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## For the oppressed teacher: stay real!

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### ABSTRACT

This article addresses teachers' challenges in relation to other stakeholders, in light of funding policies and evaluation mechanisms. In particular, a condition where pressures toward high pass rates or 'throughput' in the degree system provide a good negotiation position for students with little learning orientation as to their aspirations after credit units is considered. This condition is intensified by the fact that the mere completion goals of non-learning-oriented students align with the collective goals of administration (university), given the throughput-based funding policies. A teacher willing to honorably exercise the profession is, then, 'squeezed in between.' Daily teaching endures by the incorporation of the wrong kind of flexibility, which undermines the education system. This problematic pattern is reviewed, and a remedy proposed by drawing on Freire and considering a recent theorization by Sutton on the position of an academic under a neoliberalist condition.

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## 1. Introduction

The education system or 'degree system' has its quietly overlooked tensions. I speak for teachers with an emphasis on higher education context. 'Teacher' is used to denote an educator whose primary agenda is to advance students', and in this process her or his own, intellect. An alternative role for an educator in the degree system is that of a 'degree system representative.' This term denotes an educator who primarily serves 'degree system expectations' instead of insisting on advances in higher education stakeholders' thoughts. Furthermore, 'degree system expectations' is used to signify the quantitative evaluation of education progress in terms of the number of credits and degrees granted, a conduct which hardly gives attention to whether competences are increased amongst learners and that is destined to be cursory.

The quietly overlooked tension that I will address is entirely trivial for a reflective educator. This tension nevertheless constantly emerges when teachers discuss their anxieties, and it is a highly complicated issue to resolve. To be precise, the perception of one stakeholder's primary educational goals in higher education may not align with other stakeholders' goal perceptions. My worry is that the teacher is being 'squeezed between' two

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stakeholders: students and administration. Students with non-learning orientation are in a good position to burden teachers with requests for course completions and credits, regardless of the level of performance they demonstrate. The phrase, 'non-learning-oriented,' is used to refer to conditions where the learner is not primarily directed by the will for improved competences but rather some other motive(s), such as receiving credit units.<sup>1</sup> The good position for the non-learning oriented holds because the mere completion goals align with the goals of the administration (whether a faculty or university) who is unavoidably willing to witness steady and improved credit accumulation under pervasive, 'throughput'-based, funding regulations. The teacher squeezed in between constantly encounters the dilemma between insisting on a teacher role or descending into a degree system representative; herein is potentially a corrupt pattern undermining education.

I am voicing that teachers are tempted to be not much more than degree system representatives and related to this concern will give specific attention to the interplay between teacher and students. The text reads similar to an essay and advances a particular analysis on a teacher position by utilizing multiple sources and without an intention to be exclusive. It started from considering Freire's accounts in connection with personal observations and challenging experiences within academia. These personal 'memories' were committed to paper and contextualized and conceptualized by referring to Freire and other relevant literature. Authenticity was the guiding principle in preparing the text; authentic occasions and research experiences also underlie the text when conceptualizing, contextualizing, and arguing about education system. To illustrate, authenticity with personal involvement underlie the general narrative when referring to teacher rationale and unions in Section 5.3. Authenticity in this sense was not needed when describing related work or the education system, and some arguments simply arose from the educational position adopted.

On reflection, this essay resembles auto-ethnography because it springs from inward-looking epiphanies on lived experiences (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2010), and draws on memory, which has been argued to constitute plausible data (Wall 2008, 45–46). It also resembles self-ethnography: a self-ethnographer is an authentic participant of the research scene, that is, an 'observing participant' instead of the usual 'participant observer' in an ethnographic study (Alvesson 2003). I also adhered to 'relational ethics,' which means that the identities of important others were protected (see Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2010). To achieve this, I alternated between active and passive voice, and frequently merged personal narrative with the literature.

This text is not restricted to one university or the Finnish (my home ground) higher education. The incentive to prepare this analysis arose from unobtrusive observations and informal discussions of teachers' experiences during close and far encounters.

## 2. Oppression, Freirean hope, fear

Freire et al. (2005)<sup>2</sup> denounced a 'banking method' of education as a measure by which an oppressor is able to uphold oppressive conditions. For Freire, banking, where information is deposited in learners, signaled a closure bearing affinity to the concept of necrophilia. He instead made a point of openness or 'humanization,' a process of becoming more fully a human. The key vehicle of change was the identification of oppressive conditions and action, 'conscientization.' Taking action upon increased awareness signified a

departure from mere activism. Freire's departure from the closure, or absolutism in epistemological terms, did neither indicate relativism because he noted that education cannot transform into mere chatting. The critique of Freire's thought has seized upon potentially harmful western interventions in non-western settings, and suffering arising from increased consciousness under a sustained lack of power to act (see Roberts 1996).

This text is anchored to Freire's canon that, of the oppressor and oppressed, only the oppressed may discharge oppression: only the strength springing from the oppressed is able to release both the oppressed and the oppressor. My locution, 'teacher squeezed in between,' nevertheless refers to an oppressor without a clear identity. The oppressor herein is a structural entity, an 'intangible stakeholder' resulting from funding regulations and the maxim of education as a service, which is actualized and shows itself to a teacher in the interplay between stakeholders.

The intricacy of the oppression existing in the form of an intangible stakeholder can be further understood through a notion that under the condition of gaining more, the conducts of an apparent oppressor (e.g. administration) may be projections, signifying that the apparent oppressor is also oppressed, whether in a conscious or an unconscious way (Myers et al. 1991). In effect, Myers et al. argue that anyone socialized into need to be 'better than' (56) and into the condition of external orientation are adherents to a sub-optimal conceptual system; they are oppressed and have difficulties to realize a positive self-identity. A solid sense of self, Myers et al. theorize, results from intrinsic experiences of worth and value. These notions illustrate how difficult the oppression experienced by a teacher is to tackle. They also help stress that my position in this article does not suggest a lack of awareness regarding the imposed nature of the behaviors of other stakeholders.

Freire has received attention in texts addressing the bureaucracy that circumscribes sincere aims for teaching and learning. In his self-reflexive exposition, Sutton (2015) recognizes 'fatalistic disenchantment' in encountering instrumentalist conduct in neoliberalist higher education. While seizing upon Freirean hope, Sutton's message can be viewed as devastating because he so germanely and elegantly theorizes suffering through fate, concluding that one needs to 'settle for' (45) the current circumstance. His hope springs from the possibilities of critical pedagogy in the 'interstices' of the education system, the concrete proposals addressing assessment in ways that involve students.

Similar co-existence of critical pedagogy and neoliberalism is concluded by Ingleby (2015), who reports conflicting patterns while, upon his discoveries, refrains from general conclusions. He discovered 'right skills' leading to 'employability' as the students' perception of higher education; in contrast to the tutors in his sample, the students' perceptions thus reinforced neoliberalist policy. Furthermore, in my interpretation, the need to 'settle for' while seeking relief from the 'interstices' is shown in a qualitative study by Ylijoki and Ursin (2013): they report on a 'bystander' (1146) narrative by Finnish academics, which indicates a tendency to parry bureaucracy by attempting to let it occur outside daily praxis.

Under constraining bureaucracy, hope is grounded to the possibility of transformative projects arising from resistance identities (see Castells 2009; Ylijoki and Ursin 2013; Sutton 2015). Reflecting on my own experience, I add that teachers nevertheless fear to speak outwards and to act. We are condemned to produce not much more than 'intellectual suffering.' Fear characterizes the profession of a teacher under a neoliberalist condition. Personally, this fear arises from imagining a negative repute for and consequences from delaying the

production of quantitative outcomes while adhering to a teacher identity. The feeling is amplified through the lived experiences of administrative meetings where reviews of pass rates and anonymous student feedback are considered personally regardless of whom they might concern; Lyotard's (1984, xxiv) address to the post-modernism referred to 'terror' injected in the education system in terms of pressure to 'be operational or disappear.'

The recent studies reviewed rest on academic identity conflict; however, I came to the same concern through a 'role conflict' in teaching. Castells (2009) deems identities a stronger apparatus than roles 'because of the process of self-construction and individuation that they involve' (7) and alludes to a primary identity that endures over time and space. I accordingly feel that I am in touch with my own teacher identity but pressurized to dress up to fit the role of a degree system representative. A prevailing aspect of role theory is conformity to norms and behaving according to expectations stated by the norms with a role conflict, then, denoting 'two or more incompatible expectations' (Biddle 1986, 82). In my experience, teaching itself carries the inherent norm of assisting in learning, which conforms to teacher identity, while the managerialist system forces 'performativity' (Sutton 2015) – a wrong uniform.

'Performativity' above denotes a 'systems-orientation' (Yeatman 1994, 110), that is, 'governance which establishes strictly functional relations between a state and its inside and outside environments' (111), which concerns an education system as well (e.g. Ball 1998). Relatedly, Giroux (2001) conveyed worries on corporate-fashioned functions in vocationalized universities who have lost their critical, societal voice. In another context, performativity means that entities are performative, that they are continuously performed (MacKenzie 2004). In this connection, Butler (2010) rather emphasizes that performativity yields effects that link with our perceptions of the entity in question (e.g. gender). She clarifies that performativity resists positivism – entities taken as fixed – and that this signifies a critical view to the underpinnings of the entities. Taken together, this suggests that when critically referring to the systems orientation, a reminder of the inevitability of performing, which also concerns teaching, and the lack of materialization of the learning versus non-learning-oriented as a simple condition must be recognized.

A link between role conflict and stress has been proposed (see review by Biddle 1986, 82), and the role conflict leading to teacher burnout has been highlighted (Maslach and Jackson 1981). In studies by Maslach and many others, the consequences of burnout are made up of emotional exhaustion, cynical attitude toward clients, and lowered appreciation of one's own accomplishments, which dramatically add to the Sutton-posed 'fatalistic disenchantment.' Schwab and Iwanicki (1982) explain that teachers may experience these outcomes in varying degrees, which, in my thinking, matches the view of the present-day higher education teachers struggling in 'interstices.'

The old literature on role conflicts altogether shows affinity to texts on academic identity conflicts; Biddle (1986, 80) explained that deviations from norms can occur 'secretly,' and that they may continue to occur although discovered. This appears similar to the narrative of 'bystanding' (Ylijoki and Ursin 2013) and the 'co-existence' of bureaucratic condition and sincere teaching and learning (Ingleby 2015; Sutton 2015). These references differ in their approach while complying with the dualistic sense in the life of an academic – a kind of a natural triangulation: Sutton theorizes from subjective experiences; Ylijoki and Ursin present an inductive analysis of the interviews on academics and Ingleby on tutors and students; and Biddle advances a conceptual literature review. The last examines

role theory generally but the included ideas of role conflicts and norm deviations provide a reference point that is substantiated by the other literature in this paragraph.

Taking issue with an oppressing system is impossible without commitments to change through action (Freire et al. 2005, 96), while hopelessness denotes a means for escaping (Freire et al. 2005, 100). In view of these Freirean maxims, I conclude that we are challenged to reach beyond verbalism in facing inherent difficulties. I attempt to contribute to the shared narrative by insisting on a teacher role and looking at ways to capitalize on this increased awareness – leaving behind fear. My proposals will focus on the ordinary interplay between teacher and student(s) during academic courses, where the tension that I am addressing can emerge and which the examples in Section 5.1 illustrate.

### 3. Education system is preventing itself

Next, I advance the claim that the ‘education system is preventing itself.’ An educational action researcher is, then, likely to discover that all roads lead to the education system itself.

When transforming an advanced programming course into a flexible delivery that enabled both online and contact participation and studying the difficult topic in different course sizes and pace, we finally ‘encountered the system.’ After several action-taking and reflection iterations, course didactics improved, but considerably many students noted that they could not self-regulate under increased flexibility. Students descended into a conflict where they enjoyed and appreciated flexibility but were not able to act upon it. A portion of those noting the challenge stated that they should practice freedom, while another portion called for a more teacher-directed course resembling their previous studies. The study is described elsewhere (Isomöttönen and Tirronen 2017).

This pattern shows the education system itself representing the root problem during improvement efforts on single courses, a problem that cannot be fully tackled by taking actions on those courses. Educational action researchers attempt to desperately introduce compensating activities, which they hope will mitigate the effects of the education system that is ‘backfiring.’ Personally, ‘fatalistic disenchantment’ (Sutton 2015) arises from observing the same difficulty in different coatings during compensating activities, and from the resultant question of what can be achieved by action research – the end point is known from the start.

I continue to illustrate these difficulties with insights into study difficulties. A severe difficulty for Finnish higher education students arises from their schooling background.<sup>3</sup> Students comment that they passed with little effort, that they never needed to struggle to learn, and that their academic studies are now impeded by the lack of such critical capacities:

My [university] studies have progressed a bit slowly for many reasons. The biggest obstacle is nevertheless the fact that I am sluggish to do anything study-related in an unprompted manner or to plan my studies. [...] I have noticed that in the university you should be active as to your studying. In particular time management is in a bad way, as I have never done such a thing. In the high school, I went to just sit in the classes and left the reading stuff for others. My success was quite decent then, although my compensation started to show up in the matriculation exam. (Translated from Finnish) [Transcription no. 54841/4; 2016-Jan-14th; 67 min]

Such student accounts correspond with another study where a university course was offered to Finnish high school students. Workload was one difficulty expressed by high school students, and the reason for dropping out of a university course (Lakanen and Iso-möttönen 2013):

I think it was because it was so laborious [why I dropped out]. I am not used to working so hard on something, you know, school things. [See interview details in the cited study]

I am highlighting the conflict between the aspired and actual consequences of schooling. Reported aspirations for the mandatory school in Finland emphasize thinking skills, ways of working and interaction, crafts and expressive skills, participation and initiative, and self-awareness and personal responsibility.<sup>4</sup> Responsible and participating self-directed individuals with good interaction capacities are the goal, while, as I underline here, being in the school system undermines this goal by cumulatively institutionalizing individuals and their orientations.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, as a form of prescribed regulation, schools are upholding lives for us, and when this structure is removed, problems emerge. Research literature on ‘transition to university life’ and ‘preparedness for higher education’ is evidence of this condition. Speaking both personally and as an observer, it may take several years of higher education for an individual to reach a level of self-regulation that constantly yields outcomes – personal experience has showed evidence of student populations who acknowledge their higher education potential while articulating that they (students) need to be awakened and ‘saved’ in this respect. My thinking here is that this issue is known by scholars who study topics such as the transition to university, and through little prompting by learners who are already troubled, but it does not receive sufficient reaction in reform discussions – perhaps because the critical conceptualization that the *education system is preventing itself* is missing. Here, the intent is not to criticize schools, but rather to pronounce the inherent difficulty.

For the present purposes, the assertion is that higher education entered with institutionalized orientations, which are further reinforced by massed higher education courses, initiates a challenging scene for the interplay between higher education students and teachers. This challenge is intensified by study allowance regulations requiring a fixed standard of progress for all students and by the condition of education as a service.

#### 4. Where our polices lead to

Rinne, Kivirauma, and Simola (2002) raised a change in the perceived role of education in Finnish schooling: before the 1990s ‘the main duty of education was to produce citizens to develop society’ while during the 1990s education was considered ‘existing in order to serve the citizen.’ Along with this change, students and guardians became ‘active and rational players and choice makers.’ Rinne, Kivirauma, and Simola (2002) explained that politically, this march was underpinned by ‘free the lead’ or ‘invest in the best’ thinking adopted as a measure to respond to international competition.

What I am concerned with – when education is primarily seen as a service, with the schools accountable to their clients who are the choice makers – is the teachers’ omission from thinking regarding education. With education as a service, clients can use it and complain with little or no accountability, which, as reported in the media, is evidenced in the high number of Finnish school teachers who experience bullying. It should also



be mentioned that along with neoliberalist decentralization in Finland, the earlier role of a principal as the teachers' confidant was turned into an executive role (Rinne, Kivirauma, and Simola 2002).

Finnish universities apply 'management by results' (Kuoppala 2005). In performance negotiations between the Ministry of Education and Culture and each university, the results of the university are inspected and targets are set for the next four-year period. The negotiations determine the funding and standing of the university, for instance, by setting seat quotas for particular disciplines.

The funding model by which the Finnish universities receive basic governmental funding is declared by the Council of State as a specific statute (331/2016). The number of higher degrees and students who receive a minimum of 55 yearly credits play a key role in funding, 13% and 10% respectively. The number of employed graduates affects it by 2% and anonymous student feedback by 3%. That is, a set of Likert questions is annually administered to bachelor-level students. In light of the funding indicators, the questions phrased such as 'I am satisfied with my personal studying' and 'Sufficient guidance has been available..?' indicate the quality of service instead of the quality of education. In this aspiration, the conception of quality is heavily linked with fluency so as to steer learners as quickly as possible through the system.

Universities tend to imitate the national funding model. At my university, the national feedback is accompanied with local feedback collected from each course. Such anonymous and voluntary feedback can scare teachers regarding the future of their careers because this local feedback is delivered to local administration; course titles are included and the feedback reflects student satisfaction levels, which might also surface in national surveys tied to funding. It is less clear if anonymous criticism received from students whose expectations of service were not fulfilled by a poor teacher aspiring after true learning is thoroughly analyzed. Regardless if a teacher responds, conclusions by administration are subject to interpretation.

The steering described dictates that a quality education system is a 'well-oiled machine' and continues to estrange higher education from a fruitful sphere that is primarily concerned with the epistemic development of its stakeholders and the surrounding society. It is important to question and acknowledge the type of education and interplay that emerges from a pedagogue-student relationship defined as a service provider-client relation. A related critical departure is to ask what learning theory proclaims education as a service. In light of these questions, education as a service constitutes one more argument for the degree system preventing itself.

Giroux (2001) opposed the corporate model of university where teachers become mere subjects of corporate-fashioned functions. His thinking that 'markets don't reward moral behavior' (32) reflects the problem of the corporate efficiency model. To summarize the present section, this claim can be restated to convey that it becomes difficult to act morally with the pressures imposed by corporate-fashioned funding models. Moral actions can be in the opposite direction to the degree system's expectations.

## 5. Return to the problem

Students and administration see benefits in the same conduct: the number of credit units granted. Non-learning-oriented students are in a good position to request that their

performances are qualified, regardless of the level of work. Teachers willing to advance student thinking are left alone and squeezed in between these other two (close) stakeholders. Quantitative performance indicators accompanied with quality-of-service feedback mechanisms create the pressurizing intangible stakeholder present in the teaching profession. The teacher experiencing throughput pressures does not necessarily encounter any concrete critique targeted at his or her classroom, but senses the intangible stakeholder.

### **5.1. Illustration**

An illustration is a student requesting extra exercises by which to complete an unfinished course. The student has failed through normative course procedures and is requesting an alternative conduct. The teacher under throughput pressures prepares extra exercises for the learner who begins to submit cursory attempts. After the teacher's unavoidable critique, the student keeps requesting more opportunities, which grows into on-going interplay and work. After the teacher calls off the work, indicating a need to re-register for the course next term, the student contacts the teacher's colleague and resumes. The student ignores the primary course teacher, who has already sacrificed a huge amount of resources and mental energy by providing this service. Moreover, the teacher, working in education as a service, took a risk of receiving anonymous criticism targeted at the administration, affecting his or her professional appearance.

Another example is when a student is aware of mandatory course attendance rules and does not appear to reach the minimum requirement. Then, as the course ends, the student contacts the teacher, requesting personal exercises to compensate for the absence, making a point of the forth-coming graduation. The teacher expends precious resources preparing new assignments, which may be superficial, and offers an option not known by the rest of the course population. In the same example, the other students not performing at the required minimum show up during the late course sessions, knowing their inadequate effort but not raising it. The responsibility is left on the teacher, whose authority is continuously tested.

Before proceeding, it should be emphasized that the concern is not the students themselves, but rather the structural tension that has been established in the degree system for teacher-student interactions.

### **5.2. A link to corruption?**

Hallak and Poisson (2007) defined corruption as 'the systematic use of public office for private benefit.' Chapman and Lindner (2016) used a similar definition from Transparency International (2013), 'the abuse of entrusted power for private gain.' Based on the patterns of corruption in these texts, the present problem, I argue, relates to corruption. Chapman and Lindner (2016) and Hallak and Poisson (2007) raised the link between true effort and reward: when corrupted conducts break this link, a risk of creating a whole culture of corruption increases. The present problem alludes to this concern: if pressurized teachers capitulate to learner demands and to the wrong kind of flexibility, learner cohorts will come to know about individually tailored arrangements for course completions, and a norm of distrust in higher education is absorbed – credits are academic

currency. The illustrations in Section 5.1 demonstrate situations that are personally sensitive to loosening the link between effort and reward. I have in particular found surprising in-class requests from the non-learning-oriented to introduce this risk, which explains my focus on teacher-preparedness through dialog in Section 6.

Another concern is the mis-allocation of talents (Hallak and Poisson 2007; Chapman and Lindner 2016). In the current text, this signifies that when teaching resources and energy are allocated to management of non-learning orientations, raising underperformances, and the frustrating negotiations that befall, students with a genuine interest in learning are overlooked. A non-learning orientation is taking over higher education, reducing the meaningfulness of classroom time for potential learners, ultimately resulting in the mis-allocation of potential. I have often felt it to be less stressful to begin regulating for the non-learning oriented during courses compared to receiving taxing requests retrospectively – a condition illustrating the mis-allocation.

Chapman and Lindner (2016) advanced that insufficient payments from academic work compared to workload may cause academics to accept supplemental work, and funding pressures can cause academics to take shortcuts. The potential shortcut with the present problem is overlooking under-performances under the degree-system expectations. It is here not related to personal monetary gains, but the multitude of liabilities imposed on a teacher may create a threshold of tolerance that is managed by overlooking. The intention here is not to assign blame to myself or important others. The link with the corruption literature is a conceptualization that arose when facing challenging situations; it communicates the severity of the present agenda and motivated consideration of a remedy. I altogether seem to have arrived at the realization that the education system is not only preventing itself, but also, its regulations are urging corruption.

### **5.3. Painful disavowal**

Oppressed tend to rationalize their problems away (Freire et al. 2005). First, teachers shutting their eyes to ‘passenger’ learners reason that under-performers will wake up to the hard reality during life after school. Second, they reason that insufficiently participating individuals are the ones who lose. Together with such rationale, educators may leave the present problem unaddressed because touching would pull them into the zone where resources are expended on unpleasant interactions and risky conducts. Accordingly, Freire described a strategy where the oppressed bypass their difficulties by waiting for them to vanish.

As noted by Freire, preaching about repair is pointless if actions do not ensue. I frame the following correspondence: if educators announce sound course descriptions that eventually do not hold, they will experience inner conflicts by not committing to their own aims and words.

The argument is that this described rationale translates into pushing the problem away and into ‘painful disavowal.’ A further consideration is that escaping the problem is easier together than alone. A shared escape is a tempting alternative because a questionably rationalized escape can be voiced outwards through impersonalization; no single identity becomes the epitome of the escape; disavowal becomes less painful. This note is important because, personally speaking, the intangible stakeholder can be a more tolerable partner when teaching occurs together with another teacher. Two teachers can share the perceived

risk in testifying their ethically sound and uncorrupted enterprises. From the Freirean standpoint, teacher unions are required: revolutionary projects need to organize and require leaders who can constantly testify the position sought for (Freire et al. 2005, 195–196); Giroux (2001) relatedly proclaimed that teachers as well as students must organize for counteracting corporate functions. It is important to note that even the teachers' opportunities to embark on shared teaching are likely to vary for reasons such as financial restrictions imposed by management or individual teachers' unwillingness to compromise academic freedom; a separate empirical study should investigate the opportunities for and perceptions of shared teaching from the perspective of oppression.

## 6. Remedy

The education system tends to enervate teachers if they do not develop and possess authority. The following sections focus on a particular kind of dialog between teacher and students, offering a reflection on my personal development in this regard.

### 6.1. Disclosing the system

The first item is a teacher disclosing the system to students. A teacher can openly describe stakeholder duties and the effect of these activities on funding. Learners should be prompted to see that a higher education organization is a shared enterprise of its stakeholders and that the resources expended on the treatment of non-learning orientations undermine the important functions of that organization. Students must be prompted to notice that those functions (e.g. research and outreach) play a crucial role in the standing and survival of the organization. The position here is that many students, as the appendage of their schooling and under the condition of education as a service, narrowly perceive higher education, and do not consider the worries that non-learning orientation and the related misconducts implicate on a larger scale.

The system objectively illustrated to learners provides a teacher with a plausible argument for not regulating learning for learners. It helps a teacher tell a student, for instance, that *discussions whether to complete exercises on time must essentially occur between you and yourself, not between me and you. I cannot know how you plan to progress your studies*. A shared discussion in the classroom should address consequences for higher education if resources are continuously expended on the treatment of non-learning orientations, for instance, on debating over unfinished assignments. Higher education students must be seen and treated as adults who are able to absorb important system-level information. Disclosing the system and initiating student expectations upon the realities of higher education counteracts the expectation of education as a service in a pedagogic relationship.

### 6.2. Employing ear-catching locutions

Although national funding policies complicate higher education, other policies provide strong dialog tools for the teacher. The principles of 'protection of trust' and 'equity' in the Finnish governance provide a strong foundation for dialog. The teacher who is able to clarify these principles and the necessity to adhere to the announced course guidelines

is one who can be at ease. The stance of teachers is being clarified in a way that is difficult to object to without losing rationality. In my experience, no student will state that you should not adhere to equity but treat me according to my special requests. Furthermore, a teacher can contrast his or her position with ‘corruption’ and use voicings such as *we should respect the principles of protection of trust and equity, which are counterparts with corruption; other course students must be able to trust that all are treated equally; you respect your peers as you comply with the course requirements; your willingness to rework the insufficiencies in your performance indicates your willingness to counteract corruption. You are speaking for the dignity of your institution and higher education.* I have also noted to students that *I become a liar if the announced course guidelines do not mean a thing. Why bother defining them?* By bravely employing these locutions, the teacher makes dialog serious, and it will be noticed by students.

### **6.3. Forcing realistic relationship to higher education**

The two guidelines reviewed indicate a third one, which is forcing a realistic relationship onto higher education. This can also be illustrated through an example. A common justification from the non-learning oriented for not contributing is that of ‘other hurries,’ often given when a student works as part of a group undertaking. Without any irony or blame, students here should be prompted to discover that an academic course cannot bear a title *I do not have time, 5 credits*. Prompted in this manner, students have made a self-initiated decision to change their habits or to drop the course instead of continuing to ‘free ride’ it. Forcing dialog from unrealistic to realistic indicates teachers’ presence and actions in which being in higher education is taken seriously. This practice necessitates sensitivity of a teacher to meet students holistically and to undertake a counseling voice and actions as needed. It ‘publishes’ problematic expectations, which in turn grants immediate opportunities to consider, for instance, how a personal study plan could be revised according to the student’s life situation.

In Freirean terms, deceitful ‘words’ pretending about teaching and learning should not be adopted, as it results in absurdity. Freire also noted that one cannot employ truthful words on behalf of others; a teacher can decide to be realistic, with students making their personal decisions upon such revelation. This is motivated by Freire’s thought that affections for life (here, realistic conduct) are to engender pursuits for freedom (here, learning behaviors that are not principally occupied by the system). From the position of this text, the teacher insisting on realistic conduct is acting morally while those actions may be in direct opposition to the degree system’s expectations.

### **6.4. Spinning off the center**

Action research literature indicates that a project should ‘spin off the center’ (Melrose 2001). For the benefit of students, to lessen the pressures imposed on individual teachers and resource-wise, the actions proposed could be mirrored to first-term induction courses. The literature on student transition to university, often addressing self-regulation challenges, emphasizes that induction should reach beyond a one-off intervention and be a process (Laing, Robinson, and Johnston 2005; Leese 2010). If university studies are

collectively initiated for a realistic relationship to higher education and individual teachers address that item later, a prolonged process is being established.

During induction courses, students can be asked to be intellectual about critical themes. Regarding group work, students might consider whether it is possible to value outside-course time differently within a group. They can continue by pondering the assertion 'free riding in a group is plagiarism.' Finally, students can be requested to consider plagiarism as a form of corruption. Asking students themselves to consider assertions relating to non-learning orientations avoids the impression of teachers as steerers. These kinds of activities were personally piloted at two universities, leading to the observation that introduction of critical themes engendered valuable discussions.

### **6.5. Summarizing**

The teacher's articulation must occur without blame or demonstration of power, and reflect holistic interest in the learner's study situation, which signifies a readiness of a counseling perspective – none of the proposals indicate insensitivity to meeting students holistically. The tone of voice must associate with being intellectual and caring about being in higher education, which can be facilitated through objectifications. Employing principles such as protection of trust and equity provides a useful objective ground that enables a departure from a myopic steerer appearance.

Chapman and Lindner (2016) warned of the accumulation of rules when corruption is counteracted. The proposals above should not translate into a teacher fighting non-learning orientations through the tumult of course rules. Once the course guidelines are known and the student perspective widened to include the system level, reinforcing the realistic relationship to being in higher education should result in shared respect and well-being in the classroom – andragogy and pedagogy are the same.

It is obvious that not all the students will take seriously the dialog proposed, the success of which arguably depends upon the students' prior experiences of education, their political intentions, and how the education system and educators therein appear to them overall. I am documenting ideas and actions that have personally helped adhere to a teacher role, while increasing a chance for student responses that are informed of such a posture towards the education system.

The actions reviewed appear extra-curricular, but when the alternative is a painful disavowal, working the dialog may appear helpful. Acknowledging the psychological concept 'desensitization' has been personally useful; I learn to recognize my frustrations and, instead of stagnating, build strategies for improved tolerance, which allows for informed, yet sensitive reactions.

## **7. Concluding with despair and hope**

I am occasionally ruminating on and overhearing longing for mechanistic administration of lectures and summative exams in place of challenging student thinking otherwise. In Freire's terms, I title such considerations 'return to banking.' Teachers believing in hard work for learning and individuals' willingness to improve on their competences are on the brink of cynicism after a prolonged exposure to issues explored in this writing, and their willingness to a strict order in terms of uncorrupted practice makes them consider

the mechanistic approach. This is of course paradoxical, given that contemporary andragogy suggests departure from banking and has emphasized meaningfulness for decades (Lindeman 1926). The education system is occasionally preventing itself to the extent that teachers encounter the inner contradiction of whether to risk their pedagogic position by adopting banking or whether to seek relief in banking.

Hope instead is witnessed in students' thoughts after exposure to 'anti-banking' learning environments. To illustrate, a student who had finished course, which attempts to foster creativity, stated that

The only thing addressed during the course, in which I did not really develop myself, was ideating. Our group had severe difficulties with ideating, which can be seen in the outcome. We could not come up with a good idea and topic of everyone's interest. Many courses do not at all require student ideation, which is a bit negative thing. One has learned to work on predefined topics or problems, which is likely to cause passivity and makes ideating painful. One does not learn to ideate just like that, while, encouraged by this course, I started to think over this matter more closely and will work on the matter somehow in the future. (Translated from Finnish) [Learning-reports data, participant-ID33]

I have observed transformations from meaningless to meaningful. Although often slow, as reflected in the quotation above, such transformations must be fostered for the benefit of students and to counteract meaningless higher education and questionable behaviors therein.

As regarding schooling background, efforts toward active engagement emerge in the school and higher education classrooms while the difficulty lies in the possibility of a holistic change – the (Finnish) school system has been characterized as stubborn (Rinne, Kivirauma, and Simola 2002). An interesting holistic reformulation of the Finnish school was implemented in the 1980s. This school called 'pedagogy of joy' insisted on the pupils' own responsibility and the school as a workplace where learning is the reward (Juurikkala 2008). A great deal of resources were expended on learning to respect peers and taking responsibility, with the remark that the number of critical disciplinary skills during early preliminary grades is actually small and efforts can be directed to such crucial skills. From the higher education perspective, I consider such thinking a match with the present text. The recent Finnish school curriculum emphasizes phenomenon-based pedagogy and student responsibility, which I hope will materialize as a counteraction to institutionalism.

In theoretical terms, as long as the goals of stakeholders diverge on one-and-the-same affair (here, education), oppressive tensions emerge and exist as constant social structures. Hope then resides in the higher education stakeholders', including legislature, commitment to a 'single-track' principle in which conscious strategies are developed and efforts demonstrated to marry the stakeholders' conceptions of degree system goals and quality.

## 8. Final notes

The problem described is trivially known by teachers performing under similar circumstances. Continuous resolving is crucial not least because producing hollow degrees is a disservice linked with corruption, which is frighteningly known to be linked with poverty (see Hallak and Poisson 2007). Chapman and Lindner (2016, 264) state the



challenge of administration not being aware of what is happening inside university premises. Echoing this thinking, formal education may comprise and engender tensions, of which legislature and administration do not know about. The important question is whether the actions of such bodies are informed enough. That is, when taking somewhat weighty actions, those actions should, as Freire emphasizes, draw on sufficient reflection and awareness to reach beyond mere activism. The remedy I proposed generally indicates a Freire-anchored guideline: teacher, stay real! Finally, I encourage auto- and self-ethnographic texts from inside academia to foreground the critical patterns that should inform action on a larger scale. Such accounts should be prepared by all stakeholders.

## Notes

1. The term ‘non-learning-oriented’ is an abstraction and necessary simplification adopted for theorization and argumentation about the oppressive teacher position, which materializes in relation to other stakeholders; I acknowledge various life situation-related reasons, and issues such as widening participation, which may cause student behaviors to appear non-learning-oriented without that term being a fitting characterization. It is equally clear that the term does not characterize all students; I do not attempt to make any quantitative claims; studies including approximations of higher-education preparedness may inform the reader in this regard; see, e.g. (Lowe and Cook 2003).
2. I used the Finnish translation (2005) of the *Pedagogia do Oprimido* by Kurtti, Tomperi and Suoranta but will frequently refer to this work shortly by the name Freire.
3. A qualitative study in progress.
4. The attributes originate from the past curriculum outline but provide a relevant summarization.
5. The argument is not exclusive but drawn from my repeated exposure to situations where university students reflect on their past education and raise the habitual condition where one is not used to work for advancing in education; existence of other patterns is obvious, for instance, that a student appearing low in self-direction may not adhere to an institutionalized system.

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