# Students Finding Voice in a in a College Classroom: Reflections on a Teaching/Learning Journey

## Abstract

This paper describes a pedagogy put together heuristically to address the challenges of teaching developmental reading to college/university freshmen. Most of the students come into these classes considering reading a book to be a form of severe punishment, situated at the bottom of their interest lists (if it is there at all). Originating in a Learning Paradigm, my classroom practice is counter-hegemonic, inclusive and caring. A curriculum relevant to the students' lives allows them to revalue reading and its potential for self-empowerment and to rethink the connection between learning and schooling. By semester's end many students describe themselves as readers, having begun to realize their inherent powers of negotiating texts while their written work shows budding self-authorship.

When I ask my college/university freshmen, many of whom consider having to read a book to be a form of severe punishment, to rate themselves as readers during our first meeting of the semester, the picture I have been getting throughout the years has not changed: most 'read a book only when I have to' (i.e. when it is assigned in school), and then prefer the shortened notes or watching the movie; a few like to read, but don't do it often because they 'don't have time'; and a few brave souls admit outright: 'I hate to read' or 'reading a book bores me' (although I always sense that others in the room feel the same but are reluctant to be so blunt in the new setting)[1]. They have learned in schools that reading only means (other people's choice of 'good') books, so none of the students ever give themselves credit for the many hours of non-book reading they engage in all the time. And most of them come to the class with *a priori* feelings of dread.

Charged with 'teaching them to read' I embarked on a journey to figure out how to best reconnect my students with the act of reading books in a way that will convey to

them reading's potential for empowerment and growth, as well as the enjoyment it can bring to the reader.

I appropriated Barr & Tagg's (1995) ideas about the possibilities for qualitatively improving undergraduate education by shifting from an Instructional Paradigm, which focuses on teaching as both the means and the end of the institution's mission, to a Learning Paradigm that focuses on the learners and their learning. This involves a conceptual shift in institutional responsibility from delivering quality instruction to supporting learning, while the students, as co-producers of learning, take responsibility for their own knowledge construction. A shift to a Learning Paradigm allows us 'to create environments and experiences that bring students to discover and construct knowledge for themselves' as members of communities of learners, knowledge that is transferable and can be used in other situations along time and space.

Following is a succinct outline of the theoretical framework on which my pedagogy is based, after which is a description of my classroom practice, the goals I set and the challenges we all face in a learning process that culminates in strong academic achievements for most of the students.

## Theoretical Framework

Literacy is a multiple and contextual concept, effecting a different literacy profile for every student (person), thus making comparative assessment of students' literacy achievements meaningless as they fall into the realm of relativity (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Varenne & McDermott, 1999). Reading, as a component of the larger concept of literacy, is a social/ideological practice and its learning is contingent upon context: cultural, historical, political, economic, psychological/ biological (Street, 1995; Gee, 1990; Vygotsky, 1986). Within this literacy paradigm lies the idea that every student

*can* learn to read – regardless of social, cultural, economic or political background –if they are considered to be, first and foremost, contextualized human beings (Green, 1993; Neilsen, 1997), if they are taught material that is relevant to and purposeful for their lives, and if they are allowed to take control of their own learning process (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004).

The school reading courses that have failed most of my students originate in an Instructional Paradigm emanating from a pedagogy that is patriarchical, teacher centered, dominant-literacy and testing based, as Giroux (1987:3) puts it:… 'a pedagogy of chauvinism dressed up in the lingo of the Great Books'. At the heart of this pedagogy is a deficit approach whereby students are characterized by their divergence from The Standard and learners who do not measure up are labeled 'deficient' and in need of remediation (Lankshear, 1999; Ohanian, 1999).

In contrast, my pedagogy is Freirean, focusing on the students and their learning and on a continuous search for new structures and methods to promote learning and student success. To this end I have compiled a pedagogy, which is critical, democratic, humanistic and feminist, involving counter-hegemonic practices that are inclusive, caring, more just and allow my students to reconstruct themselves as empowered readers. I have appropriated aspects of three major theoretical frameworks (all pointing back to Freire and Dewey) and have fused them into a practice that creates fertile ground for growing reading literacy in my classrooms:

- Critical literacy … ' is language use that questions the social construction of the self' (Shor, 1999). The pedagogy associated with this paradigm focuses on commitment to teaching for the possibilities of social justice and active change, acceptance of cultural diversity and political enfranchisement. Based largely on Freire's ideas, critical literacy talks about knowledge construction emanating

from dialogue and interaction, problem-posing education for liberation and transformation of students' lives, teaching students to inquire into and deconstruct texts of power, oppression, language and silencing in their lives (Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Rosenblatt, 1978; Shor, 1999).

- Constructive-developmental pedagogy posits the goal of learning as self-authorship: … 'the ability to reflect upon one's beliefs, organize one's thoughts and feelings, in the context of but separate from, the thoughts and feelings of others, and literally make up one's own mind' (Baxter Magolda, 1999:6). Constructive-developmental pedagogy creates the classroom conditions for learning to take place based on three principals: validating students' ability to learn, situating learning in the students' experiences and defining learning as a collaborative exchange of perspectives (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004).

- Critical postmodern feminist pedagogy outlines six guiding principles for creating an inclusive classroom of learning: 1) Students' experience is central to teaching and learning; 2) Creating safe spaces for students to speak freely, teachers affirming students' perceptions and experiences allowing them to assume ownership and take action in their lives; 3) Raising issues of power and agency, giving students opportunities to rewrite relationships between centers and margins; 4) Raising issues of diversity to allow for the reconfiguration of social boundaries; 5) Presenting students with a language of critique and possibility; 6) Acknowledging multiple ways of knowing as a basis for including all students in the educational discourse (Brady & Dentith, 2001).

This 'pedagogy of fusion'[2] allows me to address the two major challenges in my teaching:

- Reversing negative attitudes towards reading/language/English classes and the disconnect between schooling and learning that had developed during the students' previous school experiences;

- Creating 'an environment of possibility and enablement' [3] by teaching both ideas and skills that would afford all of my students equal access to learning, to the potential inherent in critical reading, and to achieving success in their endeavors.

My goal is empowerment for the students – directing them to the powers they have within to begin constructing themselves as able readers, raising their awareness of the relationships between reading and learning, reading and power, and reading and pleasure. Ultimately, I would like my students to become 'intentional learners' [4] - students who are energized and empowered to be in control of their own education.

## The Practice

Following are descriptions of the frameworks, dynamics and processes, as well as the obstacles we trip over, in our classroom experiences:

### I. A polyvocal classroom focused on the students and based on dialogue

My classrooms are focused on the students: *their* reading, thinking, interests, responses, learning and success. Their experience is central to the curriculum. The texts I bring in deal with people, situations and issues that are relevant to their lives, interests and circumstances as a diverse group of teens growing up in the 21st century U.S. Teaching and learning are constructed through oral and written dialogue in an environment of mutuality, addressing mainly two interdependent levels of cognition: dialoguing with the mind (a process of pattern recognition) and dialoguing with society (inquiring into cultural models) [5].

Often we begin by all reading *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Chbosky, as I model the processes of reading critically, questioning the text, and interacting with texts to create meaning on the personal, social and language/structural levels[6]. I choose to begin with this book because it deals openly with a very wide range of experiences of relevance to my students' lives, such as peer pressure, drugs, sex, teen pregnancy, abuse, homosexuality, loneliness, relationships with parents. In addition, its form, a diary, and its relative brevity are less threatening to reluctant readers. The very first entry mentions teen suicide and, sadly, almost every one of the students has heard about or knows someone who has committed suicide and can connect to a thread of conversation that develops. To enrich the conversation we read an article about an African-American Businessman whose two sons committed suicide and who has launched a nationwide educational initiative for awareness and prevention of teen suicide (*People*, 2000).

Combining reading texts that are culturally relevant and interesting to the students with open dialogue that isn't censored for ideas, allows the students to come together as a community of learners trying to understand relationships between texts and their worlds. Other than drawing the line at anything that might be hurtful to others, the floor is open for any topic:

❖ *I am now able to speak out in other classes, because of the open atmosphere we had.  It gives everyone a chance to speak, and makes them want to speak more*, J.D. [7]

Our class discussions also:

1) Situate learning in the students' experiences and illuminate the connections between texts and lives, acknowledging multiple ways of knowing as a basis for including all students in the educational discourse: *'I can say that I found out what I liked to read about and what keeps me into a book, and that is reading about kids my age'*, A.A.;

2) Open debates around issues that are elements of the students' life but had been silenced or disvalued throughout their schooling, leading us to question dominant

discourses and power structures and paving the way for the reconfiguration of social boundaries: *'I learned not to be so quick to judge and never be afraid to question'*, T.G.;

3) Show diverse perspectives of an issue, encouraging recognition of diversity and challenging one's own belief boundaries[8]: *'My views have changed about lesbians and gays. I am a lot more tolerant toward them. I have become accepting'*, R.C.;

4) Raise possibilities of becoming active agents for change in the learners' own lives: *'I am reading this book about Nelson Mandela…He is an inspiring leader…and someday I wish I can be somewhat like him and be a leader of a younger generation'*, K.C.

5) Present students with a language of critique and possibility and direct them away from 'authority-dependent learning'[9], toward personal meaning making from texts and individual enfranchisement: *'[This class] also broadened my knowledge by showing me how to think for myself and analyze what I am reading'*, L.S

6) Define learning as a collaborative exchange of perspectives and knowledge construction as emanating from dialogue and interaction: *'I had an excellent time learning from the perspectives of my fellow students. They brought a sense of universal thought into the classroom'*, M.H.

For the rest of the semester the students choose their reading books (from a list), raise issues for discussion, have total freedom writing their papers and creating the projects they present to the class[10], as I coach their processes of meaning-making and support their thinking, without doing it for them or expecting them to think like me.


**II. Creating a democratic, safe classroom as a gateway to self-authorship**

Many of my students had shut down in high school in the face of perceived arrogance of the curriculums, teachers, or dominant social or cultural texts (Key, 1998). Therefore I try to create a safe learning setting with an emphasis on the dissemination of traditional

power structures, where students can open up, say what's on their minds, take risks without fear of penalty and, slowly, find their voices.

❖ *I was nervous when this book reading stuff started. It was no choice for me but read the book…I tried…Then I realized this was not as hard as I thought it was*, Z.Z. (ESL student).
❖
We sit in a circle and engage in discussions revolving around texts (oral, written or visual)[11]. For some, this is a challenge:

❖ *When you told us to make a circle I hated that. I wanted to go take my seat in the back where nobody could see me or in the front where all anybody could see was the back of my head*, T.G.

My role is to direct the conversation and assure that no one takes over or is intimidated from joining in; to allow every voice to be heard and respected; to enable mutual teaching and learning:

❖ *I enjoyed learning that children and young adults can also teach… that it is a give and take experience that I benefited greatly from*, D.K.

Students have the right to create their own meanings from the texts they read, but inquiry is expected and opinions must be defended.

❖ *I almost finished the book* Into Thin Air. *The book was not really interest me. After all, I still do not understand the point of risking life to be on top of the world*, Z.Z. (ESL student).

It is along this trajectory that I find my most challenging task. I have realized that a great many of my students are either not used to thinking in school contexts, are afraid of the risks involved in confronting the serious issues, or are deterred by expectations of unpleasant reactions if they speak their mind or give a 'wrong' answer.

❖ *I've lived my life trying to avoid any issue that didn't directly have an effect on my life. Well, I won't say that I've changed that yet, but this class has made me aware that I need to*, T.G.

In the spirit of critical literacy, I am sensitive to the different kinds of knowledge

and meanings that students bring to class (Ben-Yosef, 2003), so I try to create an atmosphere where diverse experiences are valued rather than judged, leading to openness and sharing in our conversations and, even more deeply in writing. Furthermore, when the students realize that there are no negative consequences (criticism, ridicule, evaluation penalties) to voicing their opinion, and as I try to bring up provocative issues, playing the devil's advocate in such a way that it is hard to remain silent, almost all find their public voices:

❖ *The first day I entered class I was afraid of the different people…As I became more comfortable I began stating my opinions and learned a lot from both my professor and my classmates,* M.S.
❖ *In [this] class, nobody's wrong about anything. I think that this gives the students confidence to speak what is on their mind, and not have to be worried about being criticized ,* P.B.

When students' minds are emancipated from outside authority – the stronghold of the author, a need to please the teacher, or the hegemony of political correctness, and when their own powers of interpreting texts are legitimized, classrooms become fertile grounds for developing of authentic voices, for 'the making of self in society'[12].Students can take risks necessary for constructing knowledge and courageously confront texts that would have intimidated them in the past.

❖ *[This] class took away the fear of picking up a book. [It] has prepared and motivated me to read with no worry of being bored or not understanding,* G.C.

With time and experience comes trust in our relationships, and as the students realize there are no hidden traps, many of them show budding self-authorship:

❖ *This class started me thinking, thinking hard. I've learned that I want to help people…but, even more, I want to help myself. [I need to develop] my own opinions, rather than merely agreeing with what other people say,* M.P.
❖ *I feel like I am able to conquer any book, and not just by reading the words but more like becoming the words and becoming the characters in the book. I relate myself to the situations and come up with my own solutions,* P.G.

❖ *My eyes have been opened to new things and I like some of what I am seeing, but the things I don't like I will do something about to bring about change,* G.H.
❖ *Most of this class was comprised of freshmen and I feel they will begin their college*

*careers better off than I did; with the knowledge that they are free to learn and explore as they choose, and just as free to reject what they see as arbitrary…* A.L.(senior).

## III. Critical reading and transparency

Learning and knowledge construction originate from inquiry, textual deconstruction and problem solving. My students learn to become critical readers by interrogating the texts – reading between the lines and behind the words, seeing through what is written to what may be hidden. We question the choice of language in poetry and short stories such as *Barbie Doll* by Marge Piercy and *Desire's Baby* by Kate Chopin; we inquire about the use of genre for conveying the message in *The perks of being a wallflower* by Chbosky and compare this to the letter exchange in *Address Unknown* by Katherine Kressmann Taylor; we watch feature films (*Crash, Renaissance Man*) and documentaries (*Black to the Promised Land* by Madeline Ali, *Unequal Education: Failing Our Children* and *Whose Streets? Our Streets: The True Face of Youth Activism*, by Educational Video Center, Manhattan), and ask ourselves why a certain scene, sequence or behavior was displayed where, when and as it was; we learn that everything was put into a text for a purpose and we inquire into that purpose; we engage in intertextual practices and we analyze our responses to different types of texts.

❖ *In the past I would just read and highlight the text I found important. I never questioned the text or looked at other layers embedded in it. When I started to question and make connections, the text began reading to me. The material became much more comprehensible,* E.R.

We respond to texts as mirrors of our lives and as windows onto our times and society. We learn not to accept things at face value, to peel away the outer layers of meaning of words, expressions, facts (such as when we read in a *Time* article that there are public schools in poor areas of the U.S. that have no library) and numbers (is *'only 1%'* of kids on anti-depressants who commit suicide – a lot?).

❖ *Over the course of this semester, I have begun to not only read the words but to read for meaning and to question what the author is trying to show me. Just because something is typed into a book does not make it true or right…* M.S.

There is no hesitancy to name issues of concern (Fine, 1992) and any critical conversations regarding social, cultural, political or economic arrangements are welcome. We analyze our own learning experiences and raise questions about power and access to literacy and language. In so doing we expose some of the macro issues underlying the texts we read, illuminating social issues that impact us all (i.e. prejudice, addictions, violence, oppression, discrimination, silencing, social construction of mental illness, crimes and punishment).

❖ *[After this class] I can never look at the world the same. Even the clothes I buy I look at differently. In the back of my head I think of the child working for 25 cents [per hour] to make my sweater or jeans. Every time I watch the news I wonder about the kids who died because of gang violence*, C.A.
❖ *Before I entered this class I would just take things for how they were, not questioning the reasons and motives behind them. For example, poverty, the education system, cultural differences. Now I do question. I think for myself and analyze the situation from my own point of view*, S.C.
❖ *The amount of free expression in the classroom enabled many of us to see the world more clearly. It allowed us to see other points of view so we may examine our own and look more closely at them, minimizing many of our biases*, S.M.S

## IV. Equitable access to education and success

Embracing aspects of critical postmodern feminist pedagogy is my attempt to 1) Include all students in the educational discourse of our classroom, and 2) Coach students toward self-authorship and autonomous learning, in order to avail everyone the equal potential of reading education (Brady & Dentith, 2000, Neilsen, 1997). I focus on building bridges from the students' literacy configurations and interests to the texts and discourses of the class (Ben-Yosef, 2003). Steering the curriculum away from canons, classics and politically correct texts, our print reading is enhanced with various media: students bring in lyrics of songs they like (pre-censored for language), they do an internet research paper on a topic of their choice, and I include video and film as teaching tools

due to their comfort level and familiarity for the students, their potential of heightened engagement and their relevancy to students' lives (Lieberman, 2002). By teaching students to read and make meaning of visual texts (film, TV, internet, pictures, etc.), this media is legitimized as an important potential source of information and knowledge in the culture of the 21st century.

> ❖ *The movie* [The Renaissance Man] *with Danny DeVito was really funny and inspiring to me.* [I learned] *that if you put your mind to it you can accomplish anything. Seeing these kids that weren't really smart and didn't like to read just like me. Then… these kids learn new things like simile, metaphor and Shakespeare…This kind of motivated me to read even more*, K.C.

Since I have learned that interest motivates and gives purpose to reading, I am constantly looking for trade books and films that address real and troubling issues my students might be dealing with on a daily basis (coming of age, addiction, love, relationships, drinking, difference, depression, eating disorders).

> ❖ *I was not a big reader; in fact I hated to read. However today I can say that I enjoy reading…I found myself very compassionate towards Antwone Fisher's situation because he resembles me in so many ways that it is almost scary*, J.W.[13]

I also have a collection of articles and short stories on social 'hot' topics (i.e. child slavery, human trafficking, racism, capital punishment), which are provocative in a way that encourages response even from the more reticent students.

From a list of texts students choose one they wish to read within our topic unit (e.g. adolescents and identity, education, mental illness), so that several different books are read and discussed simultaneously in class.[14] (I am often told this choice they are given has a positive effect on their motivation to read.) I prescribe the number of pages to be read between classes for the first book, but for the rest of the semester I only give a date by which we will begin the next book, letting them read at their own pace (optimally, completing 5 books).

> ❖ *I could never keep up in high school because the teacher always went too fast. In* [this] *class I completed my first book ever*, G.C

Motivating students to learn and take ownership of their own potential is tied to success rather than to testing, judging or comparing them to each other[15]. The Learning Paradigm posits that learning, while challenging, should be a win-win situation based on cooperation, collaboration and support. In my classrooms I sow seeds of motivation by opening the gate wide for all be able to succeed, focusing on their abilities and *expecting* each one to do well (Ben-Yosef, 2002).

❖ *I also learned that when encouraged to do well a person usually succeeds. If a person believes in you, you will most likely be successful in what u set forth in doing*, C.C.

Every student receives an 'A' up front; all they have to do to keep this grade is 'their best'[16]. This significantly reduces stress and hegemony in the classroom, helping create the safe space where students can defy past silencing and open up to learning.

❖ *I think grades play games with people's heads because if they get an A on something they think they are a good and intelligent person. If they get an F they think they are stupid and put themselves down because of some red letter on their paper*, P.P

Equal access to success in class is also exemplified in our discussions that are situated in the students' experiences:

❖ *Now I can read a book and come up with my own conclusions to it instead of what the author wants me to think, and that makes reading more fun and exciting*, D.H.

This approach also represents a step toward creating independent learners and weaning students from authority-based learning, as Foertsch (2000) writes, … '[this is] what I use to serve students best, to hopefully free them from myself, from their need of something from me, when our teacher-student relationship is over'. In the same vein, rather than grading and comparing my students' papers I respond to their content, (disregarding spelling and grammar, thus eliminating inhibitions that usually come with fear of making mistakes), creating an open, flowing personal dialogue with each student,

❖ *When someone does not get graded on things and just receives responses it makes the student want to learn more. Giving responses to papers makes the student feel equal to the next student*, O.S.

❖ *When we were given assignments that only had to be one page long, I found myself writing two to three pages worth of feelings about the class. This class showed me that grades never really mattered. I did my best work all along because I was learning and enjoying it*, K.A.

It is also my way of showing my students respect.

❖ *Thank you… for treating us like adults who want to learn and succeed, and for eliminating as much as possible the 'fear' factor*, K.M.

## Reaching the Destination

Our learning journeys begin slowly, as we check out the setting, the plot and each other. Writing and dialogue are succinct and contrived at the beginning of the semester but with time and encouragement, risks are taken, texts became longer, thoughts more explicit and, when they feel safe and comfortable, there are a lot of things the students want to talk and write about,

❖ *I really hate to talk about my life and past experiences in my life. But it will be a lot easier to talk about things of that nature now because I have seen that it is okay to express your internal self to others because today's society is a mix of all types of personalities and problems*, J.W.

By the end of the semester, I can clearly see development across the board in critical reading, in written expression and, most importantly – in the students' stronger sense of self confidence as they construct themselves as readers/learners:

❖ *This class gave me strength to read in general. In the beginning of the semester I didn't like to read books. My abilities of reading was low when I started the class but now it got much better. In the current moment…I have the power to read many books that I wouldn't read before in my life*, L.N. (ESL student).
❖ *It was the first time in my life that I read a book that written in English…I was able to get meaning out of the book just like I was reading a Chinese book. This is giving me so much confidence of reading*, Z.Z. (ESL student).
❖

By emancipating my students and myself from some of the anxiety-producing constraints of the Instructional teaching paradigm, and by incorporating a

pedagogy of care, dialogue, acceptance of difference and a relevant curriculum that gives the learners purpose for reading, we are able to focus our energies on the students' growth, their powers of reading and learning, and even on the joy of reading books.

❖ *I was never interested* [in reading]. *However, this class has helped me realize the enjoyment of reading and now instead of hearing music on my way home on the train, I am constantly reading a book*, S.T.

❖ *When I'm bored I'll reach for the TV remote, but then stop to think, and then 10 minutes later I find myself buried in a book…*, M.G.

Some of my students criticize my pedagogy as being too lenient and forgiving (because I don't chastise those students who don't keep up their reading pace with others, or those who hand in papers late), but I strongly believe that removing unnecessary systemic pressures in classrooms is conducive to much more productive knowledge construction, where time *isn't* of the essence, but learning is. Ultimately, the university and I both achieve our goals of reading 'development': the university gets stronger readers/learners and I see my students develop appreciation and love for reading, they develop skills for negotiating texts and they step more confidently on their way to becoming autonomous learners, finding their agendas and their voices: Reading the word and the world –

❖ [My mind] *was opened to the fact that I can read the world along with my books*, R.T.

Believing in their potential –

❖ *I certainly learned a lot* [in this class] *that has helped me become an active reader as well as an active learner .Now I will use all the vital lessons I learned…to excel in my other university courses*, J.V.

And making the path by walking –

❖ *This class and the novels we have read have pushed me to start my life. To start walking down the path that is created with each step. I can't say that I've gotten very far, but I'm still learning, still growing…* M.P.

# Notes

[1] I teach Developmental Reading, at the university, and Basic Education non-credit courses in preparation for credit English, at a community college.

[2] Ben-Yosef, 2003.

[3] McLaren, 1995:112.

[4] Doherty & Ketchner, 2005.

[5] Gee, 1997.

[6] All book reading is done at home. Supplementary texts are read in class

[7] This paper is polyvocal and brings in my students voices as well as my own. Quotes from the student's work will be edited only for spelling.

[8] One of the strongest texts I found for exemplifying diversity of perspectives is the movie *Crash*.

[9] Baxter Magolda & King, 2004

[10] They write a weekly letter to me responding to texts from class and from their readings. Final projects are done as individuals or in groups and are responses to a book, a character, an issue or a theme the students find interesting. Any medium is acceptable, *except* essays. Past projects have included scrapbooks, poster presentations, writing lyrics to music and recording a CD, short plays (a student brought her boyfriend to class and they presented a play they wrote about teen pregnancy), poetry, painting, etc.

[11] Although Foertsch (2000) contends that sitting in a circle is as much about the teacher's control of the students as it is about symbolic equality

[12] Shor, 1999

[13] In the book *Finding Fish*

[14]14[14] A partial list of books I have used: Chbosky, *The perks of being a wallflower*; Lebert, *Crazy*; Mitchner, *Becoming Anna*; Peltzer, *A child called it*; Fisher, *Finding Fish*; Diaz, *Drown*; Sedaris, *Naked*; Sapphire, *Push*; Burroughs, *Running with scissors*; Mah, *Falling Leaves*; Bolton, *Gal*; Suarez, *Sparing Angola*; Santiago, *When I was Puerto Rican*; Chamoiseau, *School Days*; Burgess, *Smack*; Kotlowitz, *There are No Children Here*; Baca, *A place to stand*; Kozol, *Death at an Early Age*; Rodreguez, *Hunger for Memory*;
Johnston, In the Deep Heart's Core.

[15] Varenne & McDermott, 1999, show, for example, that using a dichotomous concept such as success/failure in our education system virtually breeds failure in schools.

[16] I believe that a reflective teacher can distinguish between honest and perfunctory efforts.

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