambiguous Right Answer to a question.

English is not History and History is not Science and Science is not Art and Art is not Music, and Art and Music are minor subjects and English, History and Science and major subjects, and a subject is something you "take" and, when you have taken it, you have "had" it, and if you have "had" it, you are immune and need not take it again. (The Vaccination Theory of Education?)

And here, Ivan Illich:

The traditional hidden curriculum of school demands that people of a certain age assemble in groups of about thirty under the authority of a professional teacher for from five hundred to a thousand times a year. It does not matter if the teacher is authoritarian so long as it is the teacher's authority that counts; it does not matter if all meetings occur in the same place so long as they are somehow understood as attendance. The hidden curriculum of school requires—whether by law or by fact—that a citizen accumulate a minimum quantum of school years in order to obtain his civil rights.

The hidden curriculum teaches all children that economically valuable knowledge is the result of professional teaching and that social entitlements depend on the rank achieved in a bureaucratic process. The hidden curriculum transforms the explicit curriculum into a commodity and makes its acquisition the securest form of wealth.

The translation of the need for learning into the demand for schooling and the conversion of the quality of growing up into the price tag of a professional treatment changes the meaning of “knowledge” from a term that designates intimacy, intercourse, and life experience into one that designates professionally packaged products, marketable entitlements, and abstract values. Schools have helped to foster this translation.

And finally, John Taylor Gatto, who taught in New York City public schools for 26 years, and in 1991 was selected as New York State's Teacher of the Year. At the awards ceremony—the festival where the happy-face sticker is ritualistically placed on the honoree's chest—Gatto put a pie in the face of the self-congratulatory assembly by saying, in effect, that schools murder the souls and minds of children *by design*, and that he's been fighting a guerrilla war against genocide in the classroom his whole life—a war he is losing badly.

Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling (1992), contains Gatto's victory speech along with other occasional writings. Streetwise and blunt, Gatto pulls no punches: “The lesson of report cards, grades, and tests is that children should not trust themselves or their parents but should instead rely on the evaluation of certified officials” (p. 11); “Children will follow a private drummer if you

can't get them into a uniformed marching band" (p. 12); "It is the most important lesson, that we must wait for other people, better trained than ourselves, to make the meanings of our lives" (p. 8); "first and foremost [schooling] is a jobs project and an agency for letting contracts" (p. 9).

Gatto outlines in excruciating detail the real lessons of American schooling, things like hierarchy and your place in it, indifference, emotional and intellectual dependency, provisional self-esteem, and the requirement that each of us submit passively to certified authority. The experience of schooling is that nothing of real importance is ever undertaken, nothing is ever connected to anything else, nothing is ever pursued to its deepest limits, nothing is ever finished, and nothing is ever done with investment and courage.

"Children learn what they live," Gatto argues: "Put kids in a class and they will live out their lives in an invisible cage, isolated from their chance at community; interrupt kids with bells and horns all the time and they will learn that nothing is important; force them to plead for their natural right to the toilet and they will become liars and toadies; ridicule them and they will retreat from human association; shame them and they will find a hundred ways to get even" (p. 76).

No wonder we produce a recognizably American student who is "anti-intellectual, superstitious, lacking self-confidence [or] inner freedom...[and] inadequate to the personal crises of their lives" (p. 78). Education is bold, adventurous, creative, vivid, and illuminating. In other words, education is for explorers, thinkers, and citizens. Clearly our schools have little to do with education. Training is for slaves, for loyal subjects, for

tractable employees and good soldiers. Education tears down walls; training is all barbed wire.

Another thing that's a big part of the hidden curriculum is this: official, certified learning is boring. And school is boring, too, not by accident, but by design. No one really believes any more that all kids will learn the same things in the same ways at the same time, nor that discreet bits of information poured into the heads of inert youngsters will add up to an education, but the boring system grinds on and on, hour after hour, day after boring day, week after week for nine months, the big wheel keeps on turning. The life is sucked out of us.

Everyone knows that school is boring. I know it, you know it. Because you're reading this page, you likely succeeded in school—and in order to have done so you submitted to a lot of boring stuff. The work was stupid or irrelevant, repetitive or disconnected—it was boring. And yet you or your family or your community, or all that and more, convinced you that if you ate all the crap on the plate there would be a payoff someday, and look, here you are. You submitted, you were bored, you ingested the hidden curriculum, and its part of you (and me).

The hidden curriculum is riddled with all manner of problem and challenge, but this jumped out at me, the thinking of the Vice Chancellor for Communications at Louisiana State University, an educated man from a respected institution of higher learning: "I have an advanced degree in communications, but that doesn't qualify me to comment on the New York Philharmonic." No? Why not? In his categorical scheme of things we must wait passively for some authority, someone with an advanced degree in... what?—Appreciation? Composition? Performance?—to tell us what we think of the

New York Philharmonic. Everything chopped to bits, the cult of the certified expert perched atop a single arid domain. Pity us all: this is the schooled mind in full.

My son Zayd Dohrn, a writing teacher, sent me a letter: “Several weeks ago, I visited Attica prison in upstate New York. As I walked in to the visitor’s entrance, the guards checked my ID and asked me to sign in, first in the log book at the visitor’s entrance, then again at the main prison building, and finally at the check-in desk. I walked through a metal detector and had my hand stamped with ultraviolet ink, which was then scanned as I passed through a series of gates on my way to the visiting room, where I finally sat at a small round table under the eyes of a guard on a raised platform and several dozen cameras imbedded in the ceiling.”*

Perhaps none of these requirements should come as a surprise, he noted—this is, after all, a maximum-security prison. And much of this official scrutiny, of course, has become routine in government buildings, in airports, and in offices. What should be, if no longer a surprise, at least a point of outrage and resistance is the extent to which schools, in their growing focus on and obsession with surveillance, “tracking,” in both senses of the word, “zero tolerance” rules, and “rigorous standards” of both behavior and performance, have come to resemble prisons, and are in fact undermining their putative educational mission. Their deployment of surveillance techniques and their treatment of the bodies and minds under their control destroy the possibility of learning.

Zayd wrote about discovering an article innocuously titled “40 Ways to Manage and Control Student Disruptions,” in which Ronald Stephens, the Executive Director of the National School Safety Center, recommends that schools implement a laundry list of surveillance and disciplinary techniques, ranging from (#1) “Control Campus Access” to

* This discussion of Foucault and school discipline is adapted from a paper by Zayd Dohrn called “Shooting Back.”

(#7) “Establish a state-of-the-art emergency communications center,” to (#22) “Remove posters from all windows.” Stephens throws in the whole enchilada; “electromagnetic door locking systems,” “microdot systems,” “surveillance cameras,” “Detention classrooms...for behaviorally disruptive students [equipped with] emergency buzzers or call buttons” as well as “routine locker checks,” and “allowing only clear plastic or mesh book bags, or no book bags at all.” Stephens represents an ascendant viewpoint on school safety, architecture, and administration: students in today’s schools must be observed, documented, and categorized constantly, their daily lives and activities subjected to prison-like scrutiny and regimentation. All of it, of course, in the name of “safety,” “standards,” and even, oh my, “the War on Terror.”

Despite the increasing use of disciplinary techniques in schools, however, Zayd notes that the prison analogy breaks down in one significant way: Teachers are not prison guards, and our highest aspiration is not summed up in a single word: “control”. Teachers, then, positioned as both subjects and objects of school surveillance, are uniquely situated to help students develop a critical awareness of, and perhaps even some potential lines of resistance to, the technology of power in today’s maximum-security schools.

In his book *Discipline and Punish* Michel Foucault, the French philosopher and historian, analyzes the measures taken in the Seventeenth Century to combat the plague, a new threat which was lethal, invisible, and highly contagious. This was when a new kind of disciplinary power was implemented, an approach that not only isolated a town or village in which an outbreak had occurred, but brought a group of people under intense scrutiny and segmentation, confining residents to their homes, placing sentinels at the

corners of streets and intersections, and requiring regular review and registration of the position, condition, and identity of each individual under quarantine. To Foucault, the plague and the model of the quarantine led to the discovery of a new type or “technology of power” which he called “Discipline.”

For Foucault a “mechanism of discipline” can be thought of as any “enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which uninterrupted links exist between the center and periphery.” The “architectural figure” of this disciplinary power is Jeremy Bentham’s “Panopticon”, a model prison built upon a simple concept with echoing and accelerating implications: a tower surrounded by a ring of cells. A guard stands in the central tower; he can observe each of the prisoners, but they can neither see him nor one another; prisoners never know when or how they are being observed, but recognize at all times their own visibility and vulnerability: “Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power.”

The Panopticon has become a basic model or technology of power in our society. What Foucault calls “The swarming of disciplinary mechanisms” ensures that disciplinary powers “have a certain tendency to become de-institutionalized, to emerge from the closed fortresses in which they once functioned and to circulate in a ‘free’ state.” In other words what begins as an effort to regulate and control certain marginal or dangerous segments of the population—victims of the plague, prisoners, the insane—becomes a technology used to normalize the population as a whole, adopted by all institutions with any interest whatsoever in control. “Is it surprising,” asks Foucault

rhetorically, "that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?"

Efforts to implement surveillance techniques and disciplinary power in schools have been going on for years, of course, but the process was dramatically accelerated in this country by two events: first, the shootings at Columbine High School in 1999, which provoked widespread worry over a supposed trend of school violence, and second the attacks of 9/11, which sparked a similar nationwide panic over "terrorism" and a drive, not just in schools but in every facet of American life, towards "security" of the homeland, the school, the workplace, the neighborhood and everything else. Foucault's emphasis on the origins of discipline during the plague is instructive here, as school violence, not to mention terrorism, is often figured as a metaphorical plague, something "contagious," "invisible," and "lethal." Foucault reminds us that "Behind the disciplinary mechanism can be read the haunting memory of 'contagions', of the plague...of people who appear and disappear, live and die in disorder."

In response to the widely publicized shootings at Columbine, and in the grip of a national paranoia about terrorism, schools across the country have adopted new policies and technologies to make them "safe," or perhaps simply to give the illusion of safety, the comfort of feeling safer, this despite the fact that school violence has actually been trending downward over the past decade, with junior high school and high school crime rates, including the rates of serious violent crimes, declining between 1992 and 2003. Despite this decline, the use of surveillance technologies and other disciplinary techniques has increased, including a jump in the number of schools using surveillance cameras from 39 to 48 percent in the two year period following 9/11. Schools are sinking

more and more of their budgets into “security” while cutting budgets, dramatically narrowing the curriculum, eliminating programs in sports, music, the arts, and more.

School architecture has increasingly been renovated or redesigned with an emphasis on surveillance. Mark Lam, managing partner of a large school facility design firm, suggests that “surveillance can be incorporated in two ways—actual and perceived. Crime is reduced as surveillance (or the perception) is increased.... [School facilities] should provide views for maximum surveillance from as few control points as possible.” Lam suggests that schools “avoid circular or zigzag-shaped hallways” and “remove restroom doors...to reduce horseplay and vandalism.” Some schools have taken the Panopticon model to its logical extreme, designing buildings so that one person, presumably the school principal, can stand in his or her office and have an unobstructed view of the entire facility. The message: I can see you.

Of course, new technologies allow the architectural model of the Panopticon to be extended much further, almost indefinitely—the Venetian blinds that Bentham imagined in the central tower of his Panopticon to hide the guard from the prisoners in the outside ring have been replaced by the ubiquitous black globes covering security cameras which can be wired into local police stations, projecting the unobstructed gaze of state power directly into the school hallways. Some schools have begun more Orwellian projects, including pilot programs in Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) programs, which put electronic tags on student IDs in order to trace their movements on a central computerized map. Other schools use GPS technology to shadow bus fleets, metal detectors and bomb-sniffing dogs at entryways, and fingerprint readers and biometric

hand scans to track attendance and library withdrawals. All this adds up to unprecedented scrutiny.

In such an environment teachers can easily and routinely become instruments of disciplinary surveillance, tracking students, labeling, observing, categorizing, and disciplining them. We do it—policing student work for signs of potential violence, extracting feelings and motives from creative expressions and comparing these motives against a battery of normalized prescriptions in our heads—and we read or hear stories of the more extreme examples: teachers who report students to the police or even the Secret Service for perceived violent threats gleaned from school journals or homework assignments.

On the other hand, we are often ourselves the objects of disciplinary surveillance: the cameras, background checks, urine tests, and “professional evaluation” systems that categorize, fix, and supervise us in our everyday activities. There is as well the disciplinary procedures of standardized curricula and “No Child Left Behind;” we are subject to random checks by education officials who can show up in our classrooms at any time and physically check students’ workbooks to make sure we’ve reached the required page for a specified date. Such surveillance constitutes an example of the way in which disciplinary power draws teachers as well as students into its field, and also the way that surveillance intervenes in the teacher-student relationship, and in the pedagogical process itself.

An article by Henry Fountain in the *New York Times* (April 23, 2006, p. 14) entitled “The Camera Never Blinks, but It Multiplies” is accompanied by a creepy lineup of photos of surveillance cameras and the street scenes they’re recording. “It’s spring,”

Fountain begins practically chirping, “and a new crop of police surveillance cameras is sprouting in cities big and small. New York is installing 500 on street corners; Chicago is upgrading several thousand; and even the city of Dillingham, Alaska, has 80—one for every 30 residents.” The ones in Chicago can be seen high up on the telephone polls patrolling the territory of the poor, their bright blue lights—a nod to the ACLU—blinking wildly 24/7.

He carefully points out the many modern accoutrements: “these newer cameras can pan, tilt and zoom, and are networked through the Internet, so video images can be viewed and stored centrally.” Paid for, of course with “homeland security” funds, there is a downside: “It is impossible for a police department to continuously monitor 2,000, 500 or even, in the case of Dillingham, 80 cameras. So other than producing mountains of visual data—and raising the inevitable questions of privacy—how useful are they?” Of course law enforcement argues that “just putting up a camera in plain sight can deter crime.” They imagine “a future in which software will analyze video for possible signs of terrorist activity, like someone placing a suitcase in front of a building.”

This brave new world of visibility and vulnerability provoked Zayd to give an assignment to his students designed to make Panopticism itself a focus of study, a problem to be investigated. After reading a bit from Foucault he asked his students to photograph, and then to write about, mechanisms of discipline that they can see or uncover in their own daily lives. Students chose to photograph disciplinary institutions ranging from police stations to hospitals, from schools to grocery stores, airports and buses, and in one case the student’s own family. They also took pictures of their cell phones, computers, credit cards, and ID’s.

The assignment, predictably I suppose, caused a certain amount of institutional friction. Banks, airports, and shopping malls take offense at someone photographing the security cameras, two-way mirrors, guards, and records that enable their hyper-surveillance. It is one of the great ironies of our society that observing and documenting the very apparatus that constantly observes and documents us is unacceptable and sometimes illegal. Two of Zayd's students were taken into the basement security room at a local shopping mall and interrogated by the store managers about why they were photographing the store's cameras. They explained that it was a homework assignment, and pointed out that the security cameras, after all, were photographing *them* without *their* permission. The manager responded that photographing the security cameras was threatening and potentially dangerous. "There are terrorists around," he told them. "We're watching so that we can protect you. You simply can't watch us watching you."

"You simply can't watch us watching you"—all the provocation we should need for active interrogation and engaged curriculum. Posing disciplinary power and surveillance as a problem in the classroom, a question to be interrogated, is opening to the taboo, and can be productive for teachers as well as students—it allows for active critical engagement with the mechanisms of control that are all around us.

The prisoner in Foucault's Panopticon is always "the object of information, never the subject of communication." It is our job to challenge that: our students must become subjects of communication, actors in their own dramas, writers of their own scripts, even as we ourselves resist being transformed into objects by the mechanisms of surveillance that so profoundly define the modern educational institution.

As teachers, we engage students with their own situations, and we pose problems that allow them to consider their places in the world. As Paulo Freire put it, “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. Authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without people, but people in their relations with the world.”

It makes no sense if we have freedom on our minds to go about the process of teaching while ignoring the fundamental power relations that define the world in which we all live. In schools shot through with mechanisms of disciplinary surveillance, the technology of power should itself constitute some part of the humanizing curriculum. Students can think critically about disciplinary power, about how they are being watched, by whom, and for what purpose. They can question, and they can act. By questioning and acting ourselves, we can show them how it’s done.

Readings Required:

Paulo Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

bell hooks. *Teaching to Transgress*

William Ayers. *Teaching Toward Freedom*

Other:

1. *Of Borders and Dreams*. Chris Carger
2. *Holler If You Hear Me*. Greg Michie
3. *The Dream Keepers*. Gloria Ladson-Billings
4. *Black Teachers on Teaching*. Michele Foster
5. *A White Teacher Talks About Race*. Julie Landsman
6. *Subtractive Schooling*. Angela Valenzuela
7. *Taught by America*. Sarah Sentilles
8. *Teachers Have It Easy*. Moulthrop, Calegar, Eggers
9. *The Power of Their Ideas*. Deborah Meier
10. *Because We Can Change the World*. Mara Sapon-Shevin
11. *The Living Classroom*. David Armington
12. *A Kind and Just Parent*. William Ayers
13. *She Would Not Be Moved*. Herb Kohl
14. *Stupidity and Tears*. Herb Kohl
15. *Other People's Children*. Lisa Delpit
16. *Educating Latino Students*. Luis Moll
17. *The Light in Their Eyes*. Sonia Nieto
18. *Making Choices for Multicultural Education*. Christine Sleeter and Carl Grant
19. *Starting Strong*. Pat Carini
20. *The Good Preschool Teacher*. William Ayers
21. *City Schools and The American Dream*. Pedro Noguera
22. *Urban Injustice: How Ghettos Happen*. David Hilfiker
23. *Young, Gifted, and Black*. Theresa Perry
24. *White Like Me*. Tim Wise
25. *The Skin That We Speak*. Lisa Delpit