

Pedagogy Left in Peace: Cultivating Free Spaces in Teaching and Learning

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It is important to understand that the bureaucratized teaching and learning systems ... are bent, at their core, on trumpeting ... assurances. Such systems are bent on the belief that if we only select the right standardized procedures, enacted the right institutional structures, get the right funding, forms and assessment regimes, and so on, teachers' and students' futures will be finally secured and assured and peace will reign.

These bureaucratic assurances are empty, but not because they may have, by chance or lack of diligence or information, selected the wrong structures or procedures and might just select the right ones in the future. (This is the terrible and often unspoken promise that too often comes with such assurances, that this time we've finally "got it right," thus oddly linking such assurances with a sort of market-driven sense of promise, subtle deceit, and eventual inevitable enervation.) These assurances are empty because the belief that we can, if bureaucratically diligent enough, assure a future with no risk or uncertainty, no need for further thinking or negotiation or venture, mistakes our lives and our living circumstances and those of our students, with some sort of error that can be and needs to be fixed, a "problem to be solved and subsumed under a condition of mastery or explanation" (Smith 1999b, p. 139).

The often harrowing, deeply dependent and interdependent work of confronting the mortality of the world that must be set right anew in concert and solidarity with the young, is not an error that needs fixing. Its contingencies and dependencies—viewed, to use Illich's image again, as simply "marginal" from "the center"—are not avoidable, revocable, or expugnable. The ongoing need to set things right anew and the intergenerational task of opening, protecting, and cultivating the free spaces in which this just might happen is, as John Caputo (1987) coined it, a sign of the irremediable "original difficulty" of being alive that should not be betrayed by false promises.

"Living with children means living in the belly of a paradox wherein a genuine life together is made possible only in the context of an ongoing conversation which never ends, yet which must be sustained for life together to go on at all. Homes, classrooms, schools wherein the people in charge cannot lay themselves open to the new life in their midst, always exist in a state of war. (Smith 1999b p. 139)"

Wanting to eradicate this paradox as is the wont of bureaucratic teaching and learning systems, is akin to wanting to eradicate what Hannah Arendt (1969, p. 196) identified as the correlate of the mortality of the world: "the fact of natality: the fact that we have all come into the world by being born and that this world is constantly renewed through birth." Thus David G. Smith's (1999b p. 140) still inexhaustible insight of the "monstrous states of siege" that then arise between the young and the old, the new and the established, natality and mortality.

Cutting ourselves off from the wild troubles of living a life in the midst of the living interdependencies of the world does not provide for a pedagogy left in peace. It

undermines it, imagining that peace will come when the future is fixed once and for all and the achievement of that fixed future is itself set out in developmental stages.

Pedagogy Left in Peace, therefore, sets out an image of education, not as the pacified outcome of a bureaucratic system, but as a perennial, personal, and intimate task, ... the gathering and regathering in a whiling experience of time and the perennial raising anew of the question of what is worth our while in this limited life, what possibilities might help us go on together.

— From the *Introduction: "Left in Peace"*