

CASE 2

Habib School: Creating a Curriculum for the Working Class

Dr. Habib Carlos Kyrillos School (Habib School) is easily accessible by taking one of the many buses that run along the corridor of Cupece Avenue, a principal arterial that connects the working class neighborhood of Americanopolis with the rest of the city of São Paulo, be it the more affluent areas to the North, the impoverished periphery to the South, or the

industrial city of Diadema to the Southeast. Consequently, Cupece Avenue teams with a heavy flow of cars, buses and cargo trucks and is lined with shops and businesses selling all kinds of goods and services, ranging from bakeries to auto repair shops. The PT has a strong presence in the area, as evidenced by the location of a party headquarters office at a prominent site on Cupece Avenue. Also on the street corner that leads from Cupece Avenue to the school—next to a Shell gas station—is a large store front church, a testimony to the growing influence of the Pentecostal religious movement among the Brazilian urban poor. Hence, although Habib School was in the southern peripheral part of the city, it was well connected by transit to employment, commercial and cultural centers, and therefore was not as marginalized or isolated as other schools in NAE-6.

The intense commercial activity, dense population and strategic location of the region between two cities (Diadema and São Paulo) contributed to the high level of criminal activity, namely drug trafficking, that flourished in the area. The school was built halfway up a very steep hill that rose above Cupece Avenue. Walking away from the commercial strip, one quickly entered into the more dangerous part of the neighborhood, "the nest of thieves" according to residents. Locals told harrowing stories about the violence that permeates the reality of the indigent and working class community that surrounds the school: a body shot dead in the school courtyard was discovered a year previous to the research; students related that sometimes bodies would be left lying in the streets for days before the police came to pick them up, no one daring to go near for fear of being associated with the crime by the police or with the victim. Students were protective of both researchers, refusing to let them walk unaccompanied to the bus stop two blocks away after dusk. And, tragically one of the teachers who lived in the area and was very active in the school and community, was murdered in 1994. She was very much loved by her students and her violent death cast a deep sadness over the school.

Clearly, the chaos of the surrounding neighborhood, which infected the daily lives of the students at the school, deeply affected the school site, and the teachers and other staff who worked there. At the same time, this dire situation almost demanded a reform movement like the Inter Project which might offer the opportunity to understand and overcome aspects of this violent environment and the daily fear it caused. The community of Habib School faced several prominent issues in its quest to develop the Inter Project. Of these, the primary task was to find ways of building consensus among a very strong-willed, articulate and experienced staff. Similarly, this staff, while needing to negotiate some shared ideas and meanings within itself, also needed to find ways of expanding its boundaries to include students, particularly upper grade students, in the development

of the Inter Project. With this task of redefining the school culture into one that was inclusive and based on shared goals and objectives, the community faced a third challenge: the reality of resistance to the Project from many different sectors.

Habib School: A Description

Like Sussumu School and many others schools in municipal system, Habib School was constructed mainly out of concrete and possessed few windows—many of which were broken—to interrupt the monotony of its stark walls and bland architecture. Apparently the building design came from a French architect who had won a competition, the reward for which was the construction of this school and its design was absolutely unsuited for a school in a tropical country. On strange vaulted portions of the ceiling were vertical glass windows that remained half open all the time because there was no mechanism for closing them. When it rained, as it often does in São Paulo, water built up on the roof, periodically overflowing into the classrooms. The outdoor court yard was surrounded by a high wall, topped by a chain link fence giving it a prison-like appearance and the iron door at the entrance was kept locked while school was in session. The eight classrooms were located on the second floor to which the only access was a curved stairway enclosed by two walls making the ascent and descent of students a very noisy event. The hall at the top of the stairs was brightened by floral murals painted on the walls some time ago, but the classrooms were badly in need of painting and repair. Classrooms were cold and damp, with leaks in the ceiling and windows, the desks wobbly and the chalkboards marred by worn out patches. In short, Habib School was physically falling apart.

On the lower level, where the administrative offices were located, the school boasted a relatively well-kept library and spacious reading room, both recently renovated. The reading room was truly multipurpose, and hosted everything from staff pedagogic meetings to a theatrical performance to a student sexual orientation class. In addition, a much smaller room served as the teachers' lounge where staff convened during breaks and in-between shifts. A long table dominated the room and was usually crowded with papers as teachers sat preparing for their classes, while others ate and drank the constantly supplied tea and coffee and generally chatted amongst themselves. The walls too were crowded with closets where teachers stored their materials because no storage space was available inside the virtually barren classrooms.

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History of the Project at Habib School

At Habib School, the Inter Project initially started out with only 11 teachers who were interested in adopting the Secretariat's proposal. Gradually, others joined in and by December 1990 the majority opted to join the Project. The principal at this school was a PT militant and therefore strongly supported the Project. However, she and several other teachers from the school were called out to work as part of the NAE-6 staff during the PT administration, consequently draining the school of staff that would have been key to the Project's success there. In fact, after the PT lost the elections in 1992, the principal and three of the NAE-6 personal returned to their teaching positions at Habib School. They were an important part of the effort to organize teachers interested in continuing working in an interdisciplinary fashion well after the Project's demise in 1994.

Fortunately, in the absence of the regular principal, Luciana, the Pedagogic Coordinator at Habib School and a strong supporter of the Inter Project, persuaded the teachers under her supervision to participate. She recalls the moment of the preliminary investigation that took place in the first semester of 1991 as "a great festival" generating both enthusiasm and anxiety in that teachers were initially apprehensive about the radically different approach to curriculum called for by the Project. But at the same time, many looked forward to effecting positive change in the school's program. The first semester's generative theme at Habib School was determined to be "Precarious Transportation." The theme arose out of interviews with neighborhood residents in which the problems and issues around public transportation took precedence.

As in other schools, organizing the intermediate level teachers with their disparate schedules proved a logistical nightmare. Yet, despite these obstacles, the Pedagogic Coordinators at Habib School remained committed to the Project and organized meetings at different time blocs throughout the day in order to accommodate the conflicts in schedule. The CP, Luciana, recalls the early stage of training meetings: "[During these initial meetings] words like 'dialectics' and 'epistemology' began to appear. There was a lot of theory. We began with theory and a month of meetings, it was exhaustive but animated." After the initial training, the CP related that teachers remained confused by the complexity of the theory behind the pedagogic moments they were expected to put into practice (i.e., ER;OC;AC). She observed that it was difficult for teachers to organize their lessons using all three pedagogical moments, and they gradually perceived that the Project required much more professional preparation than they had imagined. Other problems arose in relation to the selection of content matter: Luciana recalls, "at first we almost killed our students with so much

content matter." As a result of the broad categories suggested by the generative theme, a curriculum quandary was created as teachers disputed what such an approach stipulated as the relevant content to be taught. Yet, according to Luciana, this conflict also led to the initiation of a constructive dialogue with teachers across disciplines, and the exchange of ideas on a sophisticated pedagogical level. In her assessment, by May of 1991, "the collective began to truly function" (Luciana, interview, 1992).

Yet, the Project did not remain without its opponents at Habib School. A major point of contention was the break down in pupil discipline pointed out by those who opposed the Project. As teachers increasingly began to organize their students to work in groups, many also felt that they were giving up classroom control because students were allowed to move about more freely and to talk among themselves. Consequently the school was divided: "a escola se dividiu," Luciana points out, emphasizing that the division was very marked. As one teacher put it, there were those who preferred the comfort of teaching a class of students who are expected to keep quiet and those who were willing to take on the challenge of attempting to make their classrooms more participatory.

During the second semester of 1991, the school engaged in its second Study of the School Reality, this time taking into account the perspective of the students. Students were given a questionnaire of thirty questions including "What is it that you would like to build in place of the school?" At this point student discourse gained greater importance in the curriculum planning process and teachers moved away from the single textbook by bringing in content from various sources. In particular, History, Geography and Science teachers were able to employ para-didactic books and they sought alternative resources for their classroom instruction, namely newspaper articles, teacher-prepared texts based on outside research, and data collected by students through surveys and the like. "It was a good moment, very gratifying, our practice was good . . . the most beautiful part was the final planning and elaboration of the AC . . . we put together books, it was a great deal of work. [The main concern of the group was] how were we to continue to advance?" Luciana, the school's CP, reflected. By 1992 the primary grade teachers were completely outside the Project: this stemmed from a problem of lack of pedagogic coordination on the one hand; and on the other, there was the persistent problem related to the fact that a large number of new teachers had arrived who were reluctant to join a process that was already underway. Some felt forced into the Project and at one point exclaimed, "I hate this and I don't want to continue," the CP recalled. Furthermore, the new teachers demanded to see practical applications of the theories presented to them. One teacher related that the staff

began to accept the Project on the basis of teachers who demonstrated how it might work in practice gradually "forcing others to reflect and come out of their conformist position."

Still the CP and several teachers interviewed concurred that many had agreed to join the Project because they were motivated merely by the prospect of making extra money with the JTI, and they believed that they could continue to teach as they pleased in the privacy of the classroom. This seemed to be a common strategy among teachers who dissented from the Project's methods and philosophy or merely felt incapable of carrying them out. One teacher pointed to the fact that many felt a sense of guilt as though they had sinned for not closely following the Project's guidelines and therefore had to cover up. In her view, working with the Inter Project did not consist of a particular methodology but required a certain attitude, "a belief in what you are doing." Many teachers who dissented simply did not agree or believe in the Inter Project. In contrast to the Secretariat's claims, some even felt that they had been left out of the development process of the Project.

Meetings

At Habib School, the CP's active interest in a more profound comprehension of the Project and a more coherent application of its principles resulted in a concerted effort to organize regular pedagogic meetings for teachers. Meetings organized to this end—during and after the PT tenure—were very dynamic and at times even somewhat ideologically confrontational in their nature. These meetings were mostly run by the pedagogic coordinator with a high level of participation by the teachers present. Occasionally NAE-6 team members would attend such meetings and contribute to the discussion. Teachers were typically assigned a reading for the week which they read prior to the meetings and then discussed as a group, often very heatedly. Teachers were observed—more so than at other schools—engaging in very serious debates about the theoretical underpinnings of the Project and its educational outcomes. In this regard, the group of teachers at Habib School could be characterized as among the most efficacious and collegial of any of the schools visited. They were respectful of each other, worked well and often together, and were capable of being very focused as they struggled together to understand the new concepts introduced to them through the Inter Project.

Teachers at Habib School were often observed going to great lengths to prepare activities for and with their students, with whom the majority appeared to have exceptionally good rapport and hold in high esteem. This

was made especially evident in a sex education meeting with the school's upper grade students where they spoke seriously and candidly in front of their teachers of their most intimate concerns as adolescents. It was a very large faculty and diverse in terms of age and experience. This diversity, in addition to the exceptional commitment of the staff, contributed to making otherwise dull and routine meetings interesting and lively; it also allowed for a great deal of supportive mentoring between faculty members. [This was especially the case during the post-PT period observed when former NAE members played a key role in maintaining interested staff involved in the continued development of an interdisciplinary curriculum based on a generative theme.]

Curriculum Development and Classroom Practice

Habib School was distinctive in that teachers truly took to heart the dual and interactive goals of the Project related to curricular reorientation and democratization of the classroom. Evidence of this could be seen in classroom practice as well as in the content of lessons and activities. Relative to other sites included in this research, classroom practice at Habib School was very student-centered with learning activities revolving around issues of immediate concern and importance for the daily lives of its students and aimed at fostering a more critical reading of their world. For example, in one class observed while the 1992 Olympics were taking place (the generative theme for the semester was "the Olympic Games"), students engaged in a heated debate using political economy to explain why some countries such as the U.S., win so many medals while others, such as Brazil, win so few. In all the classes, group work was the norm, discussions seemed engaging to most students and teachers seemed to truly work in a coaching role rather than a lecturing one.

As an example of how the curriculum was genuinely transformed by the Inter Project, in the second semester of 1992—with the generative theme of "Human Relations"—a teacher of a fifth grade Geography class presented her students with a text for discussion: "Urban contrasts and the distribution of poverty." The text briefly summarized that inequities in the distribution of goods, services and opportunities create the differences between the rich and poor neighborhoods that develop in urban settings such as São Paulo. The same teacher had her sixth grade students discussing the eminent impeachment of then President Collor. Students worked in groups and wrote up opinion posters with titles such as "The problems of Brazil"; "Do you know what impeachment is?"; "Brazilians deserve justice." Such manifestations of a more politicized curriculum and the creation of opportunities for students to critically reflect on their current reality led many

teachers (especially those ideologically opposed to the Workers' Party) to discern a politically dogmatic and educationally unsound tone in the Inter Projects' classroom curricular outcomes. Still, many other teachers held the conviction that it was precisely that aspect of the PT reform they most embraced.

The Collective Construction of Knowledge in a Dialogic Classroom. In her mid 20s, the teacher's young face simultaneously expresses both enthusiasm and a certain degree of anxiety about her immense responsibility teaching the thirty fourth graders that sit facing her in uneven rows. The majority of the 29 students seated in five rows are girls, ten students are boys, representing a broad spectrum of mixed European and African racial heritages which is typical of the working class neighborhoods of São Paulo. The blackboard is in a deplorable state with a huge white area where the board's green surface has completely worn off; this is also typical of the schools in such neighborhoods.

Before class, the teacher, Elena, is speaking with a parent resolving a problem of suspension of a child from school. This prolonged encounter in the middle of her class is an indication of the limited time teachers have to deal with such administrative and discipline problems because they are constantly interrupting instruction time with duties such as parent conferences and teacher meetings.

Without needing to call her class to order, Elena's presence at the front of the room commands the children's attention. They sit patiently and listen while she explains what they are to do today for Social Studies. She indicates that due to the brief time they have—as a result of the teacher meeting that was just held in the morning period during class time—they are only to copy some questions off the board. She refers to a text that they have already copied off the board during a previous lesson and tells them: "I will now write questions about the text that will be your homework." The class faithfully copies the homework off the board, but shortly thereafter, a different, more inquisitive energy takes hold as the teacher turns and faces the class between writing sentences.

It is customary for students to have a notebook for each subject where all lessons are copied off the board because of the lack of materials and logistical support, i.e., few books or texts, no photocopy machines and short supply of copy paper available to teachers. Hence teachers often write out selected texts for reading and study on the black board for students to copy, into their notebooks as well as any academic exercises related to such texts. Again, what is remarkable about this particular lesson is how an otherwise traditional pedagogic practice—the copying of text and questions to be answered for homework—is converted into a dynamic dialogic moment between teacher and students around themes of enormous relevance to

the reality and daily lives of the students. The generative theme in Elena's classroom is "Workers."

Script of a Dialogic Classroom

The teacher writes on the board:

a) Para você o problema de falta de moradia e de emprego tem relação com a alta taxa de natalidade?

[a) In your view do the problems of housing shortage and unemployment have any relation to the high rate of birth?]

She finishes writing the sentence and initiates a brief dialogue with the children posing the question to them orally. A student immediately responds:

Com emprego você pode pagar coisas, sem emprego você não pode.

[If you have work you can pay for things, without work you can't.]

Other students join in the discussion, enthusiastically responding to the question posed by the teacher. The discussion becomes animated as the teacher continues posing new questions related to the text the students are currently studying. Students begin to tell their own personal stories of poverty and struggle, and one particularly expressive student goes on about a family she knows with 20 children. The teacher brings the impromptu discussion to a close by emphatically stating [in response to the idea of the 20 kids]:

Que locura !

[What madness . . .]

She turns and continues writing questions on the board pausing to check on her students' comprehension of each question before going on to the next. Three female students, in particular, are able to articulate the relationship between economy and family, relating personal experiences with employment and family and stating that once you have children you need to work more to support them. This leads to a discussion of the differences between urban and rural families. The teacher asks:

Porque no campo tem mais filhos?

[Why do people in the countryside have more children?]

The students respond:

Porque as crianças ajudam no coleta.
[Because the children help in the harvest]

A male student remarks:

Os grandes poderão ajudar se arrumam trabalho mas já é difícil prá adulto.
[The older ones might be able to help if they got a job, but it's already hard for adults to get work.]

A female student further argues:

Mais aí o dinheiro vai acabando com os filhos, com os remédios, as escola . . .
[But then the money is spent on the children, medicine, school . . .]

The teacher reinforces her examples:

É, com o custo da medicina, a escola . . .
[Yes, with the cost of medicines, school . . .]

The discussion subdues and the students resume writing for a few seconds, but soon discussion is initiated again by a student. This time, the student, after having further contemplated the contradictions between urban and rural life, muses:

Aqui não se planta e chove . . . lá eles plantam mas não chove . . .
[Here there is no planting and it rains, there they plant but there is no rain.]

This comment reflects the fact that many students' families are immigrants from the poverty-stricken and drought-ridden Northeast. Another student makes reference to the discrepancy between the price of lettuce in the countryside and the city where it is three times more expensive. He explains:

No campo vendeu pra alguém e depois souberam muito o preço por que não esta dando lucro com o preço da condução.
[In the countryside they sell it to someone who then raises the price very high because with the cost of transportation there's no profit.]

One student adds:

Na cidade é mais difícil prá família numerosa por que não . . .
[In the city it's much harder for a large family because . . .]

Another student finishes the statement:

Não tem trabalho e todos querem lucro.
[There's no work and every one wants to make a profit . . .]

She continues relating her family's own story.

As the students engage in this dialogic exchange regarding the issues, elicited by the questions the teacher has written on the board, Elena pauses again to check her students comprehension of a particular word:

O que é boia fria?
[What is a boia fria?]

Among several answers that are yelled out, one student offers:

Trabalhador rural!
[Rural worker!]

The teacher continues questioning.

Ele ganha . . .
[He makes . . .]

Students [in unison]:

Pouco!
[Little]

Teacher:

Trabalha muito, ganha pouco.
[Works a lot, makes a little.]

Student:

Por isso se chama boia fria porque trabalho muito, ganha pouco e só pode levar a comida fria ao trabalho.
[Because they work hard and make little and so they can only take a cold lunch to work.]

The discussion continues intermittently as the teacher pauses to ask questions while some respond and others continue copying. The teacher

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then turns to the students and solicits answers to the last question she has written on the board:

Porque atualmente as mulheres trabalham fora?
[Why do women work more today?]

The students offer responses explaining that women have to work to complement household income, or because their husbands have died. About one third of the students in the class participate while others remain outside of discussion preferring to take on passive role of copying questions. With the exception of one boy, the girls seem more willing to communicate their thoughts to the class.

One girl continues:

Muitas contas, a luz, agua, aluguel, as vezes não dá!
[Lots of bills, electricity, water, rent, sometimes there's just not enough!]

The teacher asks:

Diminiu a quantidade de criança por que a mulher foi trabalhar fora?
[Did the quantity of children fall because women began to work outside the home?]

A heated debate ensues with this one leading the teacher to rephrase the question she had written on the board based on the points brought up by the students in the discussion. The students help rewrite the question dictating while the teacher writes it on the board for the rest of the class:

Na sua opinião o numero de criança diminuo na cidade porque as mulheres estão trabalhando fora de casa ou por causa da dificuldade financeira?
[In your opinion, did the number of children in the city drop because of the fact that women are working outside the home or because of the financial difficulties?]

The teacher stops to clarify:

O que é dificuldade financeira ?
[What is financial difficulty?]

One student announces to the class:

Eu já respondi tudo.

[I already answered all the questions.]

The teacher admonishes her:

Não quero resposta boba.

[I don't want any silly answers.]

Another student responds to her initial question:

Quer dizer que uns ganham mais do que outros.

[It means that some make more than others.]

The teacher probes her student for deeper analysis:

Porque uns ganham mais do que outros?

[Why do some make more than others?]

Student:

Uns trabalham em melhor emprego.

[Some work in better jobs.]

Teacher:

Então isso é distribuição de renda, uns ganham muito, outros pouco.

[O.K., then that's income distribution, some make a lot, others little.]

A student adds:

Os trabalhadores têm direito de ser registrados.

[Workers have the right to be registered.]

The teacher writes and asks the question:

Para você a situação precária de vida está relacionado com uma mal distribuição da renda?

[Do you think that the precarious life situation is related to the poor distribution of income?]

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Achou que sim, não é que todos devem ser iguais mais cada um tem seu valor.

[I think so, not everyone should be the same, but everyone is worth something.]

Student:

Um quer comprar uma roupa e não pode porque não tem dinheiro, deveria ser igual.

[You want to buy clothes but you can't because you have no money, it should be the same.]

Teacher:

O justo . . .

[What is just . . .]

Exasperated by the topic of discussion, one student finally blurts out:

Tabalhar, trabalhar, sacrificar sua vida para ganhar uma miséria, não dá!
[Work, work, make sacrifices all your life to make a miserable living, it can't be!]

This classroom dialogue demonstrates a problematizing approach to teaching that the Inter Project sought to promote and that indeed persisted at Habib School after the end of the PT tenure. In this particular script of a dialogic classroom, the teacher allows students to consistently voice their opinions about the subject matter and to reflect on its relevance to their own experience. Even when a child relates a personal story, the teacher validates that student's participation.

This kind of dialogic exchange is exemplary of many similar student-teacher discussions encountered in classrooms participating in the Inter Project. North American critical pedagogue Ira Shor aptly defines such pedagogic practice as a form of desocialization in as much as such "critical democratic dialogue questions traditional classroom relations, teacher-talk, unilateral authority, and the official syllabus [. . .]" He further elaborates on what should happen in a desocializing classroom in order to promote critical dialogue as the basis of the development of an educational counter-culture. Shor writes:

The thoughts of students on the subject are the point at which critical dialogue begins. Those thoughts are social outcomes learned in mass culture and the traditional curriculum. two socializing agencies. In a desocializing class, existing knowledge is examined with the goal of gain-

ing critical distance on what has been absorbed uncritically in school and every day life.⁸

Vivid examples of such learning abounded at Habib School.

Teachers' Assessments of the Inter Project

As with those in other schools, the teachers at Habib School held a range of opinions about the Inter Project and implemented it with varying levels of success and fidelity in their classrooms. Interestingly, a distinctive feature at this school was less whether to engage with the Project than how to understand it and utilize its principles. Though the teachers had several outlets where they could negotiate a shared understanding—most notably the formation group meetings—dissension and competing points of view still remained, as the following profiles illustrate.

JENNY: An articulate and motivated educator in her early forties, Jenny worked two jobs: as a principal at a school in the state system and as a Portuguese language teacher in the municipal system. Educated throughout her life in private elite institutions, she studied under Franciscan nuns during her secondary and teacher training. Despite her high level of education [two college degrees, one in Language Interpretation and another in Pedagogy], she claimed that the combined salaries she received from her two jobs as a teacher and a principal were not enough to keep her in the profession. It was her sense of responsibility to serving her country which motivated Jenny to remain committed to working as an educator.

Jenny purported to hold "progressive educational beliefs." In fact, she was observed employing up-to-date teaching methods in her classroom reminiscent of the cool efficiency of North American models (e.g., mastery learning). Her students sat in a very orderly manner at tidy desks and followed her well organized lessons faithfully. Still, she cited Freire as essential to understanding the role of education in contemporary Brazilian society, and although she did not position herself completely in line with the PT's political or educational philosophy, she had this to say about the Inter Project in the municipal schools:

I believe that the authors that deal with education by means of transformation are the ones that have more to offer in terms of solutions to our social problems, because education is very close to that social aspect. I believe that education is the very basis of things, of the comprehension, of the consciousness of the individual, in the formation of his/her citizenship so that he/she acts within the society, fighting for his/her rights, complying with his/her duties, demanding his/her rights . . . I believe that it is one of the three points of the infrastructural tripod of a country—

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education—if not the most important aspect of the country's infrastructure. This project gave us an outlet, a change in what was going on in terms of education in the city, I believe it was even a somewhat radical change for many of us who were still working with a different methodology, another line of thinking. But in the process of its implementation it demonstrated results, changes in the behavior of our children, a greater degree of conscientization that the project was bringing about on an individual basis. I feel this to be extremely important, a conscientization of oneself and of the society, because the children did modify themselves. They stopped destroying things in the school and began to perceive the school as a space to which they have a right and which is theirs. It is not a public space to be anarchized and vandalized but a space of the people, for the people's development.

For the most part, Jenny viewed the Inter Project in a positive light, but not without expressing her reservations about its feasibility and recognizing the limitations entailed in its implementation on a large scale. In this regard she argued:

The public school implies something very large. That thing that is so large is difficult to reach. It can be accomplished at the level of obligatory implementation [of a given reform], in other words, all should follow specific educational guidelines established by the administration. But this does not guarantee by any stretch of the imagination that all will be affected by the internal changes [brought on by the reform]. People can be changing merely externally and continue not to work out the school's [curriculum] within the Inter [Project] and not authentically engage in the change process. Therefore we need not measure how much this administration affected schools in terms of the system as a whole. The system is very large. Yes, there was wide-spread implementation of the Project but with many effectively continuing without having a real consciousness about it.

Jenny's observations synthesize well what both the NAE personnel and teachers who enthusiastically supported the project came to recognize: the Project's implementation was uneven within schools and across the system due to the inability or unwillingness of teachers to fully comprehend its design. To a large extent, teachers agreed to work with the Project without really understanding what it was about. This lack of consciousness on the part of some teachers speaks again to their limited training and high degree of professional burnout that can be associated with the broader conditions of the Brazilian economy and society. For instance, many teachers are forced to work at more than one school to make a living

wage [as was the case with Jenny], rendering them with little time and energy for the intensive work and analytical processes required for planning and carrying out an interdisciplinary curriculum via a generative theme.

MAGDA: Magda spoke candidly of how much she had enjoyed working in the municipal system for the past 17 years as an art teacher. Well-educated in her field, she received training in design, plastic arts, art education, and pedagogy at four different post-secondary Institutions, including the Faculdade de Bellas Artes, São Paulo. For the past six years she had to work in both the municipal and state system, as have many of her colleagues in the face of dwindling teachers' salaries and skyrocketing inflation. In the past, she worked in private schools and in art schools teaching design. Her experience in the municipal school system is extensive and includes early involvement in the organization of the municipal system's *supletivo* [adult night school].

Despite her extensive professional experience, Magda, true to her artistic self, offered the following simple answer when asked to identify the theoretical influences in her pedagogy: "I am very much me [. . .] I have a broad formation in the arts, I also do theater, cinema, television, advertising-media. I understand a little of each area. So each year I go along according to the interests of my students, I'm used to not having a static plan."

Given her flexible approach to curriculum planning, Magda was very open to the idea of creating a curriculum according to a generative theme selected each semester. She recognized, however, that the initial change in curriculum structure did not sit as well with her students. She recalled that the first reaction of her students when the system [of the Inter Project] was implanted was one of resistance. According to her Magda, her students "did not know what was going on, they asked to be taught subjects, they thought they were not receiving any lessons in any subject matter. They would say 'Everything is great, but when are classes starting?'" But with the passage of time, Magda pointed out, her students became conscientized to the purpose of working in this new manner. They began to understand the Project and eventually, in her estimation, came to fully accept the proposal. She elaborated on her students' change in attitude:

The fact that they perceived that all that was formulaic and neatly presented to them before gave them a false sense of security since they had something concrete to memorize and to answer. Now [with the Inter Project] they had to research, look for things, investigate, they had to develop their own opinions about things. This made them feel insecure. Then they felt they were being challenged, called upon to respond. They had to react. It was no longer something comfortable, a finished product that

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was passed on to them, they had to look for [their own answers]. They came to like the Project very much.

For Magda, in addition to the students' eventual acceptance and enjoyment of the challenges that the Inter Project presented for them, its relative success at Habib School had to do with the fact that there already existed a firm sense of teacher camaraderie which matched up well with the Projects' principle of collective work. "At this school we have a very strong bond of friendship among the teachers. Specifically at level II [intermediate grades] we have a community of teachers, and the Inter came to reinforce that spirit that already existed among us."

Teacher-student relations improved significantly as well. Traditional distances between teachers and students diminished as a result of the methodologies of dialogue and continuous problematization of students' reality which were introduced into the classroom with the onset of the Inter Project. Magda commented on related changes in teacher practice, specifically in teachers' perception of their students, that occurred with the Project's onset:

From the traditional approach the teacher says to the student 'you are over there, I am over here. I am the supreme authority you need to respect and obey me. But there are some teachers that understood that concept [suggested by the Project], that we need to give a space for the student to open up because you are going to work with the discourse of your students. It is not just the preliminary investigation that you do. The investigation needs to take place on a daily basis, you have to always analyze what the student says in order to work with that material, to modify [your classes] along the way. There are still teachers that resist, but that isn't the majority, at least in this school.

Finally, she identified the role of the Pedagogic Coordinator as key in the successful development of the Project at any given site. Although she felt that Habib School was fortunate to have an excellent CP who was able to understand the Project theoretically and guide the staff in its implementation, "because if she [the CP] does not have the ability to comprehend the process, nothing comes of it, the teachers are going to feel lost. Here at this school we have that."

Interestingly, she cited lack of support from school's administrative staff [i.e., the school secretaries and support personnel] as the source of greatest resistance toward the Project at Habib School. They failed to see the validity if the educational work teachers were carrying out within the Inter Project. Magda attributes their rejection to a bureaucratic mindset :

"They do not understand the flexibility we have in the classes and the liberty that the students have to have [in this Project]. They tell us that 'you're just having a good time while we have to work' . . . that we are making money without doing anything." As a result of this disapproval, Magda reported that the administrative staff would use the few punitive controls they had on teachers. For instance, "if we arrived one minute late they would discount us a point." The situation deteriorated to the point that the school principal had to intervene to ensure that teachers were being paid for the hours they put into the Project.

Similar to many other teachers who agreed with the Project in principle and made an effort to implement the new curriculum, Magda bemoaned the limited technical support that the NAE personnel were able to provide as a result of the Project's rapid expansion through out the municipal system. To address this problem Magda suggested that NAE should have created a central unit where teachers could go access resources, such as teaching materials and videos, and receive direct technical assistance.

In light of these and other perceived shortcomings of the PT's administration of the municipal schools, she had this to say:

They had all the good intentions, they were qualified with great capabilities, but they were too few to be able to attend to the needs of all the schools. This is a process that is merely being initiated, if there were time to continue . . . We hope to have that opportunity to continue, now that we are facing a change in government . . . I have an enormous fear. If the candidate from the PT wins he will surely continue the Project, but if the other wins, he is of the authoritarian party, connected to the former military regime, so he has another position, he doesn't accept this openness. They are of that system that believes the teacher needs to remain in the classroom and teach that which is programmed for them to teach. [According to such a position] the people don't need to be critical, they need to obey.

Despite the threat of a change of administration in late 1992, Magda held firm to the belief that the Project had fundamentally changed the way she and other teachers perceived their role as educators. She offered the following optimistic view of the perseverance of the Project's essential elements into the future:

I don't believe it will disappear because the teachers who are in the Project have a different outlook. They were transformed, we've had a certain liberty and whoever has had a taste of that liberty will never accept returning to that old pattern. It may be that from above, the Secretariat, there is a change in policy. But in the classroom we will never have the same

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mindset. The type of class we teach will never be the same, so I think in that way a little seed will remain: [from which will continue to evolve] a new kind of class, a new way of treating the students, and living out their problems.

FRANCISCO: Among the teachers most enthusiastic about the Inter Project at Habib school was a fourth grade teacher, Francisco. He exemplified what could be called a "militant educator" in contemporary Brazil. Born and raised in the impoverished neighborhood where he still teaches, he took his role as an educator as part and parcel of his political work in defense of the rights of his community. Illustrative of his educational militancy was the fact that in addition to his day time shift at Habib School, he was an active participant in a night-time adult literacy training group that formed part of MOVA, the literacy movement initiated by Freire's administration.

A 24-year-old husband and father of two, Francisco lives and works in the southern periphery of São Paulo. His tired, but otherwise young face reflects the hardships of his daily life and his battle to become a school teacher despite having been born in the heart of slums. He spoke candidly of his harsh up-bringing: "As for myself, I never had a mother, she left when I was three. I had many stepmothers. I lived in a little shack that was falling apart. I would get food to eat from the floor of the street market . . . [Growing up in poverty] I have learned above all to love people for who they are not for what they bring, without concern for their social position. We all have value, through education you need to discover your own value in order to learn to grow."

Consequently, Francisco's students respected him because he fully respected them as equals in the larger struggle to build a better school, city and life together. His own struggle to become educated despite adverse conditions had a marked effect on his political-pedagogical vision:

I live the same reality as my students, I live here in the periphery. I didn't attend college because in this country it is exorbitantly expensive which make university access prohibitive for many. I completed magisterio [normal school training] two years ago and I intend to study Law or even Pedagogy, but it will be difficult for me to attend the university. You work all day . . . even when I was in high school . . . I went to classes in the morning, worked at the bank all afternoon . . . I would come home to no running water and would barely have a cup to drink and still have to do my homework for the next day. This has made me understand my students better. That experience also made me search out the reason behind the school failure of most children. School failure is related to the life conditions of the student . . . no food, no one to watch over them, no mother,

no father. To make matters worse [at school] the child remains on the outside, receiving information that is not relevant to him . . .

When Francisco arrived at Habib School, the Inter Project had already been initiated. Still he witnessed the early stages of its development at another school where he had previously worked as a substitute teacher. He immediately found that the Inter Project matched well with his own convictions of the transformative role of education in Brazilian society: "I am a son of the periphery, a child of the public school, so how could I not embrace something that spoke of my own life."

Not surprisingly, Francisco agreed with the Inter Project's premise of departing from the students' local reality, especially when teaching children of poor working class neighborhoods in a city like São Paulo. Accordingly, he argued, "there is no point in talking about Paris if the student lives in *Missionaria* or *Jardim Miriam* [two low income districts near Habib School] and doesn't even know about Santo Amaro [a neighboring commercial district]." Also in accordance with the Project's pedagogical perspective, he viewed his students as "active subjects" in this learning process and conceived the role of the teacher as a catalyst for the conscientization of his students. To this end, he believed that "the teacher has to use his or her creativity to take advantage of what exists concretely in the classroom. You have to speak the language of the student, the popular language."

Francisco's remarks reflected a particular stance regarding the nature and purpose of dialogical interaction that the Inter Project intended to cultivate in the classroom. At the same time, he argued that the role of a liberatory educator is not to make excuses for why their underprivileged students can't learn; instead, Francisco insisted, teachers should help their students understand their life conditions in order to awaken their desire to change those conditions. He elaborated on this point in a forthright manner: "You shouldn't say to her, 'look you don't have this and that, therefore you are incapable. It's to the contrary, because you don't have those [material] things you need to demonstrate your capabilities. You have to reverse the process.'"

In Francisco's eyes, the Inter Project's goal of educating for conscientization is realized by employing the Freireian principle of the generative theme. For him the generative theme is a problem that stands out for the community, but it does not stop there. The educator's role is to problematize the significant situation for the community that is embodied in the generative theme. He explained for example, that if the generative theme is "violence" [which was the case at Habib during the Projects' implementation there in 1992], then the teacher must construct his or her cur-

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riculum around a series of "significant questions" such as: "What types of violence am I talking about?"; "How do I commit violence?"; "What factors make that violence intimidating for the community, for individuals?"; "What other values are hiding behind the problem of violence?" He asserts: "It's not enough for you to just look at the problem. You have to look at the causes and what can be done to transform the process. So the generative theme is a challenge for revision." Apparently, Francisco directly associated the pedagogic use of a generative theme [as the axis of an interdisciplinary curriculum] with what he held as a political imperative to address social problems through a process of collective conscientization and transformative action. From such a position the school becomes an essential element in the struggle for social justice and a critical citizenry. In his own words:

That is why I say the work of school cannot be limited within four walls, because from the moment that you are within four walls, you are alienating the student. There is no point in handing children books to read if they are not understanding what is happening on their own street. So, only [by] departing from her [the child's] daily life experience can we form a critical citizen and [instill] the idea of the right to citizenship.

When asked how his experience in the Inter Project affected his educational practice, Francisco again demonstrated a decisively critical stance. Within the Inter Project, Francisco insisted "you don't approach history the way society wants, the way society determines that it happened. You become a teacher-researcher. You work at searching for means and artifices to demonstrate to the student that the history that is there is an alienating history, and that there is another history of people who contributed but were simply erased from our history." Hence, he questioned [as did the PT-MSE] conventional notions of what constitutes valid knowledge and recognized the presence of a history and knowledge outside the "official" discourse that needs to be taken into account within the transformative classroom.

In addition, like many of his colleagues at Habib School, Francisco reported enhanced professional interaction among teachers as a result of the Inter Project's implementation; but at the same time, he pointed out that the Project failed to achieve the objective of promoting community involvement in the school's educational program. Francisco attributed this increased unity within the teaching staff at the school to the collective hour, introduced with the Inter Project: "because teachers now have a specific time to sit and discuss, analyze and review things together. Suddenly the concerns that before were yours alone, became the concerns of everybody."

Although the greater task of galvanizing the community around a movement to build a popular public school was yet to be undertaken, Francisco believed that the Inter Project provided the necessary ground work for that process to begin: "We are taking steps. We cannot say that we have effectively achieved unity [with the community] because we haven't. Its a gradual process . . . because we have had years and years of traditionalism." The Inter Project therefore signified a first step to changing not only the frame of mind that teachers have of their work and of the school's role, but also entailed a shaking up of the traditional perceptions of the school held by the community.

Francisco was one of the few teachers interviewed who positioned himself as strongly sympathetic to the Workers' Party and its over all project to build a popular public school aimed at the education of a critical and participatory citizenry. Unlike many of his colleagues for whom the Project's association with a PT administration made them suspicious of its intentions which they perceived as intrinsically partisan and ultimately undesirable, for Francisco the PT association gave the curriculum reform program immediate validity. He passionately articulated his position with the following words: "The PT is a government of the workers, which is precisely how it differentiates itself from previous municipal governments. The PT is a party with a very beautiful history. There were years of struggle and conquests. This is why I wear the PT star on my shirt, because I believe that when something is good we must announce it." [He refers to the Party's insignia—a red star with the initials PT in white—commonly worn during the mayoral election campaign in progress in October of 1992]. Like other PT supporters in the municipal schools, Francisco was very conscious of the fact that if the party lost the elections, it would most surely mean the end of the Inter Project.

Summary: Project Impact

Students in a seventh grade class who, by 1992, had experienced two years of schooling under the Inter Project at Habib School, reflected on the Project's relative success in achieving its goal of enhancing students' critical consciousness. These students were very articulate in expressing their comprehension of Brazil's social and economic conditions and how the Inter Project had helped them to relate school knowledge to their current situation. They understood the Project's principles of collective work and dialogic exchange well and were quite satisfied with its effect on how and what they were learning. Accordingly, they made statements such as, "We learn more with the Inter Project"; "What we learn stays more in your head"; "It has to do with our lives." Students were able to give specific examples

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of how their classroom had changed; for example, one student related that in her English class they had translated rap songs and discussed the strong cultural ties between Brazil and the United States and the effects of "cultural imperialism." "Look at us!" she exclaimed, "we all wear jeans and 'tennis,' we all want to look like Americans." Although such revelations were certainly not novel, in the eyes of the students, they were born from their experience of critical dialogue carried out in their classrooms under the pedagogic-political umbrella of the Inter Project. More importantly, when the question as to what was their ideal school was posed to students their answers resonated with the PT-MSE's broader objectives of creating a popular public school through the promotion of a critical consciousness and commitment to community: in general they projected the utopia of a school where all are united, working and learning together, not in competition, but in solidarity to build a better future.

Habib School was one of the sites at which follow up fieldwork was conducted in 1994. As a result, the impact of the Inter Project can be discussed in concrete terms, analyzing the elements of the Project that remained despite the change in administration. It should be noted once more that several of the NAE-6 personnel were on staff at Habib School prior to 1989 and returned following the 1992 elections, certainly bringing with them their expertise and enthusiasm for the reforms of the previous administration. The vignette that follows describes a meeting among a group of teachers as they develop a generative theme, two years after the PT electoral defeat.

Collective Analysis of the School Reality. The small group of nine teachers (seven women and two men) discussed, often heatedly, the data they had collected through a series of interviews with residents in the neighborhood. Reading aloud from notebooks, the participants shared the various statements of the residents and codified them as they went along. For example, a streetwise statement recorded from a youth in the neighborhood was, "the trick is not to get mixed up with the drug dealers and criminals," which was categorized as "security." Other categories included "health," "hygiene," "housing," "leisure," "transportation," "schooling," and "social relations." Once the data was categorized, the team constructed an extensive table of the different categories with corresponding fragments of the community's discourse.

At a second meeting the group worked collectively to determine the significant situations revealed in the data. At one point during this meeting teachers discussed the contradictory nature of the statements made by the community. For example, one teacher pointed out how the same person who observed that "the neighborhood is calm" later stated that he is "afraid of the neighborhood." Others present at the meeting questioned

the categorization of particular items; for example, one teacher in the group questioned whether the statement "the people on the hill ruin everything" [referring to residents of a poorer section of the neighborhood] should be considered as falling under the category of security or of social relations? In other words, did the statement represent a discriminatory position against the poorer people who live on the hill or did it express a legitimate concern for the criminal activity that emanates from that part of the neighborhood?

With regard to another epigrammatic expression from a community member, "peace with god and the devil," a teacher [and former NAE Inter Team member] remarked emphatically, "that one is very significant" drawing attention to how it represents a survival strategy for those community members who are law abiding but at the same time revere the criminals with whom they are forced to coexist. As a result of this interactive and dynamic process of collective analysis, a set of significant situations were identified and a consensus reached as to the generative theme around which to construct the curriculum.

This level of commitment to the Inter Project—represented in these teachers' willingness to continue to carry out a Study of Reality to derive a generative theme and design an interdisciplinary curriculum despite the new administration's efforts to discredit and discontinue the PT curriculum reform—is significant. Nevertheless, these observations should be tempered by the impressions of other teachers who also remained.

For instance, in a follow-up interview in 1994, Francisco was more critical in his reflections of the successes and limitations of the PT reform experience. Like others, he cited the institution of the JTT⁹ and cycles as two factors that worked against the Project's development in the final months of the PT tenure. Also, he saw the theoretical murkiness of the proposal as ultimately casting a cloud on its future. He explains: "The proposal was not clearly defined. Things often remained at the level of theory, I didn't always feel that they were being practiced, the teachers often didn't know how that theory was useful in the classroom. [In this sense], the NAE committed a sin, they should have done it in a different way. Instead of sitting us down to discuss theories they should have given us more concrete methods." Still he recognizes the positive impact of the Inter Project in as much as "it turned teachers into researchers . . . if they were willing they could become active participants in the process of educational planning. The Secretariat saw teachers as professionals and as professionals they had their rights as well as their obligations. [Consequently,] teachers discovered they were professionals, not baby-sitters."

Despite these negative assessments, Francisco concluded with the following remarks: "the Inter Project offered the conditions to put into practice all my aspirations as an educator. I never perceived myself as only a

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teacher, I've always seen myself as someone who stood beside my students. I never merely passed knowledge to them but engaged in a reflection of lived practice, my own as much as theirs." Reflecting on the general experience of the Inter Project, Francisco remained steadfast in his belief in education as a transformative tool: "As an educator I do not like to maintain a partisan outlook. I am not of the PT, I have no formal ties to the party, but I believe in some of the proposals of the PT. I believe in the public school as a space for changing society."

It is clear, based on the work that Habib's staff did during the PT-MSE and their perseverance after the PT's defeat, that their commitment to the democratic transformation of society was very strong, at least among a core group of faculty. Though each of the teachers profiled in this case expressed their solidarity with the popular public school in different ways, they each reflect the type of "responsible" educator that Freire describes¹⁰ who works with clarity about their political values and in a manner that reflects coherence between these values and their educational practice.

Praise for

EDUCATION AND DEMOCRACY

"At the age of 68 Paulo Freire, one of the most influential educational thinkers of our times, became education secretary of the municipality of São Paulo. This book is a fascinating and committed account of the efforts he led to expand educational opportunity in this major urban center in Latin America. Relying on an enlightening combination of analysis of documentary evidence, interviews, observations and theoretical discussions the authors offer an insightful story of the results of implementing three key efforts of Freire's administration from 1989 until 1991 and beyond in the areas of curriculum reform (Interproject), parental participation in school management and a literacy movement (MOVA). The discussion of the strategy to build alliances between the State and non-governmental organizations and social movements and of Freire's efforts to promote the value of teachers as agents of educational change provides lessons to all interested in the reconstruction of education in Latin America. This book should be required reading for all interested in the practical implications of Freire's ideas and in a Pedagogy of Hope."

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