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Ending Generational Poverty: A Contemporary Application of the Work of Paulo Freire in Nicaragua, Los Angeles and Uganda

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**Ending Generational Poverty: A Contemporary Application of the Work of Paulo Freire in
Nicaragua, Los Angeles and Uganda**

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SIT Nicaragua: Fall 2010

Location of Primary Research:

Pearl Lagoon, Nicaragua; Los Angeles, California; Kampala, Uganda

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I. Introduction

Choice Magazine deemed Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of Hope* "a scholarly defense of the radical liberal position." Though this work is, as the subtitle reveals, widely-known as Freire's reliving of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the latter of the two books has value in the sole fact that it is a classic, that it contains the original educational theories of this celebrated critical pedagogy theorist: "According to Stanley Aronowitz, [*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*] 'meets the single criterion of a "classic" in that it has outlived its own time and its author.'"¹ While the book has met with much criticism due to its openly radical nature, there are countless theories that—with fine tuning to adapt to the effects of the natural progression of time—prove extremely relevant and valuable when searching for the means to educating marginalized populations today. While illiterate adults constitute the target population for the revolution that Freire calls for in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, there is a point toward the end of the piece where the author extends his argument to children: "If children reared in an atmosphere of lovelessness and oppression, children whose potency has been frustrated, do not manage during their youth to take the path of authentic rebellion, they will either drift into total indifference, alienated from reality by the authorities and the myths the latter have used to 'shape' them; or they may engage in forms of destructive action."² In these short sentences, Freire pinpoints the dilemma of children not only in the developing world, but among oppressed populations worldwide. Without the resources for said rebellion, disheartening quantities of children turn to drugs and violence in misguided attempts to "get something out of" the societies that have failed them. In addition to stating that this "admittedly tentative work is for radicals," the author admits to not having first-hand experience with the revolutionary cultural action that he promotes. He thus urges his readers to

¹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2000) 11.

² *Ibid.* 155.

correct his mistakes, misunderstandings and omissions.³ While this may not have been the author's intention, the aforementioned sentence regarding the potential responses to oppression among youth provides an opening for a more current, perhaps de-radicalized, reading of this book as it applies to alternative methods of education among youth in marginalized societies worldwide.

In order to decrease the rate of generational poverty in marginalized populations, alternative educational and social service models must be explored, as preexisting approaches have not shown an ability to significantly decrease the prevalence of this phenomenon. Despite vast differences in geography, and the socioeconomic standing of the respective home countries of the organizations, the following educational institutions and organizations share certain philosophical underpinnings, many of which correspond to theories posed by Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, that yield effective practices in serving marginalized populations: Pearl Lagoon's Academy of Excellence in Pearl Lagoon, Nicaragua; Camino Nuevo Charter Academy in Los Angeles, California; Amagezi Gemaanyi Youth Association in Kampala, Uganda. The three educational and service models employed at these schools and organizations demonstrate various approaches to helping a marginalized population integrate and avoid the continued cycle of poverty. The prevalence of shared conditions despite the geo-political variance among these entities attests to the need for alternative intervention on a worldwide level, and the shared principles at the core of each of these approaches—which will, again, be examined through an analysis of the central theories of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*—may serve as transformational insight for more traditional models that have often been unsuccessful in their attempts to truly educate marginalized populations living in generational poverty.

³ Freire 39.

II. Methodology

Due to the comparative nature of this piece, the methods and procedures for conducting the research varied in each country. Though the Nicaragua portion was technically carried out last, it is the guiding section of the paper and the methodology for this portion will thus be analyzed first. I arrived in Pearl Lagoon, Nicaragua, on November 10th, 2010 and, due to the imminent end of classes and, consequently, a limited time frame for me to observe in the classroom, I was forced to immediately conduct observations. Though I was initially uncomfortable with having my procedure determine itself in this way, this ended up having a positive outcome for several reasons.

On my first day in the community, Marlene Hebbert, Principal of Pearl Lagoon's Academy of Excellence, brought me to the fifth grade classroom, as I wanted to work with one of the older groups and sixth graders were no longer in classes due to their upcoming graduation. Ms. Hebbert introduced me to the teacher and the fifth graders before leaving me to hit the ground running with my observations. This was extremely helpful in gaining rapport with the students, as my presence in the class allowed the children to slowly warm up to me, while still maintaining the unobtrusive quality that I sought in placing myself in the back of the class. Furthermore, conducting observations during my first week helped mold and structure my questions for the interviews that I would later conduct with students and staff.

My classroom observations were non-participant and unstructured, as I wanted to allow the teacher's practices and students' behavior in class to unfold naturally. I thus entered the setting without a specific goal or preconceived beliefs regarding the topics I might encounter or address in my work, a system that also helped in avoiding bias. Furthermore, the unstructured nature of my observations served me in figuring out how my theoretical framework—Freire's

Pedagogy of the Oppressed—would fit into my work, without hindering the originality of the research. My analysis of the book was in the context of the reality I was in during my first few days in Pearl Lagoon, thus allowing the foci of my observations to mold my reading of Freire’s theories and aiding me in avoiding the reverse, which again could have significantly altered my interpretation or the actual direction of my research. In summary, the timing and structure of my observations allowed for the implementation of my contemporary interpretation of Freire’s ideas, without trying to mold or fit what I was observing into the fixed structure of this theorist’s arguments. The guiding foci that aided me in this process are as follows: actors, acts, goals and feelings. While I interpreted students’ feelings based on their verbal behavior, making such interpretations without participating and interacting with students could have symbolized the projection of my own thoughts on the observed sample. I tried to counter this, however, by confirming my interpretations with students and teachers in the interviews I conducted later in the process.

Ms. Hebbert and her Pedagogical Assistant, Lisa Powell, were the gatekeepers in the process of gaining entrée in the community and the school, specifically in terms of my entry into the classroom environment. This helped me gain rapport with these influential women, and they quickly became key actors for the rest of the research process in Pearl Lagoon. Powell and Hebbert did not, however, wield much power over the results of my observations nor my work in general, as our meetings were largely logistically driven, rather than content based. Ultimately, this served as a strategy for alleviating bias when I later interviewed the two women, as I had not discussed with them the intricacies of my theoretical framework nor what I was looking for in their school. In order to keep with this unimposing strategy—aimed toward gaining the most truthful insight into the inner-workings of the school— I chose to conduct semi-structured

interviews with all of my informants. I went into my interviews with a guide containing rather specific questions, but I did not want the guide to hinder interviewees' sense of freedom and ability to guide the interview with information they found important. As a result, I readily went out of order, added follow-up questions, and removed questions I had previously deemed necessary, as the rhythm and direction of the interview became clear.

In order to actively employ the use of triangulation and provide more depth to my research, I interviewed people that occupied a wide range of social placements within the context of my work, such as students, teachers, administration and representatives from government institutions in the community (with which the school has little affiliation). Furthermore, the comparative nature of my research allows for an interesting use of triangulation, as I used previously conducted research, and the methods and time frame for each piece of the research varied greatly. Though the foundation of the work I had done in Uganda and Los Angeles—last summer and last fall, respectively—coincided quite well with the project that was evolving in Pearl Lagoon, the addition of Freire's work as the theoretical background added a new element, thus making it necessary for me to return to the sources I consulted in my previous work.

Because my CNCA research was a finished project with a bit of a different angle than this current project, I had to restructure the research slightly to fit the theoretical framework but, again, this was not difficult, as the findings so closely matched those of PLACE. In terms of matching the findings to Freire's work, this also did not prove to be very difficult, as I was openly doing a contemporary reading that I was placing in the First World context. In terms of the Uganda portion, I had not gone to the country with a specific research project but ended up working in a school and conducting some basic, unstructured participant observation there. For this project, I then had to conduct official interviews with AGYA members, all of which required

the use of technology due to my being out of the country—which was also true for CNCA follow-up work. This was, in some senses, a limitation, as I was unable to work face-to-face with interviewees. However, the fact that this was only an extension of previous work alleviates many of the potential limitations in this regard. Nevertheless, there were, of course, other limitations throughout the process.

One limitation for the Los Angeles section is I had not conducted participant observations that were relevant to this project. I considered using participant observations from the Intervention class that I taught fifth graders, however, I felt that my deep involvement and authority in structuring the way the class was conducted would have led to a bias and would not have been a reflection upon the school but on the methodology I decidedly employed. Luckily, however, the interviews I conducted with students and staff, as well as the addition of the school's Charter as a main source for understanding the theory behind this model, proved to be enough information to analyze the school's contemporary application of Freire's theories in the developed world. In the Pearl Lagoon portion, one limitation was the language barrier. Interviewees naturally resorted to Creole during interviews, which in some cases meant I had to translate some of their comments to the best of my understanding. While the languages greatly resemble one another, thus making it unlikely that these modifications would have a significant impact on the results, this may have affected the precise accuracy of quotes and information used from these interviews. Furthermore, the assumption that the 5th grade classroom I worked with is representative of the overall school could create another limitation. However, I tried to counter this assumption by aiming to discover the principles that guide teaching methodology and training at the school, which served as an aid in determining whether this teacher's methods were the result of a school-wide effort or an anomaly.

The final aspects of the methodology involved in this project are ethics and my personal influence on the results. In terms of informed consent, the gatekeepers provided permission for classroom observations. To obtain consent for student interviews, I went around the community with interviewees to their homes to speak with their parents, give them background information on my research and ask for permission to interview their children—all of which was logged in my fieldwork journal. Ethical concerns naturally presented themselves throughout the process, but I was conscious in avoiding these concerns as they appeared. For example, one student was visibly growing uncomfortable as the interview progressed and, though I tried to encourage her to continue, thinking she was simply shy, I ended up realizing it was general discomfort and terminating the interview. My goal was to adapt to the situation of my participants and make all parties feel nothing less than comfortable throughout my time in their environment. The same was true for the other sections of the paper, though my work as a teacher at CNCA and a volunteer at AGYA helped me establish a greater sense of rapport with participants, thus creating fewer ethical concerns.

Who I am personally, as well as my personal feelings regarding the subject matter of my research, inevitably affects my research. As someone who plans to enter educational reform and wholeheartedly supports and argues for alternative education in underserved communities that have experienced oppression, I am personally drawn to and inspired by institutions and organizations such as the three that I examine in this work. As a result, I could have easily made the mistake of providing empty praise for these organizations, without doing a sufficient and true examination of what these models' aims are and whether or not these organizations are achieving such goals. However, as my aim in this project is to examine the way in which these institutions are adopting their own version of Freire's work, and determine how this may offer suggestions or

serve as a model for future endeavors, I realize the need for being unbiased and critical when necessary. For this reason, the body of the paper is dedicated to the data and the way in which this is representative of an implementation of Freire's work, while the conclusion focuses on the limitations of these three bodies and how these limitations, as well as experienced successes, may have implications for future leaders and educators of marginalized youth. I tried to remain aware of my passion for the issue and not let that affect the hard data that my research unveiled, which will henceforth be examined in the following order: PLACE in Pearl Lagoon, Nicaragua—to view the application of Freire's ideas in the environment that is most similar to the context in which his work was written; CNCA in Los Angeles, California—to see how his theories are, in fact, applicable in marginalized communities in the developed world; AGYA in Kampala, Uganda—to examine how Freire's ideas apply in a variety of settings that are not limited to traditional school environments.

III. General Historical and Geopolitical Background

After the World Bank adjusted the international poverty line to \$1.25 a day in 2005, research found that 1.4 billion people in the developing world live in poverty. Though the pace of poverty reduction has remained largely constant, the number of poor people in the world is higher than estimated in the past, with one in four people living in poverty in developing nations.⁴ Connections between poverty and low educational-attainment levels are rampant across the world. UNESCO estimates that, between 2005-2008, 130,583,570 youth in the world were illiterate. Illiteracy rates in developed countries during this time period were, according to EFA (Education for All), 578,733, while rates in developing nations exceeded the million mark:

⁴ “New Global Poverty Estimates,” The World Bank, Feb. 2010, 7 Oct. 2010 < <http://www.worldbank.org.in/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/INDIAEXTN/0,contentMDK:21880725~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:295584,00.html>>.

129,882,424.⁵ As a result of this statistically proven phenomenon, it is necessary to explore alternative ways to reach and educate marginalized youth suffering from generational poverty, a life condition that fosters values, which, ultimately, steer children away from education, thus perpetuating this very cycle of poverty.

Pearl Lagoon, Nicaragua

Nicaragua is the second poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. For many Nicaraguans, meeting the most basic of needs is a struggle, as poverty and inequality are rampant in the country. In fact, almost half of the population lives below the poverty line.⁶ According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the gini coefficient for income inequality is 52.3%, meaning that nearly half of the population suffers from the maldistribution of wealth in the country.⁷ Furthermore, the UNDP states that the intensity of deprivation is 51.9%, which indicates that the average poor household is deprived of over half of the weighted indicators. With such an extreme poverty rate, it is of no surprise that the country's focus and expenditure on education is minimal. According to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the total government expenditure on education is 15%.⁸ Though UNESCO states that 92% of Nicaraguan boys and girls attend primary school, only 48% of girls and 42% of boys are in secondary school and the survival rate to grade five is 51%. While UNESCO reports 91% of adults and 96.9% of youth are literate in the country, according to the

⁵ "Regional Literacy Rates for Youths (15-24) and Adults (15+)," UNESCO, 7 Oct. 2010 <<http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=201>>.

⁶ "Country Profile: Nicaragua," USAID, 26 Apr. 2010, 7 Oct. 2010 <[http://www.usaid.gov/locations/latin_america_Caribbean Coast/country/nicaragua/index.html](http://www.usaid.gov/locations/latin_america_Caribbean_Coast/country/nicaragua/index.html)>.

⁷ "Nicaragua: Country Profile of Human Development Indicators," UNDP, 7 Oct. 2010 <<http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/NIC.html>>.

⁸ "UIS Statistics in Brief: Education in Nicaragua," UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 7 Oct. 2010 <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=121&IF_Language=eng&BR_Country=5580>.

UNDP, the mean years of schooling among Nicaraguan adults is 5.716, proving that education is, in many parts of Nicaragua, not among the predominant areas of value or concern.

While the realities of the education system have been grim in many parts of Nicaragua, the attention given to the inordinate amount of difficulties experienced on Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast have, historically, been largely ignored. This history of civil marginalization for the region begins in the 1600's, when the Caribbean Coast was a British Protectorate. Under this agreement, the British were granted access to the plentiful resources of the region and the natives were given protection. In 1860, however, the British signed the Treaty of Nicaragua, which stated that the Caribbean Coast would be returned to Nicaraguan control on the condition that the communities were guaranteed the right to maintain their traditions and create their own laws. In other words, on paper, their customs as indigenous people would be respected. After toppling the last King of the region in 1894, President Jose Santos Zelaya began the process of "Reincorporation" of the Mosquitia—an area that included the indigenous, Caribbean Coast from Honduras to Costa Rica. Though this process was labeled voluntary, it was in fact forcible. From this moment on, it became increasingly apparent that the government was trying to acquire land by whatever means necessary and the long-term, unspoken battle for territory between the Pacific and Atlantic regions of Nicaragua became far more pronounced.⁹

After Zelaya's take over, there was a ten to twelve year period during which the formal education system substantially deteriorated, as classes were to be taught in Spanish and parents

⁹ Information gathered from the following lecture series during the Atlantic Coast Conference:

- a) Johnny Hodgson, "Overview: FSLN Regional Political Secretary," Conf. Series on Atlantic Coast, Bluefields, 5 Oct. 2010.
- b) Pedro Ordonez, "Overview: Legal Representative for the 12 communities of Pearl Lagoon," Conf. Series on Atlantic Coast, Bluefields, 6 Oct. 2010.
- c) Wesley Williams, "Overview: Secretary of the Inter-Sectorial Commission for Demarcation (SID) and Director of the Center of Mediation and Conflict Resolution in Pearl Lagoon," Conf. Series on Atlantic Coast, Bluefields, 7 Oct. 2010.

resisted this “hispanization” and the imposition of an education in a language that was not spoken in the region. During the period from the rule of Zelaya to the forty-three year Somoza dictatorship, education was predominantly organized by churches and social organizations within the region, and thus not by the government. Schools, hospitals, lumber companies, and development efforts in agriculture and fishery were, for the most part, also under the control of the prominent local churches and organizations of the time. This isolation of the Caribbean Coast lasted through the 1960’s and, up until that moment, the region continued to receive outside, non-Nicaraguan influence in its cultural realm. Food, clothing, Blues and Country music entered into the area from North America, specifically Texas and Louisiana. This isolation from the rest of the nation even had a physical manifestation, in that there was no road to integrate the two parts of the country and the only way to get from one end to the other was by crossing the Rio San Juan, traveling by air, or through extensive journeys on small roads. When a highway was built in the 1960’s, however, the Atlantic Coast began to integrate into the Nicaraguan way of life to some extent.

Following the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship and the Triumph of the Sandinistas in 1979, the Caribbean Coast became known as the “Zona Especial” (Special Zone) and the government made efforts to restore the culture of the region. Though Spanish remained the official language, the government officially instituted a bi-lingual education system in efforts to officiate the native languages of the region. Ultimately, however, the system did not come to full fruition, as, due to the amount of civil unrest in the nation at the time, the Sandinista government was unable to see their plans through. The 1987 Autonomy Law, officially established to end this civil territorial struggle, strikes a similar chord of unfulfilled promises. For over a decade, the law was unregulated, as the land-possessing elite of the Pacific did not want to relinquish control

and restore stolen land and rights to their compatriots on the Atlantic Coast. The economy, army and territory of the Atlantic were thus, essentially, still under the control of the Nicaraguan government.¹⁰

After the reincorporation of the Mosquitia, land was largely divided among the people of the State and not among the common people. As a result of the pressure of an unsatisfied people, the government established Law 445 in 2002, which stated that the communal lands of the afro-descendent and indigenous people of the Caribbean Coast would be titled and demarcated in efforts to prevent further loss of territory and the resultant loss of autonomy and culture. However, of the twenty-two territories that were to be demarcated, as of today, only eighteen have successfully gone through the process. According to the region's most recent autonomy evaluation in 2006, the region is exercising a mere 15% of its rights to autonomy. Pearl Lagoon—a region of 12 indigenous and afro-descendent communities, comprised of 6 ethnic groups—is one such community that has yet to be fully granted its territory and its autonomy as a region of the indigenous and afro-descendent inhabitants of Nicaragua.¹¹

The current socioeconomic and educational standing of many Pearl Lagoon citizens highlights the current-day perpetuation of the region's historically disadvantaged position. According to Alan Sandoval, Director of Planning at the Mayor's Office in Pearl Lagoon, statistics discovered through a diagnostic study carried out in 2008 support his theory that the regional lack of job creation is maintaining the municipality's status as an extremely impoverished region. Of the 10,676 inhabitants recorded in the 2008 study, 30.2% were deemed poor and 61.2% were placed in the category of extreme poverty, with two to three weekly hours of work, at most. Unsurprisingly, educational attainment is greatly affected by these extreme

¹⁰ Conf. Series on Atlantic Coast.

¹¹ Ibid.

rates of poverty. 10-15% of the municipality is reported as being completely illiterate, especially among the Mestizo population—58% of the overall population—whose youth tend to work the field beginning at a very young age. Despite a population that is largely comprised of children and adolescents, 60%, only three of the seventeen communities have secondary schools, meaning that a majority of the youth receive no more than a 6th grade education, if any education at all.

With 80% of the population relying on remittances, it is of no surprise that Pearl Lagoon has easily fallen prey to drugs and violence. Beginning in the late 70's and early 80's, cocaine has become a problem that still afflicts the region today. As boats send packages of cocaine through trafficking routes from the South to the North, they inevitably pass through the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua. Whenever the Coast Guard detects such a boat, the traffickers are forced to dump the drugs they are carrying before continuing on their way. As fishing is the livelihood of the majority in the Pearl Lagoon area, many fishermen began finding the drugs as they drifted inland. Once it was discovered that narcotics officers would pay 5000 cordobas per kilogram of cocaine, many fisherman took to producing crack to mix with the cocaine in efforts to reap more benefits for turning in the discovered narcotics. As a result of the production of drugs in the region, many young people have become addicted and theft and violence have peaked over the past two decades. Though the United States government has become aware of the situation and monitors ships and boats passing the waters near the region, making trafficking more difficult, the local government has yet to be successful in fighting the drug problem in the community. Hard data and social facts such as all of the above, both historical and prevailing, prove the necessity of studies examining the current educational system, where it is failing its

youth, and where it may, in fact, be succeeding in truly educating and providing better life alternatives for this marginalized population.¹²

IV. Research in Pearl Lagoon, Nicaragua

The moment in which the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua became a British Protectorate was a crucial time for the communities in this part of the country, a time whose effects are, in many ways, still prevalent today. This historical moment could be interpreted as the origin of the Atlantic Coast's constant necessity to be supported by other more stable and prosperous regions and nations. This economic and political dependence contributes to a widely seen underestimation of the power that this society has to evoke change in its various communities. This misunderstanding or underestimate of power may be a factor in the lack of mobilization in the region on an internal level, which may also be a contributor to the extremely slow pace and amount of difficulty of the autonomy process. However, today, though the struggle for autonomy continues, various communities on the Atlantic Coast have made several advancements in correcting the defective aspects of their political and social systems that are inhibiting the attainment of a true autonomy. One such community, Pearl Lagoon, is still engaged in the search for its own voice and ability to create change, however the community seems to have fulfilled the first step of this process by reaching an agreement regarding the most effective vehicle for evoking such change: education. Nevertheless, the pathway out of a system that Freire terms "antidialogical" is both long and complex and various theoretical dimensions must be addressed to examine whether or not an alternative approach is truly doing away with such a system.

Antidialogical action has the following fundamental characteristics: the necessity for

¹² Wesley Williams, Informal Interview, "Historical and Social Realities of Pearl Lagoon," 22 Nov. 2010.

conquest, divisive tactics, manipulation and cultural invasion.¹³ Throughout history, the Caribbean Coast has been a victim of such action. The 1860 Treaty of Nicaragua is one of the first manifestations of the antidiological action that has, for so long, dominated the region. According to Freire, “within certain historical conditions, manipulation is accomplished by means of pacts between the dominant and the dominated classes—pacts which, if considered superficially, might give the impression of a dialogue between the classes.” However, such pacts, in fact, represent false dialogue, as they are one-sidedly dominated by what the author terms the “unequivocal interest of the dominant elites.”¹⁴ Despite the signing of this Treaty, various historical occurrences have demonstrated that the “autonomy” granted the region in this moment was both superficial and false. In 1894, for example, 400 Nicaraguan soldiers arrived on the Caribbean Coast with the false intention of protecting the region from imminent invasions, though the true invasion was that of these very Nicaraguans. The soldiers assumed control and declared themselves the government of the Atlantic Coast, thus initiating the conquest aspect of the process of antidiological action.¹⁵

Facts such as the aforementioned invasion reveal the Atlantic Coast’s propensity for being treated as a possession, first by the British and later by their own compatriots, a phenomenon that can still be detected today. Despite the fact that, in this situation, both the oppressed and the oppressors were technically Nicaraguan, there is an important ethnic distinction between the two groups that makes such conquests not solely matters of power but also of culture. Freire argues that cultural invasion also serves to benefit the attempted conquest of the oppressors. By invading the cultural realm of a foreign group, the invaders suppress any potentialities and creativity that once existed within the culture of the group, which he labels

¹³ Freire 138-152.

¹⁴ Ibid. 147.

¹⁵ Conf. Series on Atlantic Coast.

violence, “whether urbane or harsh.”¹⁶ The resultant Decree of Reincorporation—which occurred after the takeover in 1894—is yet another manifestation of this “violence” or subordination, and the consequences of this reality are still being struggled with today. One such long-term consequence is the negative effect the Reincorporation has had on the region’s education system. Zelaya, the President at the time, wanted classes to be given in Spanish and, as Spanish was never spoken on the Caribbean Coast prior to this takeover, many schools closed and students were forced to discontinue their attendance.¹⁷ As a result, educators of the region have had to reconsider the idea of educating their people and reconstruct the system in a way that would relieve them of the confines of their antidiological past. Unfortunately, however, as Freire highlights, the repercussions of an antidiological system do not fade with ease: “all the actions of the dominant class manifest its need to divide in order to facilitate the preservation of the oppressor state...[or] the system which favors the elite. They are forms of action which exploit, directly or indirectly, one of the weak points of the oppressed: their basic insecurity.”¹⁸ As a result of a successful cultural invasion, the invaded group develops an inferiority complex, which, again, subconsciously creates within the oppressed a lack of faith in their own abilities or, according to Freire, a “fear of freedom.”

Due to a consciousness laden with conformity and unfamiliarity with autonomy and responsibility, the oppressed class is often dominated by this fear of freedom: “Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes a myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion.”¹⁹ In his introduction for the 30th

¹⁶ Freire 152.

¹⁷ Conf. Series on Atlantic Coast.

¹⁸ Freire 144.

¹⁹ Freire 47.

Anniversary Edition of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Donaldo Macedo, Professor of Liberal Arts and Education at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, highlights that this fear of freedom is bred from the battle between the colonized and the colonizer, a battle that has proven to be ongoing on Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast. As a man from Cape Verde who struggled with his cultural identity as a result of Portuguese colonialism, Macedo articulates the characteristics that often accompany a colonized or "borrowed culture." As the "model of humanity," or the "model of manhood" becomes that of the oppressor, the oppressed begins to subconsciously identify with the oppressors when, in reality, they should be contradicting them. This leads to a lack of awareness of self and a failure to realize that these individuals form part of an entire class: the oppressed class.²⁰

After the Triumph of the Sandinistas in 1979, the Sandinista government urged the communities of the Atlantic Coast to define their autonomy and identify the intricacies of which they hoped such freedom would consist. Because the region still did not have a sense of their own voice, citizens had to be urged by the Sandinista government to find this voice, to determine what they wanted for their government and their society. However, despite the Autonomy Law of 1987, the Caribbean Coast remained in its position of subordination, as they were, again, not provided with the necessary tools to truly exercise the rights that had supposedly been granted to them in that year's Constitution. From that day forward and through all of the aforementioned conditions, educators of Pearl Lagoon have had to search for a way to truly engage and educate their people. To really move toward a meaningful autonomy, something that the region has been struggling to achieve for over 100 years, various members of the Pearl Lagoon community began to realize that they would have to take education into their own hands and not wait for the government to do something to address this deep-seated problem. Out of this environment, this

²⁰ Ibid. 46.

need for action on an internal scale, various organizations such as FADCANIC (Foundation for the Autonomy and Development of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua)—the non-governmental organization (NGO) responsible for the creation of Pearl Lagoon’s Academy of Excellence (PLACE), the alternative school that will henceforth be examined —emerged to recuperate the community’s right to educate its people as these very people saw fit.

Before analyzing the effectiveness of this existing alternative model, it is important to investigate the context of the larger educative system of the region, in order to understand the framework within which this alternative functions. In this situation, it is thus imperative to examine the function of the MINED (Ministry of Education) on its various levels: municipal, regional and national. Carmen Dixon is the Municipal Supervisor of the municipal branch of the Nicaraguan MINED. Her task is to work in classrooms, within the 124 schools that are under their jurisdiction, to detect the strengths and difficulties that students and teachers may have. With this information, Dixon is then responsible for devising strategies and methods to address any weaknesses she encounters and, later, following up to verify compliance. Despite the potential of such a position, Dixon admits there are various systemic challenges within this process. In order to do systemic follow-ups, for example, there is a high need for economic resources that Dixon claims the delegation simply does not have. In light of the recent economic crisis that has had worldwide effects, Dixon notes that the response from the national MINED branch regarding this lack of funds has greatly diminished—though there was never a very strong response to begin with. This year’s budget, for example, only provided funding for two school visits. However, due to the personal commitment of the delegation, Dixon and her team often take the money out of pocket in order to go ahead with the necessary visits: “It’s not for the money, it’s for the benefit of tomorrow. When the government doesn’t respond, we take our own

money and go. If you can [better prepare and educate] people, poverty will be minimized and we will have a better future.”²¹

While the municipal delegation seems to have its heart in the right place, restrictions apply even when making such out-of-pocket visits. The structure of the MINED at its various levels is highly bureaucratic, authoritative and anti-dialogical, even despite the supposed autonomy of the region. The central or national branch is, of course, the base; all decisions are made within this upper body, all materials to be used in the classroom must be centrally approved and a national calendar is made by this national branch, despite potential differences in observed holidays due to the cultural differences across the nation. The regional branch—located, in this case, in Bluefields, the nearest city of size in the region—is then responsible for disseminating this information to the municipal branch, which is thus responsible for monitoring that teachers comply with “the structure given at the national level and [capacitating] teachers with any materials given at the national level.”²²

Educational materials create another struggle for the delegation. All materials used in Pearl Lagoon are made locally in Bluefields and are reviewed with the help of international experts. The concept behind this system is that students need to know about their history, the natural resources of their region and their culture; in efforts to provide them with such knowledge, materials must be made by people who reside within that culture. Though this has technically been approved on a national level, little support has been provided to bring this effort to a place of functionality. In fact, Dixon highlights that 40% of material funding is received from the national government and the delegation must look to NGO’s for the remainder.

²¹Carmen Dixon, Personal Interview, “Structure of Municipal MINED and Relationship with PLACE,” 17 Nov. 2010.

²² Ibid.

While history is something the Pearl Lagoon MINED seeks to promote, unfortunately, perpetuations of the more negative aspects of this regional history are creating more hurdles for the organization. Because many students' parents were obligated to receive their education in Spanish, Dixon states, "many refused to go to school and are [illiterate] because of this [decision]." Consequently, parents do not see the value in educating their children and create yet another limitation for the delegation because they are unable to aid their children in their homes and unable to communicate with teachers in the classroom. Despite the fact that the government is, in many senses, not helping their children, "parents see education as a government responsibility" and believe that the "people [receiving] a salary should deal with it." To combat this historically-rooted indifference, MINED seeks to provide parent training and Saturday classes to lower the prevalence of illiteracy and "make parents conscious [of the fact] that this isn't for [or about] the government, but for them and their children." With these efforts, Dixon hopes to reach a place where "parents, students and teachers can speak the same language" and stand united in helping children get an education, "so tomorrow they can live better and be someone better [within] society."

With hopes of compensating for this lack of governmental support, MINED has formed partnerships with various outside organizations. With the help of USAID, the local Mayor's office, various international NGO's and several local organizations—such as Acción Médica Cristiana (a Christian ecumenical health organization) and FADCANIC (whose relationship with the MINED will be further explored in the coming pages)—MINED has been able to pass some programs through the national level. One such program is the current project to improve the bilingual education program in the municipality. This nationally authorized program is attempting to vastly improve the quality and quantity of classroom materials available in the seventeen schools involved in the program. One aspect of this effort that has been controversial

is the standardization of Creole in the classroom, something the delegation is wholeheartedly pushing for. Many parents and local officials believe this unnecessary because they believe English is the language children “need to develop fluently for business and work on cruise ships,” one of the most common outside jobs among young Pearl Lagoon citizens. Dixon, however, argues that Creole is what identifies the community and children should thus be able to read and write *their* language before learning another language. In fact, she argues the mastery of their native tongue will, indeed, aid them in better mastering the English language.

Despite these efforts, Dixon does acknowledge that teachers often teach English courses in Creole and this leads to a significant problem with pronunciation. While MINED does not have funding for the necessary teacher training in this and other areas, the generosity of neighboring projects—such as that of FADCANIC—has, according to Dixon, greatly helped the delegation in this and various other challenging endeavors. Despite the aforementioned challenges, the municipal MINED continues their efforts and looks forward to future projects, such as the opening of a Technical School for education in tourism and the preservation of natural resources, a project Dixon hopes will create better options for children’s futures. After all, as Dixon notes, “education is for a lifetime.” In the meantime, however, additional, often non-governmentally affiliated, efforts are both welcomed and encouraged by the MINED in efforts to create more options for the betterment of children’s futures.

In 1990, Dr. Ray Hooker Taylor founded FADCANIC, an organization that seeks to foster the development of the Atlantic Coast region through the implementation of a diverse array of projects. Among the areas within which the NGO works are Agroforestry and Sustainable Development, Gender and Equity, Autonomy, Land Regulation and Natural Reserves. In addition to initiating these development efforts, Taylor had a vision for improving the education system of Pearl Lagoon. In 2003, Taylor founded PLACE in efforts to provide the

community with a model school: “Since February 2003, the project emphasizes that the municipality has for the first time a model education in the sense that it seeks to demonstrate the proper conditions under which children should receive bilingual education to make them competitive in future educational opportunities including the labor market. The aim is to lay down a school model that will be able to serve as a certain example of bilingual intercultural education for all schools in the Autonomous regions.”²³ The school works with several donors, as it is a private endeavor and thus is not governmentally funded. Among the donors are Horizont 3000, Catholic Men, Medicores, and SAIH (Norwegian Students’ and Academics’ International Assistance Fund).

Horizont 3000: Austrian Organization for Development Cooperation is an NGO that “[supports] partners in developing countries to improve the livelihoods of their communities.”²⁴ This organization is the school’s predominant sponsor, responsible for maintaining the school facilities, paying teachers, facilitating teacher training and on-site workshops, and providing materials. Every two to three months, the school receives a visit from one of their sponsor organizations, in efforts to confirm that PLACE is complying with the requirements their donors mandate. Some of said requirements are as follows: serving a specific number of students, maintaining close relations with authorities, parent involvement and positive results, all of which is to be reported every three months. Reports are sent to the Coordinator of Education at the main FADCANIC office in Bluefields and then forwarded to the national office before being evaluated by a representative and sent off to donors. According to Principal Marlene Hebbert, however, though donors “send the requirements, we adequate them to our realities—as long as

²³ “FADCANIC: Educational Projects,” FADCANIC, 1 Dec. 2010 <<http://www.fadcanic.org.ni/?q=node/157>>.

²⁴ Horizont 3000, 1 Dec. 2010 <<http://www.horizont3000.at/english.php>>.

we have positive results...the requirements do not affect [the way we run] our program.”²⁵

According to Hebbert, the schedule at PLACE differs from that of public schools, in that there are more breaks throughout the day in order to accommodate one of the components of Dr. Taylor’s vision: an enriched curriculum. To allow for music, art, computing and science lab—which are not offered in neighboring schools—the school day has been extended at PLACE and students are given more breaks to ensure better attention and retention. Additional components of Taylor’s vision are as follows: a community-wide effort, constant teacher training, parent participation, the promotion of gender equality, a healthy school and an internally derived staff. “When Dr. Ray dreamed of having a school in Pearl Lagoon, he never thought of bringing people from the outside to teach or do the job because we have people here who can do this. Also, [for these people], it’s not just about preparing the kids, but also themselves. [For this reason], teachers are in constant training alongside students.”²⁶ Dr. Taylor

envisioned a school where everyone in the community would share a portion of the responsibility in better educating the region’s future leaders. According to Hebbert, “one of our main goals is to prepare and promote quality students who are not [solely] able to read and write, but will be prepared to face life. We are trying to prepare the future leaders for the community and, if possible, the region. Somehow, the political leaders of the region aren’t doing what they need to be and we need to prepare young people to take over and do what is needed for our community.” In order to achieve such aspirations, responsibilities are to be shared by staff, administration, parents and community leaders. To guarantee that communication remains high among all involved parties, teachers schedule meetings with parents every two months—and additionally as necessary—and administration frequently meets with community leaders, as well as parents.

²⁵ Marlene Hebbert, Personal Interview, “PLACE from the Principal’s Perspective,” 25 Nov. 2010.

²⁶ Ibid.

Hebbert argues, “We are conscious that the people who are financing the school won’t do it for a lifetime. Their plan is to help us reach the 11th grade and we need to focus on where we are going to get funding, we have to think of auto-sustainability and this is why we need a close relationship with leaders of the community. I know if this becomes a government school, things won’t be like they are now.”²⁷

The plan among donors to “help PLACE reach 11th grade” has to do with the school expansion that is currently taking place. The school currently matriculates students from 1st to 8th grade and plans to add an additional grade every year, beginning with 9th this upcoming school year. Every year, PLACE promotes 47-49 students and, of this quantity, roughly two or three leave, while the rest continue at PLACE for high school—which begins after 6th grade. “We started this and we need to go all the way. If we were to stop at this halfway point, the question is ‘where are all of the students we are attending going to go?’ The condition of the neighboring public school is not like it used to be. Because of the support they aren’t receiving from the government, they don’t have the means or conditions to support the amount of students they could before.” The administration of PLACE thus feels it is their responsibility to continue providing a quality option for these students in continuing their education.²⁸ To make certain they are meeting all of the aforementioned standards and goals they have set for their school, administration conducts an internal, midterm evaluation twice a year. With selected teachers, students, the Parents Board, a group of additional parents, and community leaders, teams are formed for a discussion regarding what has been accomplished and what needs to be bettered for the upcoming term. This internally driven process serves as preparation for the external evaluation that donors conduct every three years, in conjunction with the three-year budgetary term.²⁹

²⁷ Hebbert, Personal Interview.

²⁸ Hebbert, Personal Interview.

²⁹ Ibid.

After closely examining the foundational principals behind initiatives such as FADCANIC's creation of PLACE, it is important to note Freire's distinction between systematic education and educational projects. While systematic education is only alterable through the exertion of political power, such as what was seen throughout the various branches of the MINED, educational projects are initiatives whose organizational aspects are carried out with the help of the oppressed.³⁰ The ultimate goal of such projects is humanization, as this is "the people's vocation...their tool with which to overcome injustice, exploitation, oppression and the violence of the oppressors."³¹ Freire thus argues, "The only effective instrument is a humanizing pedagogy in which the revolutionary leadership establishes a permanent relationship of dialogue with the oppressed."³² "Co-intentional education" therefore becomes a key characteristic in successful educational projects: "teachers and students (leadership and people), content on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge," something that requires "not pseudo-participation, but committed involvement of the oppressed."³³ Within this educative framework of a co-intentional system, an ability to intervene in reality is born as the oppressed subject "emerges from submersion," and achieves *conscientização*, consciousness that is born out of historical awareness.³⁴ This *conscientização* is the preparation that, when combined with action, readies men and women to fight for their own humanization.³⁵ Interestingly, observations carried out during fifth-grade teacher Ms. Mavis Ramirez Archibold's lessons at PLACE display a resolute implementation of several of the aforementioned requisites for a successful

³⁰ Freire 54.

³¹ Ibid. 43-44.

³² Ibid. 68.

³³ Freire 69.

³⁴ Ibid. 109.

³⁵ Ibid. 119.

educational project. During an English lesson, Ms. Archibold asked a female student to come up to the board to write down various vocabulary words that the class had been working with for the past week. The teacher instructed the rest of the class to check their answers to see if they matched those of the student at the board. If the answers were right, the students were to put a check; if wrong, they were to put an “x.” This simple exercise actively employs several of Freire’s central theories: co-intentional education, teacher-student with students-teachers, and awareness or subjectivity. Freire argues that education often tends to have an inherently narrative quality to it, one that encourages rote memorization and absorption on the part of the student who is naturally expected to solely accept and retain what the teacher claims is true—a concept that Freire deems part of “the ‘banking’ concept of education, [a misguided system lacking] creativity, transformation, and knowledge,” which will be further explored as the observations unfold.³⁶ Conversely, however, the libertarian system of education, one that might employ the previously stated co-intentional practice, emphasizes the reconciliation of the teacher-student contradiction, a solution that makes both parties students and teachers, simultaneously and interchangeably. Ms. Archibold’s use of a student as a model is, in essence, employing the idea of the student as teacher. Furthermore, as the students grade their own work, this practice is extended to the entire class and all of the students become their own “students-teachers.” Within this process, the students also begin working with several strategies that, according to Freire, are critical to their liberation.

One such strategy is learning that, beginning with something as basic as an exercise in class, their participation is crucial in moving past “limit-situations.” Freire calls for a type of education that will lead people out of the subordination that results from a forced assimilation into the more dominant structure, and into a place of

³⁶ Ibid. 72.

awareness, a sense of subjectivity that will help foster a cultural voice.³⁷ Knowledge of the fact that the oppressed can transform the limiting situation they are in must thus be the motivating force, the catalyst for a struggle for freedom.³⁸ By correcting their own mistakes, students are working past limit-situations that they have, in fact, created for themselves and are actively participating in their betterment, their own humanization. This process is also an exercise in action and reflection, another practice Freire highlights as an essential strategy for the oppressed. The students complete an exercise and are then asked to individually reflect on and correct their actions. Finally, after the class completed this lesson, students began asking each other questions and comparing grades, which implies that there is an effective use of the support available through the peer network and a positive understanding of the cooperation required in a dialogical system.³⁹

The implementation of the co-intentional education practice was prevalent in Ms. Archibold's classroom in various forms. Another way in which the practice was visible was in the teacher's use of the following statement: "you are the judge." During various exercises, the students served as "judges" who were to tell the teacher whether an answer was correct or not. For example, during a math lesson, the class had a competition to see if boys or girls could solve a given problem fastest. While two participants (one male, one female) worked at the board, the seated students were to "be the judges" by doing the problem in their notebooks and telling the teacher whether or not the students at the front had solved the problem correctly. When one student was unable to solve the problem, Ms. Archibold reassumed her standard teacher role, however she did so in an unconventional way. As she worked the problem out on the board to help the student see what he was missing, Ms. Archibold had the rest of the class dictate the steps to solving the problem aloud, so as to

³⁷ Freire 12.

³⁸ Ibid. 49.

³⁹ Observations carried out in fifth grade classroom on 11/11/10.

constantly incorporate them into their own learning process. This student involvement was incorporated into the class until the final moments when Ms. Archibold asked the students to recap for her all that they had done and learned throughout the lesson and then clap for themselves before going out for a break, emphasizing that their actions, knowledge and participation had played an essential role in all they had acquired and achieved in the lesson.

In order to examine whether or not the above classroom practices are representative of a true libertarian, educational project, it is important to understand the intricacies of the opposing educational method: banking education. Banking education leads to passivity, which hinders the formation of a critical consciousness. This lack of a capacity for critical thinking forces students to “adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them.” This method “[minimizes or annuls] the students’ creative power and [stimulates] incredulity.”⁴⁰ One of the primary ways in which this system inhibits students is through the perpetuation of the teacher-student contradiction, which is executed in the following ways:

- (a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
- (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
- (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
- (d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly;
- (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
- (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
- (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
- (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students; the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects.”⁴¹

⁴⁰ Freire 73.

⁴¹ Freire 73.

It is thus imperative to examine whether or not observations in Ms. Archibold's class are truly representative of the breaching of the above characteristics that feed this contradiction. During a Civic Morals lesson, students were asked to read and analyze a passage. Ms. Archibold circled the room to give each group individual attention and, when one group did not seem to have carried out a sufficient amount of analysis, Ms. Archibold did not provide them with the answers nor tell them that the interpretations they had thus far were incorrect. She simply encouraged them to "keep reading and thinking." During a subsequent English class, students approached the board with a large piece of white paper upon which they had drawn various objects. They then explained their drawings and the self-created stories that accompanied these drawings. The students decided the order in which they wanted to present and were predominantly in control of the lesson. Ms. Archibold aided the exercise in various ways, such as telling them to face their audience and speak up, however, her involvement did not extend much past logistical suggestions such as these. This activity is one that clearly represents a method that contradicts that of banking education. While the exercise does involve some "hinged themes," as there is a general purpose or structure to the exercise that was determined by the teacher, the activity largely centers on "generative themes," themes determined by the students and generated from their existing level of consciousness.⁴²

According to Freire, in order to determine the proper content for an educational program targeting a marginalized population, educators and leaders must investigate generative themes or, in other words, "investigate people's thinking about reality and people's action upon reality, which is their praxis." Generative themes are thus found when students' views of the world are examined.⁴³ In order to carry out a thematic investigation, Freire highlights a very detailed,

⁴² Observations carried out in fifth grade classroom on 12/11/10.

⁴³ Freire 109.

seemingly lengthy process. The educators develop codifications that, upon the reflection of participants—students who form part of the oppressed group—generate more themes. In this process their “real consciousness”—the existing state of consciousness prior to the realization of the potential consciousness, which is discovered by acting on the untested feasibility—begins to weaken as students become more aware of their current state of awareness. The educational plan is to be developed henceforth with the aim of “[transforming] the untested feasibility into testing action, as potential consciousness supersedes real consciousness.”⁴⁴ Freire argues many educational and political programs do not succeed because they fail to realize that the dialogical nature of education begins with thematic investigation.⁴⁵ However, this type of investigation, especially in the detail in which he has outlined the above process, is simply not feasible for every educational institution attempting to liberate a marginalized population. Other strategies do nevertheless exist for inquiring into the generative themes and learning about students’ state of consciousness, their understanding of reality. One such avenue is art with an added focus on the history of the self.

Barry Lomerlock Ramirez is a very conscious, involved Pearl Lagoon citizen. Along with his involvement in a local radio project and his efforts to distribute locally made art throughout the community, Ramirez is the art teacher at PLACE. According to Ramirez, there is a need for positive engagement among youth to steer them clear of the drugs and violence that are quickly becoming deeply embedded in the society. He argues that youth need to be aided in the process of “growing conscious” and thinking about a healthier future and society. As “art is the expression of the soul,” Ramirez sees this aspect of PLACE’s curriculum as crucial to the development of self-awareness, which Freire would agree is an essential aspect of becoming

⁴⁴ Ibid. 115.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 119

critically conscious: “We need to inject consciousness into the youth...we have to feed [it to] them until they can feed themselves.”⁴⁶ Because many students do not receive messages such as these in their homes, Ramirez believes this is the school’s responsibility. He also strives to urge the children to constantly try to learn about and know themselves and what they are capable of doing, to understand what Freire might deem their own “untested feasibility.” After giving the youth these tools, Ramirez argues “it’s up to them to exploit [this] and make use of it...to turn this knowledge into something positive and make conscious decisions about their future.”⁴⁷

Ramirez highlights that there are various qualities about the curriculum and general structure of PLACE that lend themselves to the achievement of the aforementioned goals. One such quality is the focus on historical awareness. Beginning in the fifth grade, the students learn Atlantic Coast history, which he believes is essential: “We have to know who we are, where we come from—the struggle, the exploitation, the oppression—to be somebody.” According to Ramirez, the thoughts and efforts of Marcus Mosiah Garvey, “leader of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and first African-American leader in American history to organize masses of people in a political movement,”⁴⁸ have been very influential in the educational system of Pearl Lagoon. To emphasize his view of the importance of historical awareness, Ramirez quotes Garvey: “A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.” History should serve as a guide to knowing “how things have been and how they should be.” Community leader Wesley Williams, Secretary of the Inter-Sectorial Commission for Demarcation (SID) and Director of the Pearl Lagoon Center of Mediation and

⁴⁶ Barry Lomerlock Ramirez, Personal Interview, “Influence of Art at PLACE,” 12 Nov. 2010.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ “Marcus Garvey’s Biography,” Marcus Garvey: A.C.R.A., 18 May 2004, 2 Dec. 2010 <<http://www.marcusgarvey.net/Information/history.htm>>.

Conflict Resolution, wholeheartedly seconds Ramirez's thoughts on the importance of revitalizing historical awareness:

“For [the people of] this country to see each other as one, this has to happen through education. We must foster self-esteem, self-knowledge and identity so kids know who they are, where they came from and where they want to go. The problem is a lot of people don't read and write, so people from outside are writing our history. Because of a lack of written documentation, people don't know about their genealogy and their culture...there's no continuation of culture [and] without writing and studying, the dominant culture will always consume the minority culture. This is a strong weakness...this [historical writing] needs to come from the inside. We aren't worrying about this but we should be because children are not going to have any knowledge of their culture or themselves.”⁴⁹

Two additional elements that Ramirez highlights in his interview are the fact that all of the staff at PLACE is from the community, as well as the fact that this staff has created a family-like environment of support at the school: “The whole essence of our work is it is like a family, so we all have to work in unity to get things done. We coordinate.” One way in which Ramirez coordinates with the rest of the staff is by sitting in on and observing the classes of other teachers, so that what he teaches in his class expands upon or helps the students grasp what they are learning in their core classes: “The art has to have a relationship with the theory.” The leadership furthers this collaboration by requiring that each teacher leave their lesson plan for the following day in the office at the end of each school day. While this creates an additional daily burden for administration, Ramirez says they utilize this system because it is a helpful resource for teachers and it is also a good way for leadership to remain informed regarding what is being accomplished in the classroom. This is a prime example of the way in which unity, cooperation and dialogue are intrinsic dimensions of the system at PLACE. Furthermore, fostering students'

⁴⁹ Wesley Williams, Informal Interview.

artistic development is a successful way to avoid the violence and oppression which Freire argues result from the suppression of creativity.⁵⁰

PLACE's music class is a unique example of the effort that may be required of an educational institution in order to provide such creative outlets. PLACE music teacher Eric Anthony Pondler began learning and playing music on the street when he was seventeen. Nearly two decades later, Pondler has taken to a more formal musical education, a decision that was prompted by his offer to teach music at PLACE. Through lessons organized by the school, for example through the cultural courses offered to the community every January, he has had the chance to begin to deepen his knowledge by learning music theory and taking lessons with the more experienced guest musicians the school recruits. While this extreme example of Freire's "teachers-students" is an admitted challenge for this instructor, he believes it is worth it because music is an important part of the culture on the Caribbean Coast and he views it as "something very vital for our children." Pondler reports awe at having reached a place where his musical knowledge and ability to impart this knowledge to others is enough to "really make a living," something he says he had never dreamed. It pleases him to know that he may be passing that chance along to his students: "For example, some people are slower in other subjects but have a special ability in music and maybe they can't reach where they want with those other subjects but can do something, [really] go somewhere with music." Whether or not his students choose to seek a future in music, Pondler is convinced that music class helps the students, both in other subjects and by providing them with general life guidance.⁵¹

According to Pondler, the artistic training and expression generated in the music class often translates to a greater student ability to express themselves and their thoughts in other

⁵⁰ Ramirez, Personal Interview.

⁵¹ Eric Anthony Pondler, Personal Interview, "Influence of Music at PLACE," 16 Nov. 2010.

classes and, arguably, in life in general. Additionally, Pondler argues that exercises with counting beats and measures in music can even help students in their math classes. Furthermore, the discipline one must maintain in order to truly progress with a musical instrument becomes an important lesson for the students in the discipline required to truly succeed in any endeavor: “Music takes a lot of perseverance and sometimes, [students] might hear someone do something good and they might want to [achieve] this that same day but then they discover it may take years of work. In that way, they [begin to learn] that to achieve your goals in life, you need a lot of perseverance and [hard] work.” While one could argue that Pondler is not qualified to teach music, he undoubtedly has more knowledge in this field than his student come to him with and, as he is consistently seeking more knowledge and improvement, he will, with time, only become more qualified. After all, it does not appear to be a better option to deprive students of the opportunity to explore their creativity because there is no musical “expert” in the region, as is seen in national schools across the country.

Prior to declaring PLACE an effective, dialogical educational project, one must investigate whether the sentiments expressed and practice employed by the three previously mentioned teachers reflect system-wide principles or mere anomalies. Based on the presentations of Director Marlene Hebbert and her sole office partner, Lisa Powell, regarding the structure and foundational principles of the school, the former appears to be the accurate analysis. Lisa Powell is the Pedagogical Assistant at PLACE, responsible for creating workshops based on the necessary areas of improvement among teachers, parents and students. Examples of such workshops include Women’s Empowerment, Gender Equity and Teaching Methodology. Before being promoted from her teaching position at PLACE to her current administrative position, Powell was a public school principal for roughly seven years. After this substantial period

serving as principal, however, she felt she had done all she could for the school, as she and the municipal MINED authorities were no longer seeing eye to eye. While the municipal delegation was more concerned with the mandates coming from Managua, Powell was concerned with the well-being of her students. She urged MINED officials to work toward adjusting that which comes from Managua to the realities of Pearl Lagoon students, and to acknowledge the severity of the effect that these cultural differences play. Unfortunately, this proved impossible, hence Powell's trajectory of working her way up to the administrative level at a private, alternative school where, aside from complying with the weekly required number of hours for each subject, leadership has full autonomy in running the school.⁵²

One obvious characteristic that sets PLACE apart from surrounding public schools is its enriched curriculum. Powell affirms Ponder's statement in saying, "there will always be students whose strength is music or drawing and if you don't give that proper attention at a young age, it won't be cultivated to its full potential." Beyond this important aspect of satisfying Freire's call for fostering the creativity of the oppressed, Powell also highlights the way in which this creativity aids students in their academic subjects, something both Ponder and Ramirez previously noted: "It is proven that the fine arts aid students in learning the academic subjects and it motivates them to do well so they can continue to participate in dance or music groups and activities." This, again, satisfies one important aspect of what Freire deems necessary for breaking out the confines of banking education and similar systems: "To break free of this oppressive, mechanistic system, they must form a partnership based on a faith in the creative power of the students and their ability to exercise critical thinking."⁵³ The school also devotes a significant amount of effort to satisfying the latter of the above criteria.

⁵² Lisa Powell, Personal Interview, "Intricacies of PLACE," 12 Nov. 2010.

⁵³ Freire 75.

Lisa Powell states:

“When I look back on the way I was when I was young, I can see that these students are already better prepared to be our community’s future leaders. They come to the office and request meetings for situations in the classroom. I had a six year old who had been watching English programs come to the office and say that she thinks the teacher is making mistakes with her English.”

To continue to foster these voices that seem to develop at a young age at PLACE, the school has an intricate student government system, complete with elections and campaigning that Powell claims are as closely matched to the national elections process as possible. In terms of tallying the results and dealing with elections procedures, administration gives the students workshops ahead of time and then allows them to handle everything, again actively employing the participation of their students in all important school processes. Each grade has a council that meets within the classroom and then takes any issues to the general meeting with the head student government body. Though Powell admits the within classroom council system has not worked as well as they had hoped—potentially due to lack of teacher follow-through with the meetings—the administration does what they can to see that students’ voices are heard. One way in which they do so is by conducting evaluations with the student council and leadership: “We are adults and we have to accept the children’s criticisms.”⁵⁴

In efforts to prepare the students to adequately express their thoughts and opinions under circumstances such as the above, the school also tries to foster a sense of cultural and historical awareness. According to Freire, “as long as the oppressed remain unaware of the causes of their condition, they fatalistically ‘accept’ their exploitation.”⁵⁵ In this way, he argues that the education system is often “a perpetuator of a culture of silence,” by not focusing on the

⁵⁴ Powell, Personal Interview.

⁵⁵ Freire 64.

importance of this critical consciousness.⁵⁶ Powell states that one of the requirements of PLACE is to provide a “pertinent” education for their students: “We try to make sure that what the child is learning in class is to their level, [matches] the context of their environment and can be related to the present life they’re living.” Furthermore, the school’s cultural awareness focus has proven to be an effective strategy for lessening on-campus violence. Powell claims respecting and highlighting cultural differences among students, and allowing them to express how things are done in their particular cultural environment, helps children’s self-esteem. After four years of studies in Bluefields and having been “the subject of mockery,” this is something Powell claims she can identify with, as she understands how much “baggage” this creates for the student and how important it is to counter this phenomenon. She admits, however, that this is quite a challenge: “Even parents have this victimized mentality and they pass it onto the kids. We’ve been marginalized by Bluefields but we’re the biggest community in the basin, so we’ve marginalized the other communities...it’s really tough.”

Despite the challenges, however, the school focuses on trying to show students contrasts between how things were in the past and how they are presently. According to Powell, the staff tries to show these students that “where we should be is in their hands—they decide if they think things are better or worse and if they see [needed change], they have to work at it because no one is going to do it for them.” This statement is reminiscent of one of Freire’s statements on the subject: “The antidote to manipulation lies in a critically conscious revolutionary organization, which will pose to the people as problems their position in the historical process, the national reality, and manipulation itself.”⁵⁷ According to Powell, “after children are educated, know their

⁵⁶ Ibid. 30.

⁵⁷ Freire 149.

rights and are prepared to deal with situations, they [begin to see] that together they can fight for their common interests, they can be better leaders than we have been.”⁵⁸

In order to reduce challenges with this historical and cultural awareness emphasis, leadership focuses heavily on teacher training in this area, another characteristic that sets the school apart. For a few weeks in January, and again in July for fifteen days, teachers attend La Escuela Normal, a formal training school in Bluefields. Prior to the incorporation of the SEAR, the Regional Autonomous Education System, all material was taught in Spanish at the training school and, according to Powell, when teachers returned to the classroom and were dealing with children from different cultures and environments, they were unprepared. After the region gained autonomy however, SEAR was implemented as “an educational system designed by the people of the Coast, to create an education pertinent to the Coast that highlights our right to be educated in our own languages, given the appropriate materials, teach students history and customs and use resources and examples from our context to reach our full potential after years of marginalization and oppression.” After the implementation of this system, however, Powell argues teacher preparedness at PLACE has been altered completely.

Powell highlights that one of the strengths of teacher training at PLACE is the fact that administration has “managed to make teachers understand that each child has their own learning style and rhythm,” despite pressure from parents to have their child perform as well as the highest achievers. As a result of cultural and historical training, teachers are better equipped to understand the roots of problems with students, both academic and behavioral. With knowledge of the environment the child is coming from and, thus, knowledge of the origin of a problem, teachers are able to “give the child the needed attention to overcome the problem.”⁵⁹ Powell

⁵⁸ Powell, Personal Interview.

⁵⁹ Powell, Personal Interview.

claims that without such training, teachers may be more inclined to resort to strategies such as using harsh words in attempts to curb a problem, which would, ultimately, only make things worse. The school has also used outside resources to help aid in cultural struggles, by bringing in psychiatrists and specialists to give talks in the presence of students, teachers and parents. Furthermore, along with their training in child psychology at La Escuela Normal, work with these visiting psychiatrists better enables teachers to deal with these situations on their own. Powell claims that there used to be fights on campus between students of Pearl Lagoon and those of Haulover, the neighboring community that is known to be quite aggressive, however, with the use of the various strategies above, “[they] have come a long way.”⁶⁰

In order to avoid sacrificing students’ class time, formal training slots are limited to vacation periods. However, Powell supervises throughout the year and, based on observed needs, schedules on-site training and development workshops—usually about six times per year. On these occasions, students are released from school about an hour early and teachers then attend sessions that Powell strives to make “brief, dynamic and interesting, so teachers don’t get tired.” Powell does admit, however, that there is room for improvement in this overall effective training system, as it is not ideal for teachers to have a nearly full day of teaching and then require them to attend training sessions. The solution is not an easy one, though, as weekends are predominantly not an option due to the various religious engagements of teachers and staff. Additionally, when outside specialists come, they often limit the number of participants, thus limiting the amount of parents and teachers that have the opportunity to gain exposure to the information. As economic constraints apply, bringing specialists back for additional sessions is typically not an option, thus highlighting another needed area for improvement. Nevertheless, teacher dedication is something that positively counters these challenges, as it is one of the most

⁶⁰ Ibid.

prominent qualities that Powell believes distinguishes PLACE from other schools. Powell states that teachers are conscious that they will be out of a job if they do not comply with training and other school rules, such as the emphasis on non-violent discipline. However, the school is tolerant of the variant nature of individuals' growth processes and is thus willing to help teachers learn the pedagogical material that will make their time at PLACE successful. As a result, Powell sees teachers "really going the extra mile," to the point where they sometimes make arrangements with parents to give children extra, individual classes. Furthermore, as teachers are in what she calls "constant training" at PLACE, the office consistently monitors their progress. Powell notes that through the daily lesson plan system, she is able to observe teachers' progress on a daily basis and she, generally, sees abilities growing "richer from year to year."⁶¹

In addition to the emphasis on teacher preparation, parent and community involvement are also cornerstones of PLACE's philosophy. Powell claims that education has generally been viewed by the community as something that takes place solely in the classroom and, as a result, parents are often not actively involved in the education of their children: "When they come to register their children it's like they're taking a trip—after that everything is just teachers and child and they don't worry about their luggage until the end." Assistant Powell argues, however, that it is imperative that parents, teachers and students speak the same language. To achieve this end, Powell organizes workshops with parents, teachers and leaders, many of which emphasize the contrasts between when parents are not involved in school affairs, and the effects on their ability to form opinions and make a difference at the school when they are involved. The school has also set up a general Parent Board that is aided by supplementary Directive Boards within each classroom.⁶²

⁶¹ Powell, Personal Interview.

⁶² Powell, Personal Interview.

Powell opines that the Parents Board plays a critical role at PLACE. Once the board is elected, administration lets parents deal with other parents on certain issues. To aid parents in these positions, the school provides leadership workshops for the group. The Board is also responsible for garbage management on campus, as well as seeing to it that at least one board member attends every teacher training session that takes place. This mandatory attendance requirement was created in efforts to provide parents with the necessary skills to aid them in being a part of significant decision-making on an administrative level, such as when teachers are being hired, fired or promoted, and not simply giving them the task of “raising money and worrying about the hygiene of the school.”⁶³ In order to be sure that the involvement of the greater parent body is being stimulated, the school also employs practices such as sending notebooks home with students and having parents sign them to indicate that they have reviewed what their children have been working on and helped them in any needed or possible way.

In efforts to see to it that the community does not feel PLACE is an isolated entity, divorced from the community, Powell affirms community outreach is also a focus at the school. One of the main initiatives in this regard is the three-week Revitalization Courses that take place every January. These courses are open to the entire community for a small donation of less than \$3 and are accompanied with free services such as dental work and eye care, programs provided by outside partners from Williams College and a dental group from Leon, Nicaragua. Courses cover a variety of subjects, ranging from music (provided by the Escuela Nacional de Música de Managua [Managua National Music School]), technical courses such as computing, electricity work, motor repair and plumbing (provided by the Technical School in Bluefields), and dance, cooking and academic classes (including various levels of Math, English, Spanish, Atlantic Coast History and Environmental Studies), which are provided by local specialists.

⁶³ Ibid.

In order to gauge whether the aforestated efforts are properly translating to the subjects—students—gathering student opinion on the effectiveness of these strategies is vital. Eleven-year-old Jaylen Downs claims Ms. Archibold is his favorite teacher due to her focus on reading and her efforts to help him become better at this activity that he so enjoys. Despite the fact that Jaylen is a rather shy young boy, he claims that he is able to express his mind in class because Archibold always tells her students to say what they think. In this way, she encourages dialogue and student participation in her classroom, even among the more timid students. As a result of learning about Pearl Lagoon’s history and the struggles of the various ethnic groups of the region, Jaylen has learned the importance of “not changing people’s language in their own country.” In other words, cultural preservation and the non-invasive mentality that Freire so adamantly stresses seem to be prevalent in his fifth grade classroom. Should someone step outside of this non-invasive policy in the class, Jaylen is reassured by his trust in administration, specifically Director Hebbert’s ability to solve any problems he may have. His emphasis on the fact that, not only can he bring his problems to the Director, but he “can really talk to her,” highlights the fact that leadership is not solely fulfilling a disciplinary role, which Freire argues should be avoided, but is truly cooperating and forming a partnership with students. Finally, Jaylen notes that PLACE has helped him discover his future in environmental law. The school’s weekly garbage clean up “made [him] want to be a lawyer and stop people from throwing garbage all over the place.” Jaylen plans to continue at PLACE for high school and then go to Managua, which is home to numerous universities, to attend college.⁶⁴

According to twelve-year-old Loyda Joseph, Archibold is her favorite teacher because, “when she talks to you, she’s nice to you,” again emphasizing the school’s focus on co-intentional education, not a hierarchical, authoritative structure. Loyda claims that it is important

⁶⁴ Jaylen Downs, Personal Interview, “Student Opinion of PLACE,” 15 Nov. 2010.

to learn about her people's history and she is glad Archibold teaches students this: "It's important to learn about [my history] to help the people." Loyda plans to attend a University in Bluefields, the nearest city with a university, to become a doctor. Until then, she will complete her schooling through high school at PLACE because she "likes it here and doesn't want to leave."⁶⁵ In keeping with this idea of wanting to spend as much time at PLACE as possible, eleven year old Jordy Downs likes to stay after school with Archibold "to learn more." He believes the school's historical emphasis is important preparation for being able to interact and knowledgably dialogue with people of different ethnic groups in the future. He also believes the wide variety within the school's curriculum is providing him with skills he may need in the workplace in the future, such as computing skills.⁶⁶

Ten-year-old Yaneisha Williams also commends Archibold's policy on solving problems within the classroom: "Whenever we have a problem, Ms. Mavis doesn't just send us to the office, she solves it in the classroom." In terms of the exchange of knowledge that occurs in the classroom, Williams argues "when [Ms. Mavis] gives something, if we know something about it, we should say it," another manifestation of the school's efforts to foster student voice. Williams also comments on the importance of historical awareness for action in the future: "You [have to] learn more things about your communities for when you get bigger, so when you go to the different communities, you know what to do." Beyond the emphasis on local history, Williams claims that PLACE sets itself apart by teaching students about the world, something she argues is not done at other schools. Williams plans to study at PLACE through high school and then in Bluefields to become a teacher, a goal that has been largely influenced by watching

⁶⁵ Loyda Joseph, Personal Interview, "Student Opinion of PLACE," 15 Nov. 2010.

⁶⁶ Jordy Downs, Personal Interview, "Student Opinion of PLACE," 15 Nov. 2010.

teachers like Archibold at work.⁶⁷

Student Deyson Kevin also believes he is receiving a breadth of knowledge at PLACE that he would not receive at other schools. First, he is taught through history lessons to “learn from people who came before.” Additionally, “[PLACE] gives all kinds of classes—English, Math, Science, Computer, Drawing, Music. It’s different because other schools don’t have all of that.” Furthermore, the school is teaching students to make conscious decisions for their future, something art teacher Ramirez also deemed of critical importance in his interview. Kevin states, “the school teaches you to become a man and woman who doesn’t drink rum and smoke, and they teach you to have better behavior and to get your studies so you can work.”⁶⁸ Student Ashley Urtado takes this concept even further and claims that PLACE is preparing students for all areas of life in very surprising ways. Urtado says math is her favorite subject because “when you learn more math, you can do everything in life—you can calculate everything.”⁶⁹ This statement appears to be an extension of art teacher Ramirez’s idea of connecting the theory learned in the classroom to other areas of life. Even in math class, students are being given the tools to develop a critical consciousness with which to confront any difficulties life may present them. Despite all of the aforementioned successes, the validity of which students appear to have confirmed, Powell does not hesitate to admit that the school has plenty of challenges to overcome; said challenges will be examined in the limitations section of the conclusion.

V. Geopolitical Background: Los Angeles, California

According to data from the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), there are 5,162,161 families with 9,391,913 children in California. In 2009, the United States poverty level was set at \$22,050 for a family of four, despite the fact that research has shown that

⁶⁷ Yaneisha Williams, Personal Interview, “Student Opinion of PLACE,” 15 Nov. 2010.

⁶⁸ Deyson Kevin, Personal Interview, “Student Opinion of PLACE,” 16 Nov. 2010.

⁶⁹ Ashley Urtado, Personal Interview, “Student Opinion of PLACE,” 15 Nov. 2010.

families generally need an income twice as great to meet basic needs. The standard for a family considered low-income is one that receives an income below 200% of the federal poverty line. A poor family is thus one with an income below 100%, or the official poverty line. According to NCCP data on the state of California in 2008, 42% (3,956,421) of children live in low-income families, with 59% (2,713,774) of Hispanic children and 60% (2,275,134) of children of immigrant parents living in low-income families. 19% (1,754,200) of children were reported as living in poor families. Furthermore, 27% (1,222,048) of Hispanic children live in poor families, the highest percentage found among all ethnic groups surveyed (Black, White, Asian, Hispanic) and 28% (1,048,925) of children of immigrant parents live in poor families.⁷⁰

In a 2006 NCCP study entitled “The Racial Gap in Parental Education,” authors Michelle Chau, Ayana Douglas-Hall and Heather Koball note that, while education is one of the most effective tools for increasing income, high levels of parental educational attainment affect Black and Latino children far less than they affect White and Asian youth. Thus despite parents’ levels of education, Black and Latino children are most likely to live in low-income circumstances. Of the 74 million children in the United States, over 40% are minorities, with the largest percentage in the Latino category (19%). Though Latino children are least likely to live with parents who have any amount of education that exceeds a high school diploma (35%, versus 76% of Asian children), even when parents have some amount of a college education (including a degree), Black and Latino children are most likely to be low-income (44% and 40% respectively, with 18% for White children and 21% for Asian children). Furthermore, parental employment does not account for these racial discrepancies in income, as Black and Latino children whose parents have year-round, full-time employment and some amount of a college education, are still more

⁷⁰ “State Profiles: California Demographics,” NCCP, <http://www.nccp.org/profile/state_profile.php?state=CA&id=6>.

than twice as likely to be low income—again, in comparison to White and Asian children.⁷¹

Due to the fact that the Los Angeles Latino population is largely comprised of Mexican immigrants, it is important to consider this demographic group when analyzing the relation between poverty and educational attainment among Latinos in California. According to Aaron Terrazas' "Spotlight on Mexican Immigrants in the United States" for the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), in 2008, there were 11.4 million Mexican immigrants in the United States, which represents 30.1% of all U.S. immigrants and 10% of all Mexicans. California had the largest number of foreign-born residents from Mexico (4,254,415, or 37.3% of the total) and Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA, was the metropolitan area with the largest number of Mexican born Latinos (1,820,388, or 16% of all Mexican immigrants in the United States).⁷² With Camino Nuevo Charter Academy's location in MacArthur Park, a predominantly Mexican neighborhood in Los Angeles known for being one of the most densely populated and underserved communities in the city, all of the aforementioned statistics become definitive characteristics of this community.

According to Census Bureau data cited in CNCA's 2009-2010 Charter Renewal Petition (henceforth referred to as the 2009-2010 Charter), "The student body is made up of 0.2% Asian American, 1.5% African American, 97.3% Hispanic or Latino, 0.6% Filipino and less than 0.3% of all other ethnicities. These census tracts have the highest percentage of severe overcrowding in the city, the greatest concentration of single parent households (50-88%, over twice the city average), highest non-fluency in English (40-66% speak English "not well" or "not at all"), and the lowest availability of automobiles (housing units with no vehicle available ranges from 46-

⁷¹ Michelle Chau, et al., "Racial Gap in Parental Education," NCCP, May 2006, 20 Nov. 2010 < http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_660.html>.

⁷² Aaron Terraza, "Spotlight on Mexican Immigrants in the United States" MPI, Feb. 2010, 20 Nov. 2010 < <http://www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/display.cfm?ID=767>>.

90%—over three times the city average). Foreign born residents represent 61% of the community, compared with 11% in the U.S. Annual income within this district is the lowest in Los Angeles: the median income is \$11,475. The poverty rate in the area is 35%, compared with a citywide rate of 18%. Rentals represent 82% of housing units in the neighborhood versus 34% nationally.”⁷³ Furthermore, CNCA Principal claims that according to the results from the most recent annual parent survey conducted by the USC Rossier School of Education, the average parent education level of the students at CNCA is 5th grade (data collected from approximately 85% of parent body).

Statistics and studies such as these imply that it is safe to assume education is understandably mistaken as something that should not be a priority within communities such as that of the area surrounding Camino Nuevo. CNCA thus must overcome this mindset that has been generationally passed down to their first-generation students, as well address all of the issues that accompany these students’ status as one of the most marginalized populations within the United States—including the staggering propensity for gang involvement among youth in the area. As a result, it has proven necessary for the school to adopt an alternative model much like that of PLACE and an analysis of this school’s contemporary application of Freire’s ideas on the other side of the border becomes appropriate.

VI. Research in Los Angeles, California

Before analyzing whether or not CNCA is effectively implementing a modern-day application of theories presented in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*—theories that various intellectuals have viewed as groundbreaking in the field of education—one must first examine the relevance of translating these concepts, which pertain to a foreign landscape, to the context of

⁷³ “CNCA Charter Renewal Petition,” [CNCA](#), 9 Oct. 2009.

the marginalized populations of the United States. In a foreword written for the book's 30th Anniversary Edition, Richard Shaull commends Freire for providing the methodology for application within the context of the struggle for educational liberation among the marginalized in Latin America:

“At the precise moment when the disinherited masses in Latin America are awakening from their traditional lethargy and are anxious to participate, as Subjects, in the development of their countries, Paulo Freire has perfected a model for teaching illiterates that has contributed, in an extraordinary way, to that process.”⁷⁴

Literacy, according to Shaull, has often proven to give these masses the tools to, through a new sense of awareness and selfhood, actively seek to transform society, a society that had previously been denying them such action. Though this work is, again, developed in the context of education for illiterate adults in “the Third World,” Shaull argues that Freire’s “methodology and educational philosophy are as important for [the United States] as for the dispossessed Latin America.” He equates the struggle of the people of the developing World to that of African and Mexican-Americans, as well as to that of the young American middle class. Shaull sees the extremity of the context in which the book was written—surrounding the catapult of Freire’s middle class family into severe poverty in Recife, Brazil in 1921, which was already one of the most impoverished areas of the developing world and was later severely affected by the U.S. economic crisis in 1929—as a potential for insight into new models and strategies for attacking problems in U.S.

Education is, according to Shaull, never neutral. It either perpetuates conformity or fosters “the practice of freedom.” While he acknowledges that the development of an educational process that aids in the creation of the latter may lead to controversy, he believes it could mark the start of a new era in Western history. Shaull argues that Freire’s work will prove

⁷⁴ Freire 29.

very useful in this process⁷⁵ and it is within this tweaked, modernized framework that one must analyze CNCA's application of these theories.

One of the limit situations that plagues the Third World, according to Freire, is underdevelopment, which is inextricably linked to dependency: "The task implied by this limit-situation is to overcome the contradictory relation of these 'object'-societies to the metropolitan societies; this task constitutes the untested feasibility for the Third World,"⁷⁶ or the potential for growth that lies beyond the limit situation.⁷⁷ The same, however, can be said of the marginalized populations in the First World. The oppressed are viewed as "the pathology of the healthy society...marginals [who] need to be 'integrated,' 'incorporated,' into the healthy society." Through a combination of the system of banking education and "a paternalistic social action apparatus...the oppressed receive the euphemistic title of 'welfare recipients.'" In the typical United States education system, the subordinate student population is either groomed to be an active member of a society that is responsible for their marginalization, or is left without any agency or tools with which to become a truly active member of their own humanization—and thus remains in their position of subordination. In either or these cases, these "object-populations" inevitably remain dependent upon the metropolitan or dominant society, thus necessitating a similar type of "liberating revolution," or under these circumstances, an alternative, more comprehensive educational system.

According to Freire, a revolution "carried out *for the people*, [or] "by" *the people for the leaders*" would, in the end, be a "replica of the relations of repression."⁷⁸ "Revolutionary leaders

⁷⁵ Freire 34.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 103.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 113.

⁷⁸ Freire 129.

cannot think *without* the people, nor *for* the people, but only *with* the people.⁷⁹ According to principal Atyani Howard, CNCA is a school “of the people, by the people, for the people.” The school has adopted a unique approach to educating their students, the majority of whom are first generation Latino-Americans: by valuing the students' native language and employing a bilingual instructional model, students begin to value their identity and feel like they are a part of mainstream society, thus making success in school feel like an attainable and desirable goal. The students are taught they belong to a community that values that they are and expects them to succeed academically because they know they are capable, two characteristics of the program that make students feel like intelligent members of a community and of the larger society. The school fosters these ideas to create what the Howard deems a holistic, community school, one that extends beyond the traditional expectations of a school and adopts a more holistic approach that addresses areas such as gang prevention and positive family dynamics.⁸⁰

Through a simple examination of this statement made by the school's leader, an application of several of Freire's central theories is detected within the school's basic foundation. Being a school “of the people, by the people, for the people” is, in and of itself, avoiding this replica of repressive relations Freire urges leaders to do away with. Camino Nuevo was founded by a nonprofit community development organization known as Pueblo Nuevo Development (PND). Beginning in 1993, founder Phillip Lance initiated a grassroots effort and created PND in efforts to revitalize this impoverished community with the help of local residents. A thrift store and a worker-owned janitorial company were among the first projects and in 1999, the organization began its “school-anchored community development strategy” by founding Camino

⁷⁹ Ibid. 131.

⁸⁰ Atyani Howard, Personal Interview, “Principal's CNCA Overview,” 7 Apr. 2010.

Nuevo Charter Academy.⁸¹ The school was thus founded on the very principle of making the oppressed an integral part of their liberation and not thinking without or for, but *with* the people. Perhaps due to the way CNCA was initiated, this philosophy remains today as one of the cornerstones of the school's system.

It is important, however, to examine the school on its more profound levels to see whether these theories merely apply superficially or if they are, in fact, visible in practice. The CNCA mission is as follows:

“The mission of Camino Nuevo Charter Academy is to educate students in a college preparatory program to be literate, critical thinkers, and independent problem solvers who are agents of social justice with sensitivity toward the world around them. To accomplish this mission we have created a comprehensive educational program, including a rigorous academic curriculum focused on standards-based learning for grades K-8, integration of the visual and performing arts, an emphasis on social justice, access to the latest information technology, after school enrichment programs at each campus, and extensive parent and community outreach.”

In fewer words, the vision of the CNCA Burlington site, “aims to prepare low-income, disadvantaged, inner-city youth for success through a rigorous, college-preparatory curriculum that will integrate technology, real-world projects, community values, and personalization methods.” In efforts to educate such critical thinkers and agents of social justice—students who theoretically appear to fit the description of an oppressed class that is being adequately prepared for participation in its own liberation—the school centers itself on the idea of creating a community-wide effort that is inherently dialogical in its nature.⁸²

One requisite for an effective, dialogical program is that leaders must “*incarnate* [the revolution], through communion with the people. In this communion both groups grow together, and the leaders, instead of being simply self-appointed, are installed or authenticated in their

⁸¹ “History and Vision,” PND, 20 Nov. 2010, < <http://www.pueblonuevo.org>>.

⁸² CNCA Charter Renewal Petition.

praxis of the people.”⁸³ The “Camino Nuevo community” consists of students, teachers, staff, administrators and parents. The latter of the constituents is not a mere tag-on but rather a truly valued element in the proper functioning of the CNCA system and decision-making process. The school's motto in regard to parents is "parents as partners in education." Full-time parent coordinator, Zulma Suro, dedicates her life solely to working with students' parents and families by holding a series of year-round parent workshops and seeing to it that parents complete the required fifteen hours a year of school involvement.⁸⁴ Upon completion of the workshop series, a process throughout which parents “learn how to navigate the school system to become better advocates for their students,” parents draft suggestions and meet with the principal to disseminate their opinions to administration.

The aforementioned parents become the window to the greater parent community, seeing to it that the CNCA dialogical cycle has no ruptures. Additionally, teachers work closely with parents and allow them to lead workshops and direct various activities throughout the school year. The idea is to teach students that their parents are their first teachers, thus constructing a positive relationship between teacher, parent and student, as one entity geared toward the optimum education of the student. Furthermore, while Camino Nuevo is not comprised of a large gang member student population, it resides in a community with a heavy prevalence of gang activity, and is comprised largely of students who come from troubled homes. Through their health case management services, Camino's role as a support system for these families thus adds yet another dimension to the school's devotion to true “communion with the people”: “CNCA,

⁸³ Freire 130.

⁸⁴ Yvonne Carillo, Personal Interview, “Assistant Principal’s CNCA View,” 15 Apr. 2010.

Burlington strongly believes students will find greater levels of academic success when their home and school share similar values about learning and forge a genuine partnership.”⁸⁵

The goal of the “Parents as Partners in Education” philosophy is to create a common academic language among parents, teachers and students, which ultimately helps extend the child’s educational experience by creating potential for a continuation of the learning process in the home:

“When parents are respected as partners in the education of their children, and when they are provided with organizational support which enables them to channel their interest to the benefit of the school, the entire culture of the organization can be transformed. Parents have knowledge of children’s lives outside of school, which teachers typically do not have, and that knowledge can prove helpful in developing effective pedagogical strategies.”

Furthermore, according to Childs Trend Data Research cited in the school’s most recent Charter, “students with involved parents have fewer behavioral issues and are more likely to complete secondary school.” The Parents as Partners model is thus something that proves to be an essential aspect of the school’s philosophy for all parties, not solely for parents or students but also for teachers and administration. According to Freire, liberation and organization are two inextricably intertwined qualities in any revolutionary project and he, consequently, emphasizes the importance of “unity for liberation and organization,” something that the CNCA organizational model seems to be properly taking into account.

In efforts to achieve such liberation, however, Freire calls for what he names a cultural synthesis in which “the actors who come from ‘another world’ to the world of the people do so not as invaders...[nor] to *teach* or to *transmit* or to *give* anything, but rather to learn, with the people, about the people’s world...the actors become integrated with the people, who are the

⁸⁵ CNCA Charter Renewal Petition.

coauthors of the action that both perform upon the world.”⁸⁶ This theory greatly resembles CNCA’s motto on teacher involvement and preparation. CNCA recruits teachers who subscribe to the school’s vision of teaching as a craft and “who embody an unwavering belief that all children can reach the high expectations we set for them.” The motto among teachers at CNCA is “own your craft,” a phrase that reminds teachers that they must always expand themselves as educators. This coupled with broader site mottos such as “whatever it takes,” “every minute counts” and “all students can learn” help maintain the school’s commitment to doing whatever is needed to truly educate and provide students with the opportunities and support they need to overcome the challenging realities of poor urban communities. In efforts to assure that teachers are prepared to aid children in dealing with these often harsh realities, the school implements an extensive teacher development and preparation model.⁸⁷

Every Thursday is a “minimum day” at Camino, on which classes do not begin until 10am to allow teachers a two-hour professional development period. On these days, teachers not only attend on-site professional development workshops and activities but also meet in teams to review student work and classroom pedagogy:

“At Camino Nuevo Charter Academy Burlington, we believe that the teacher is the most critical key lever to student success and that no set curriculum meets the needs of all students in the classroom. Therefore, we hire staff that share the philosophy that teachers must “own their craft” by continuously reflecting on their effectiveness in the classroom and seeking out best practices in pedagogy. We are able to ensure the quality of instruction for every student by guaranteeing *what gets taught* through teacher-created standards based pacing plans and *how it gets taught* through consistent professional development around pedagogy that meets the needs of our learners.”⁸⁸

This concept that “no set curriculum meets the needs of all students” is a testament to the fact that teachers are not trying to “invade” the personal learning styles of the students and teach “at

⁸⁶ Freire 180.

⁸⁷ Carillo, Personal Interview.

⁸⁸ CNCA Charter Renewal Petition

them” with a pre-fixed curriculum, but are dedicated to working *with* and learning *from* students in efforts to discover the best way to teach on an individual basis. Teachers, in this way, are also growing with their students, which Freire argues is essential in the coauthor relationship that is key to a co-intentional education.

This creation of what CNCA deems a “culture of care” that fosters students’ abilities to self-define their own learning is, largely, made possible by the small school environment at Camino Nuevo. The school’s student capacity is capped at 520, which allows teachers to devote personalized attention to students in efforts to aid them in discovering what motivates them to learn. With the goal of “*enabling pupils to become self-motivated, competent, and lifelong learners,*” who will, ultimately, fulfill the CNCA goal of creating students who are “*college ready, college bound,*” CNCA fosters the following school setting: “a small, safe, student-centered environment where diversity is valued and where risk-taking is supported. This builds students’ self-confidence and self-reliance and encourages them to be literate, critical thinkers.”⁸⁹ According to Albert Memmi’s concept of the “colonized mentality,” as a result of being told so often that they are, know and are capable of nothing, self-depreciation becomes a prominent quality of the oppressed. The colonized believe they are ignorant and should only listen to professors, becoming completely deferential to their educators.⁹⁰ By working in a small environment that centers on building confidence and incorporating student opinion and input regarding their own personal motivators, CNCA avoids this widely-encountered problem among marginalized populations and thus creates a system in which students are better able to be the intrinsic parts of the process that Freire claims they should be. Consequently, this structure also avoids what Freire highlights as a commonly made mistake among educational projects:

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Freire 63.

“creating educational plans that are rooted solely in creators’ views of reality,” something that is clearly combated with this model of student input and self-defined learning.”⁹¹

In efforts to attempt to strip the correlation between low socioeconomic status and low academic achievement, CNCA has developed a comprehensive, supplemental academic intervention program. The goal of the program is to “address the needs of those students who demonstrated significant academic deficits that are not most effectively addressed within the context of the larger classroom environment,”⁹² again demonstrating the school’s focus on adapting to the needs and realities of each individual student. At Camino Nuevo, academic interventions begin in Kindergarten. Though this may seem to be “too young” to some, CNCA has an interesting system so as to avoid overwhelming the younger students with too much information and time at school. Kindergarteners, most of whom need help in literacy, receive intervention in their native language, which is built into the school day. Starting in 1st grade, however, students come as early as 6:50am for morning reading and math intervention, and stay as late as 6pm for afternoon intervention. The goal of the program, as expressed by Assistant Principal Yvonne Carrillo, is “remediating and then moving toward proficiency.” By creating a small group environment outside of a student's homeroom, the program also aims to “increase confidence and give [students a] space where they will be more willing to take a risk,” a statement that the intervention staff also seem to hold as true.⁹³

In outlining the process of the investigation of generative themes (previously discussed in the Nicaragua portion of the paper), one of the last aspects Freire highlights is the idea of “hinged themes,” themes that the teacher deems necessary to relay to students, regardless of

⁹¹ Ibid. 80.

⁹² CNCA Charter Renewal Petition.

⁹³ Yvonne Carillo, Personal Interview.

whether or not this is one of the students' generative themes.⁹⁴ Although this is one of the final components mentioned in his description of the process, I would argue that there may be more value in the core curriculum or "hinged themes" than Freire attributes to them. While the goal is to transform the system and give the oppressed a voice, ultimately, this would aim to serve them in climbing the social ladder, which would inevitably take place within the dominant system. This would, therefore, require the mastery of core concepts reflected in the hinged curriculum of most schools.

According to Freire, educational leaders should "never provide people with programs which have little or nothing to do with their own preoccupations, doubts, hopes, and fears—programs which at times in fact increase the fears of the oppressed consciousness."⁹⁵ Later in the book, Freire argues that, should the oppressed not arrive at the proper level of consciousness and not fully master their role in terms of their praxis, "they may aspire to a revolution as a means of domination, rather than as a road to liberation."⁹⁶ The untested feasibility in this goal appears murky—which may point to a realization that there is, in fact, little feasibility in the underclass truly dominating the system in the U.S.—thus further proving the centrality of hinged themes. In other words, there has to be some sort of set curriculum; this is simply the way formal education functions. However, there are ways to counter this potential increase in fear that may further oppress the consciousness of students, should they feel incapable of keeping up with the pace set in the standard curriculum. The CNCA Intervention program is an example of such a strategy. Interestingly, while satisfying the requirement of ensuring that students are meeting standard level with regard to the core curriculum, this program simultaneously satisfies Freire's suggestion of boosting students' confidence levels and creating an environment where they feel

⁹⁴ Freire 120.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 96.

⁹⁶ Freire 127.

at liberty to take risks, to learn and progress in ways that are most suitable and personal to them as individuals. According to the recent Charter, “learning opportunities should be differentiated to meet the needs of individual students, while at the same time structured so that students become lifelong learners who are motivated and competent.”⁹⁷

Fifth grade homeroom and intervention teachers, Rachel Caligiuri and Sierra Feliciano, agree with Assistant Principal Carrillo and uphold that the intervention program fosters growing levels of confidence and self-esteem in students. Feelings of success in intervention give students the motivation and desire to continue succeeding in school, thus helping deter students from wanting to "drop out and do who knows what in the streets," like many of the youth in the MacArthur Park area. Through intervention, “students [begin to] see a different way of life," one that contradicts what they may be exposed to by young family members or friends in the neighborhood, as well as the often non-academically driven paths of their parents. Furthermore, along with providing students with role models by building relationships between teacher and student, intervention strengthens the connection between parents and the school by alerting parents of their child's deficits.⁹⁸

As part of their "whatever it takes" motto, Camino Nuevo has adopted a policy of forming as many partnerships with outside organizations as deemed necessary. One example of the school truly doing "whatever it takes" to educate the school's English Language Learner population is their partnership with ALUMI, Alternative Learning Using Multiple Intelligences. ALUMI's approach to teaching is based on Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory and the concept that any child can learn if you find the correct medium through which a child learns best. The program's mission is to use the arts in "teaching kids to teach themselves." According

⁹⁷ CNCA Charter Renewal Petition.

⁹⁸ Rachel Caligiuri and Sierra Feliciano, Personal Interview, “The Teachers’ Take,” 15 Apr. 2010.

to educator and program co-founder Ana Olivo, any child can learn once you find the "way in." Olivo also states that through the creation of art-related projects, such as writing their own plays, students begin to feel powerful because they are using their voice to create. In the past, ALUMI has collaborated with the Los Angeles Unified School District Beyond the Bell Programs, the Migrant Education Program and the Emergency Immigrant Emersion Program. Last academic year, the program initiated an afterschool program at CNCA and received extremely positive responses from both participants and administration. In fact, the administration is considering having ALUMI take over their entire, school-wide afterschool program.⁹⁹

When asked what it is about Camino Nuevo that lends itself to effective collaboration with ALUMI, Olivo stated, "I think the element of at-risk kids. One of the problems, especially with this population, has so much to do with the fact that they don't really have an outlet for self-expression... This program gives them an appropriate place and way to work [things] out. It's almost like art therapy, in a way." According to Freire, programs must not "go to the people in order to bring them a message of "salvation," but in order to come to know through dialogue with them both their *objective situation* and their *awareness* of that situation—the various levels of perception of themselves and of the world in which and with which they exist."¹⁰⁰ This element of "art therapy," or aiding students in working out difficulties that result from the troubling realities of their circumstances, is something that ALUMI achieves not by teaching the kids anything specific or bringing them a message of "salvation" but, again, by teaching them to teach themselves. Olivo comments on last year's program and claims CNCA students truly took ownership over the project, which is the key in giving them hope, something that ties into CNCA's overall mission, thus indicating the cyclical and very intentional nature of the school's

⁹⁹ Ana Olivo, Personal Interview, "ALUMI at CNCA," 17 Apr. 2010.

¹⁰⁰ Freire 95.

holistic approach.

In keeping with the cyclical nature of the school's initiatives, CNCA's partnership with ALUMI is a manifestation of the school's effort to make sustained improvements on their award-winning bilingual program. The school's developmental bilingual program was initiated in 2001 in efforts to help students achieve proficiency at or above grade level in both English and Spanish. In efforts to better prepare teachers for the implementation of this program, CNCA has recently incorporated Bilingual Pedagogy into their professional development program. The school also extends this program to parents, in efforts to promote literacy among the entire CNCA community.¹⁰¹ Assistant Principal Carrillo believes that the strength of this program is that it creates the sense that learning in two languages is "better than one," and sends students the message that "the language they come to school with is valued and appreciated," thus validating who these students are culturally. Teachers further this method by organizing learning communities in their classrooms that help build the students' respect for differences so that they are not inhibited by racially defined social expectations that prevail in other public schools and throughout society as a whole.¹⁰² Teachers also use classroom community meetings to discuss issues and concerns that the students feel are important, again validating their thoughts and giving them a sense that who they are and what they think are critical aspects of the way their classrooms and the school as a whole functions.

CNCA incorporates their own interpretation of Freire's theories of co-intentional education and the action and reflection praxis in other interesting ways. According to Freire, through dialogue, authoritarianism can be done away with and a mutual learning relationship develops between teacher and student, one in which the teacher is also taught: "it enables teachers and

¹⁰¹ CNCA Charter Renewal Petition.

¹⁰² Carrillo, Personal Interview.

students to become Subjects of the educational process by overcoming authoritarianism and an alienating intellectualism.”¹⁰³ One way that CNCA satisfies the above idea of a mutual learning relationship is through the use of professional or adult learning communities for teachers, which employ four key structures: Critical Friends Groups (CFG’s), Classroom Walk-Throughs, Coaching Model, and the aforementioned Focused Professional Development. CFG’s are teacher-led discussions that aim to foster relationships among colleagues and “encourage reflective practice.” The process also aims to “rethink leadership roles” and thus involves administration in this teacher-driven program structure. Classroom Walk-Throughs and the ensuing debriefing sessions are also teacher-led, in efforts to gain data and insight that aids faculty in discovering the needed changes and maintenance for their instructional model. In efforts to maintain a “feedback rich culture,” the Coaching Model focuses on a relationship of high levels of dialogue between teacher and coach:

“The overarching role of the coach is to build teacher capacity to implement effective instructional practices to improve student learning and performance. The teacher role is to be a learner who is continually engaged in their curriculum and the study of teaching. When both teacher and coach fulfill their roles, they engage in an ongoing, reflective conversation about what happens in the classroom that translates into engaged and prepared students.”

According to Charter data, 100% of CNCA teachers strongly agree (57%) or agree (43%) that the professional learning community is creating more effective and reflective teachers.¹⁰⁴

In addition to aiding teachers in their mastery of the action and reflection praxis, CNCA also aims to do the same for students by giving them complete agency and instilling the confidence in them to self-direct their own action and reflection processes. In efforts to do so, the school focuses on “children owning their learning”:

“Ultimately, we seek to create an educational environment where educators experience

¹⁰³ Freire 86.

¹⁰⁴ CNCA Charter Renewal Petition.

teaching as a craft and children own their learning. We strive to provide students with the academic and social skills they need to feel inspired and achieve their hearts' desire."

The school uses various methods to achieve the successful creation of such an environment. One method is through the use of shared commitments. Among faculty, commitments include mottos such as the previously mentioned "we will do whatever it takes" and "all children can learn, therefore all of our students will grow this year" or "we will support one another toward being successful and maintaining high expectations." Additionally, students are responsible for following the "Camino Nuevo Way," a set of mindsets and behaviors that seek to define the small school community culture:

1. I stop problems before they start and I am committed to resolving differences positively.
2. I give my best effort in everything I do.
3. I make choices that positively impact the community around me.
4. I set goals for myself and use time wisely to achieve them.
5. I communicate in a thoughtful, positive way.
6. I am compassionate and respectful of all life forms.
7. I harm no one and no thing with hate.
8. I expect to be challenged and will challenge myself in my work.
9. I am persistent in pursuing my goals even when I am not successful at first.
10. I work to keep the Earth clean and green.

These ten affirmations are representative of the fact that the school holds students responsible for the action and reflection process that they instill in them. Numbers four and nine, for example, clearly require the effective use of a time management and action and reflection process in order to achieve goals, something that is fostered throughout the school and in the classroom environment, and then expected of the students under all circumstances. In order to further equip students for successful adherence to the CNCA Way, the school implements a hands-on interdisciplinary approach to learning that "allows students to make connections between different subject areas and be active learners."¹⁰⁵

Through an enriched program that involves various partnerships with renowned visual and

¹⁰⁵ CNCA Charter Renewal Petition.

performing arts organizations, the CNCA philosophy helps “students to find authentic connections to their academic learning through language, dance, drama, music, art, and technology and PE.” This enriched curriculum:

“Allows students to channel emotions into creative forms, with the objective of instilling value and a lifelong pursuit of the arts, as well as tolerance and respect for diversity. By engaging in visual and performing arts, students enhance their knowledge of core academic subjects, such as language arts and social studies, apply critical thinking skills and acquire artistic skill and style.”¹⁰⁶

This exposure ultimately prepares students with a plethora of strategies to draw from, available to aid them in their pursuit of their own personal understanding of the action and reflection process and the Camino Nuevo Way.

CNCA also aims to positively incorporate the psychosocial-emotional and behavioral domains of students’ lives as an integral part of their system: “CNCA practices a comprehensive approach to education. We believe that in order for students from historically underserved communities to achieve academic success, their home environment and their physical and mental health need to be as balanced as possible.” In order to achieve this balance, the school has implemented programs such as the Student Services Case Management program and has brought specialists onto their team, such as a full-time mental health counselor. With Student Services Case Management, “the Director of Student and Family Services is responsible for supporting students and families with gaining access to necessary medical, dental, vision, or mental health services to correct issues that impede their ability to learn.”¹⁰⁷

In addition to providing individual therapy, the school works with two organizations, the Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health Center and the Los Angeles Child Development Center, which send in representatives that lead small groups of students sharing a similar stressor or

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ CNCA Charter Renewal Petition.

concern. The school also has a Socialization Therapy Group, which provides group therapy sessions for students who are at risk for being bullied. Students are not only emotionally treated but are also taught to form allies with peers who are also in the these groups, yet another example of the school's holistic, cross-domain approach and a positive application of Freire's call for unity and partnership in organization aimed toward liberation.¹⁰⁸

One final aspect of CNCA's holistic approach is the school's focus on the education of their female students. Within the culture of machismo, often found in Latino societies, the needs and thoughts of women are often diminished, if not completely oppressed. In efforts to address the needs of their female students, Camino Nuevo, unlike many schools, goes beyond simply having required sex education classes. One example of this effort is the school's collaboration with Girls Inc. Representatives from the organization lead an afterschool program that provides an environment in which girls feel comfortable to discuss various feminine issues and are empowered through a celebration of girlhood. Students from all grades participate in the program and reap the benefits of this organization that has been "celebrating girls' voices since 1864."¹⁰⁹ An extension of this effort began last year with the first annual multi-site Girl's Leadership Conference. Female students spent the day at a conference discussing topics such as bullying, health and sexuality, as well as developing their skills in art and writing. The voice of students is a key element of this event, as evidenced by the fact that participants were surveyed and conference topics were chosen based on their interest.

Jocelyn Sanchez, a current student at Belmont and former CNCA Dragon says she hates Belmont because it is "full of wannabe gangsters." According to Sanchez, CNCA was the only school in the neighborhood that "wasn't like that." Sanchez spent time afterschool multiple days

¹⁰⁸ Carrillo, Personal Interview.

¹⁰⁹ Girls Inc., 25 Apr. 2010 <<http://www.girlsinc.org/index.html>>

a week and said that the teachers paid individual attention to every student, thus helping create an environment where students felt supported and safe.¹¹⁰ According to CNCA teacher Sierra Feliciano, this is a sentiment that is shared school-wide:

"If you ask most of the students here [if they would rather go straight home after school], I think they'll probably tell you no. Like Jaime, he told me he'd rather be here than at home—just out of the blue one day. And I remember I told the class we could either end intervention on a Wednesday last quarter or we could do an extra day to have a little party after school. I totally expected them to say just end it so they could go home but they *all* said they wanted to stay. It was really something."¹¹¹

Four years later, Sanchez's words appear to hold true at CNCA.

Sanchez highlights support from CNCA administration and staff as something that makes the school so unique. In fact, she credits this and the school's emphasis on creating positive and engaging afterschool activities as "the main thing that kept [her] out of all that drama and gangs and stuff that all my friends and family are into." Though she graduated years ago, she says she still visits CNCA because they were always there for her and she likes coming back to get advice about her future. Sanchez, a student who entered CNCA not knowing how to read in fourth grade, graduated with a 12th grade reading level. Though she will soon be a mother, she still plans to attend college because CNCA "taught her to aim high."¹¹² This is an example of the positive effects of the system-wide motto "college ready, college bound," something Camino Nuevo Charter Academy Chief Executive Officer, Ana Ponce, prides herself on.¹¹³

According to Principal Howard, CNCA crafts "action plans to address the gaps identified in the assessment measures, which serve to ensure students are supported in realizing their full academic and social potential. It is our belief that by providing students a high quality, culturally

¹¹⁰ Jocelyn Sanchez, Personal Interview, "A Former Student's Opinion of CNCA," 20 Apr. 2010.

¹¹¹ Caligiuri, Feliciano, Personal Interview.

¹¹² Sanchez, Personal Interview.

¹¹³ "Welcome to Camino Nuevo Charter Academy," CNCA, 15 Mar. 2010 <<http://caminonuevo.org/>>.

sensitive education, they will overcome the obstacles imposed upon them by a life of poverty and live the life of their own choosing.” One way in which leadership creates culturally sensitive students able to overcome such obstacles is through a focus on history:

“The Social Studies curriculum is based on a holistic approach to developing the students’ critical understanding of history and of their own identity. Out of this dynamic, historical understanding, the goal of social studies and humanities instruction is to foster a culturally sensitive perspective rooted in civic-mindedness and democratic principles, and to help students develop an ethical empathy towards social justice and act according to these ethics within their community. These competencies are developed in active learning classrooms and community-based projects that further the development of the whole student. Teachers strive to connect the content standards to students’ personal context.”

The aims of the history curriculum align with the school’s overall mission to create agents of social justice, which is defined as “an interpretation of multicultural, historical knowledge and its application to current society,” a concept that mirrors Freire’s call for historical awareness and a critical consciousness of the subjects’ problematic reality. Furthermore, in validating the students’ linguistic heritage and supporting them in accessing educational opportunities, Howard argues that the school’s bilingual program is also an attempt at getting to their problematic reality, understanding where the kids are coming from and the difficulties they are grappling with:

“A lot of the kids and families do not see themselves as part of the mainstream and an institution like a school represents the mainstream to them. So if we validate their identity by using their language as part of the institution, then it aids them in feeling like they are part of the mainstream.”

Though this effort is a defining aspect of the school, and a quality that places the school within the educational project category for the various highlighted reasons, Howard does not hesitate to admit that this is not an easy task, and a discussion of limitations is thus forthcoming.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Howard, Personal Interview.

VII. Geopolitical Background in Kampala, Uganda

According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Uganda has a population of 31,657. Of this number, 87% live in rural areas. According to UIS data from 2005, 76% of the population lives on less than \$2 a day.¹¹⁵ Though Uganda has experienced a history of extremely long, bloody conflicts, USAID claims that under current President Yoweri Museveni, the climate of Uganda has been improving in various regards: “Uganda has achieved many political, economic and social advances under President Yoweri Museveni. Strong economic growth has resulted in lower poverty, reduced rates of HIV/AIDS, and improved education. Regional disparities remain, particularly in the north of the country, which has begun its transition to peace after more than 20 years of conflict.”¹¹⁶ Despite these apparent successes, however, many Ugandans argue that the rate of corruption is at an extreme high and there may be more to this supposedly high level of progress in the country than meets the eye.

According to “Corruption Endemic in Nicaragua,” an article written last year by Ssemujju Ibrahim Nganda of Uganda’s *Weekly Observer*, the fact that a majority of Uganda’s inhabitants live in rural areas becomes a strategy for high levels of governmental corruption. The author argues that people in rural communities, “do not know they have the rights to demand services.” Nganda claims that the government’s failure to address the needs of rural communities is, essentially, failing to address the needs of nearly the entire country.¹¹⁷ According to USAID, while 98% of girls and 96% of boys are in primary school, only 21% of girls and 22% of boys are in secondary school. Furthermore, of this small percentage, only 56% of children complete a

¹¹⁵ “UIS Statistics in Brief: Education in Uganda,” UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 5 Dec. 2010 <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=121&IF_Language=eng&BR_Country=8000>.

¹¹⁶ “Country Profile: Uganda,” USAID, 5 Dec. 2010 <http://www.usaid.gov/locations/sub-saharan_africa/country/uganda/index.html>.

¹¹⁷ Ssemujju Ibrahim Nganda, “Corruption Endemic in Uganda,” Guardian, 13 Mar 2009, 5 Dec. 2010 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/katine/2009/mar/13/corruption-endemic-in-uganda/print>>.

full course of primary education and only 4% of the population of tertiary age is in tertiary school.¹¹⁸ In Nganda's article, he argues that this grim reality is darkest for rural communities and states that, among results from the 2008 primary and secondary exams, many rural schools did not have a single student pass the highest grade—which he attributes not solely to poor grades but to a lack of resources and funds. The better secondary schools cost roughly \$250 a term, a price that is simply impossible for these families, most of which are living on less than \$1 a day. This then feeds the cycle of poverty, as hopes of going to university and getting a good job fade: “This perpetually keeps children and their parents in poverty because they will never enjoy the regular income salaried people do.”¹¹⁹

Nganda argues that, though the aforementioned circumstances are governmentally documented and used to “beg for aid,” when the country receives outside aid, it is not properly allocated to address the real problem:

“Unfortunately, when this aid comes in and is added to locally raised government revenue, it is misappropriated or extravagantly used by the elite in the leadership. A bulk of local revenue and aid money is outrightly swindled and the balance officially used by those in leadership to pay their salaries, allowances, office furnishings and to buy luxury 4X4s. What's left over is sent to the rural areas to provide basic services. Unfortunately for Uganda, local governments, the highest being a district council, just provide another layer of bureaucracy and another place for public funds to be misused.”

Nganda sees little hope for change, as long as the “corrupt district official,” maintains his existing loyalty to the President and ruling party. Because of this lack of legitimate governance on a central level, the local governments have become unwieldy as well. Corruption is something that has become deeply embedded in all aspects of government and politics, in most sectors of the country:

“Corruption has become so endemic in Uganda, and is an accepted way of life, that when someone is appointed or elected to a public office they think it is now their turn to take

¹¹⁸ “Country Profile: Uganda,” [USAID](#).

¹¹⁹ Nganda.

advantage. The lack of civic competence makes the situation worse. People from rural areas treat the provision of services as a gift or favour from the government. They do not see it as their right to demand it and, therefore, settle for anything.”¹²⁰

Yasiin Mugerwa seconds Nganda’s sentiments a year later, in his 2010 article “Museveni Under Spotlight for Making Empty Promises,” written for Uganda’s *Daily Monitor*. According to the article, Museveni and the Electoral Commission are being accused of allegedly “aiding electoral corruption marred by ghost voters, bribery, intimidation and extensive cheating during elections.” Furthermore, as part of the annual anti-corruption week in Kampala, civil organizations and citizens such as Executive Director of the Anti-Corruption Coalition Uganda, Cissy Kagaba, have accused the President of making false promises in his campaigning, and thus being guilty of political corruption. However, Mr. Tamale Mirundi, Museveni’s spokesman, argues that, “whether the President is telling lies on his campaign trail or not, this is not their concern, the President knows what he is doing and the voters appreciate him.”¹²¹

After decades of notoriety due to severe human rights abuses in the 1970’s and 80’s—under military dictator Idi Amin and later the return to power of Milton Obote—and the loss of up to a half a million people, it is of no surprise that the inevitable improvements of a time of peace are recognized and appreciated in the country. However, the violence in the North continues after two decades of massacres and atrocities led by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). Furthermore, though democratic reforms have supposedly been instituted since Museveni became leader in 1986, and multi-party politics were restored in 2005, there is right for question among citizens such as Nganda and Mugerwa. The fact that Museveni was only able to be reelected for a third time after Parliament abolished the constitutional limit on presidential terms

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Yasiin Mugerwa, “Museveni Under Spotlight for Making Empty Promises,” *Daily Monitor*, 5 Dec. 2010, 5 Dec. 2010 < <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/-/688334/1066256/-/ckjh3nz/-/> >.

in 2005, is a political moment that has attracted the attention not solely of Ugandan citizens but concerned human beings worldwide.¹²²

VIII. Research in Kampala, Uganda

When Paulo Freire developed the educational theories expressed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the political and social circumstances of the environment in which he did so did not allow for the implementation of a formal education system, such as that of the two institutions explored thus far. Due to the circumstances of the extremely impoverished, illiterate Brazilian adults he targeted in his work, Freire chose to employ a popular education model as the foundation of his theories. While the aforementioned formal education institutions display an effective practice of Freire's theories in the more traditional academic environment, it is also important to explore organizations that are adhering to the precise structure the author intended: popular education. For this reason, the efforts of the Amagezi Gemaanyi (Knowledge is Power) Youth Association (AGYA) provides an interesting, modern case study of the way in which Freire's work may be implemented in less traditional educational settings—which often may be the only option when school systems are inadequate, as is often the case in developing countries such as Uganda.

According to Freire, the oppressed must be the creators or developers of the pedagogy of their own freedom: “No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in their struggle for their redemption.”¹²³ AGYA satisfies this criterion down to its very roots. In 2008, Divinity Barkley (an American, University of Southern California graduate) and Abraham Matovu (a Ugandan

¹²² “Country Profile: Uganda,” BBC News, 5 Dec. 2010 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1069166.stm>.

¹²³ Freire 54.

fondly known as “Uncle Ibra” by hundreds of children—also now Barkley’s husband) founded AGYA, an NGO committed to the following principles:

“Creating a safe, supportive, sustainable learning environment where Ugandan youth can develop leadership skills and express themselves creatively. AGYA operates a community center that has provided outreach, education, and services to more than 1,000 people living in poverty in urban Uganda. AGYA’s action-oriented, youth-centered, curriculum-driven programs are designed to foster creativity, leadership, critical-thinking, and responsibility.”¹²⁴

In order to determine the best way to bring this mission to the people of Uganda, Matovu uses his knowledge as a Ugandan-born man to develop the pedagogy for his own liberation, and the liberation of the hundreds of children the organization serves. In efforts to see to it that these young people are a part of this process, AGYA has adopted a peer-education model that actively involves the youth in the organization on all of its various levels:

“AGYA has adopted a peer-education model, and currently employs a staff of 18 Youth Leaders ages 15-25. All AGYA Youth Leaders live in the local community, and are trained to design and facilitate workshops based on their particular skill sets. AGYA’s peer-education workshops are geared towards (1) using art as a learning tool and (2) developing leadership, critical-thinking, writing, reading comprehension and communication skills.”¹²⁵

This model, driven and guided entirely by Youth Leaders, is one that, again, resonates with one of Freire’s most central theories, as “there is no one better equipped than the oppressed to speak out against oppression and to lead in the struggle for liberation.”¹²⁶

AGYA’s primary target population is youth ages thirteen to twenty-five. Though the organization does have several programs for youth of ages that both exceed and precede this age range, the co-founders argue:

¹²⁴ Divinity Barkley and Abraham Matovu, Informal Interview, “The AGYA System,” 30 Nov. 2010.*

* (Information also gathered from participant observations at AGYA in May and June of 2010)

¹²⁵ Barkley and Matovu, Informal Interview.

¹²⁶ Freire 45.

“Uganda has one of the youngest populations in the world, with 61% of the population under the age of 25, and it is critical for Uganda’s youth population to have access to the resources and skills that will empower them to become productive members of society who can contribute to Uganda’s progress.”¹²⁷

AGYA thus has three core programs that co-founders argue are “aimed at providing innovative arts-based, non-formal peer education initiatives, economically empowering local youth, and nurturing innovation, confidence, integrity and creative self-expression. Classes are led by AGYA's Youth Leaders and Youth Facilitators and all classes and workshops are free and take place daily at AGYA's Community Center”¹²⁸: Girls Program, Free Lunch Program and After-School Program. According to co-founders, the program “provides girls with positive role models and mentors, educational facilities and resources that will allow them to become successful female leaders in their communities.” The AGYA Girls program has formed a partnership with the Century City Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Sorority, with which they operate “Adopt-A-Scholar,” a mentorship and scholarship program. Through this program, members of Delta Sigma Theta serve as volunteer mentors and pen pals to girl scholars in Uganda. In 2009, “Adopt-A-Scholar” provided 4 scholarships to high school girls in Uganda; the program will have provided 10 scholarships by the end of 2010. The Free Lunch Program provides nutritious meals and access to clean drinking water to what co-founders deem “vulnerable children and youth.” Finally, the After-School Program provides youth with “a nurturing learning environment featuring tutoring and innovative arts and educational classes including computer skills, language training, textiles and fashion design, jewelry-making, poetry and creative writing, art, dance and music, photography, film and media.”¹²⁹

According to AGYA co-founders, the peer-education model has been effective for the

¹²⁷ Barkley and Matovu, Informal Interview.

¹²⁸ Barkley and Matovu, Informal Interview.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

following reasons: “Youth are encouraged to be independent, trust each other, share their skills, and help develop and empower their fellow youth. AGYA's youth leaders are effective in reaching out to some of the most at-risk youth because they were raised in similar environments and can relate to the challenges that their peers are struggling against.”¹³⁰ This statement highlights the fact that the pedagogy for this humanization movement is being “forged with, not *for*, the oppressed,”¹³¹ as Youth Leaders are treated not simply as participants but key actors, invaluable components of the organization’s mechanism. According to Freire, “The oppressed are not ‘marginals’ living on the ‘outside’ of society. They have always been ‘inside’—inside the structure which made them ‘beings for others.’ The solution is not to ‘integrate’ them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become ‘beings for themselves.’”¹³² Through an evaluation of the roles and thoughts of AGYA’s youth leader’s, it becomes apparent that the organization is creating “beings for themselves,” and transforming a group of young people into leaders who will have the needed skill set to transform the oppressive structure in which they live.

Youth Leader Kenny Mulinde is AGYA’s General Secretary and Youth Administrator, a role that greatly resembles that of an organization President. Among his duties are organizing community and leadership meetings, maintaining the computer database and member registration, and collecting monthly reports, curriculums and proposals from managers and facilitators. Additional youth leadership positions within the organization are as follows: Facility Position, Performing Arts Position, Girls Program Position, Girls Program Manager, After-School Program Manager, Free Lunch Program Manager, Sports and Recreation Manager, Media-Arts Program Manager and Art and Design Program Manager. According to Mulinde,

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Freire 48.

¹³² Ibid. 74.

youth leaders are trained to teach classes through leadership workshops that help them develop their leadership skills and abilities to create an effective curriculum. In this way, AGYA's leadership (co-founders Barkley and Matovu) is adequately preparing Youth Leaders for participation in their humanization. However, Mulinde argues "training makes them ready enough to carry on workshops of their choice and simply helps them to perform better in their own workshops," thus confirming that leadership avoids the invasive mentality of an antidialogical structure or systemic education, and seeks to perpetuate the educational project environment.¹³³

According to Freire, "The goal of libertarian education is to aid students in feeling like masters of their own thinking, a mastery that is achieved through dialogue regarding the thoughts and views of the world, dialogue that should be based on the contributions of the students themselves."¹³⁴ Maintaining a dialogical environment is among one of AGYA's highest priorities. In efforts to maintain such an environment, the organization emphasizes Freire's action and reflection practice in various ways. In order to see to it that Youth Leaders are reflecting upon the success of their classes, for example, Mulinde notes that the organization has class evaluations during the monthly leadership meetings, at which "youth reflect on the success of their classes...and those classes that need to be changed are advised and helped to make their classes better."¹³⁵ According to Freire, continued manipulation would result if leaders addressed the oppressed as "mere activists" and did not include them in the reflection, which is an equally important aspect of the process, as AGYA's action and reflection model demonstrates.¹³⁶ To ensure that communication remains high between Youth Leaders and the "more formal

¹³³ Kenny Mulinde, Personal Interview, "General Secretary's Thoughts on AGYA," 28 Nov. 2010.

¹³⁴ Freire 124.

¹³⁵ Mulinde, Personal Interview.

¹³⁶ Freire 126.

leadership,” the organization’s co-founders, Mulinde claims: “We put a lot of emphasis on uniform distribution of official tasks. This creates a strong and reliable link between the two bodies whereby it establishes need for one another. In that way, youth leaders have a high communication with the official leaders of AGYA and this is also achieved through our weekly community meeting, where a lot of information is discussed and passed on to the community.” According to Freire, “superficial conversions to the cause of liberation” fail to truly incorporate the oppressed in the achievement of the praxis, and replace key components—dialogue, reflection, and communication—with slogans, communiqués, monologues and instructions,” thus completing the process for the oppressed and leading to what Freire argues is an invalid transformation.¹³⁷ In making dialogue and the action and reflection praxis such integral components of the system among leaders on all levels, AGYA avoids this type of invalid or superficial transformation often seen in NGO’s, especially in the developing world.

Freire argues that, in a successful educational project, “dialogue becomes the foundation of a partnership that may have the power to transform, despite circumstances that may have impaired these alienated people’s ability to exercise their power to evoke change.”¹³⁸ By creating the above relationship in which Mulinde highlights the “two bodies,” the oppressed and their leaders, “establish a need for one another,” the leaders of this movement are giving youth the confidence and skills they need to participate in their liberation and transform their situations despite the hardships they have faced and the social circumstances that regularly challenge and work against them. Mulinde, for example, is an orphan who was disregarded by the rest of his family after his parents died. He then had no resources to continue his education and has been struggling to do so, despite his position at the top of his class. However, AGYA has given Kenny

¹³⁷ Freire 66.

¹³⁸ Ibid. 91.

hope in his abilities. By selling art and working with AGYA to improve his skills and belief in himself, Kenny has “always found a way” to somehow continue his education, as he understands this is essential for his future:

“AGYA has given me the much needed platform where I have been able to discover many of my potentials, abilities and personal skills. In this way, I have gained a lot of confidence and learned that I can save a soul with the little bit of knowledge I have about many things. Through AGYA, I have got the courage to reach out to fellow peers.”¹³⁹

Freire argues that when the marginalized participate in a positive educational experience that employs the criteria he highlights in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, “he or she comes to a new awareness of self, has a new sense of dignity, and is stirred by a new hope.”¹⁴⁰ It would be of no surprise for a young man like Kenny Mulinde to have lost hope and gone down a path that would, ultimately, prove much less fruitful than the one he has decidedly struggled down for years. However, because AGYA has given him this courage and faith in his abilities to creatively confront life’s difficulties, Mulinde persists. The same is true of many other youth leaders and students AGYA serves. According to Mulinde, this is, in large part, due to the following: “We believe that our programs are designed to move youth into the direction of our overall vision. We don’t run programs for the sake of it, we do it to achieve overall organizational objectives. With that in mind, we believe that every student is getting a more focused life of visions and goals. Our youth are being fostered to respect, trust and have integrity. We have also provided resources and opportunities for personal and professional development in order for our youth to excel.” Mulinde believes that this influence is coming from both the organization’s leaders and the Youth Leaders, yet another manifestation of the organization’s co-intentional learning system

¹³⁹ Mulinde, Personal Interview.

¹⁴⁰ Freire 33.

that creates a complete break in the teacher-student contradiction, which Freire highlights as prevalent in systemic education.

The co-intentional learning system at AGYA is one with many complexities. One of the challenges the organization has had to face is helping foster a voice among the women Youth Leaders and students, something that proves very difficult in a culture where women are often marginalized to much greater extent than their male counterparts. According to Barkley, “Young women, especially girls who are living in poverty, are so shy. When I first met the girls in our program, they whispered when they talked—they had no confidence.” The co-founder argues that in some contexts, such as within the traditional roles of motherhood and marriage, women are empowered and respected. However, “for young women who may have children out of wedlock or who haven’t gone with the traditional role, that respect immediately dissipates.” As a result of these cultural realities, young women tend to have extreme self-esteem issues. This extends to further problems such as selling sex, which has even become an issue within the traditional school system:

“Some girls negotiate sex for things and money. There’s been a huge problem in the secondary school in the slum where teachers and headmasters take advantage of young girls, telling them they’ll give them higher grades in exchange for sexual favors. Or, if the students can’t afford their school fees, they’ll say ‘don’t worry about your fees if you do this sexual favor for me.’ And we’re talking 30 US dollars. And the girls do it, they feel like they have no choice, no agency.”

This sense of a lack of agency is something Freire indirectly highlights in his work and it, quite visibly, something AGYA fervently seeks to counter. Barkley claims: “When I was in high school, I had things that I thought were major challenges but they’re nothing compared to what these people are facing on a daily basis. It inspires me even more. Though I love all children, I have a special place for young girls. I believe that if you really want to change a community, you

have to start with women.”

Sarah Mulekatete is the AGYA Girls Program Director. After being a member of the organization for two years, co-founders agree Sarah “has been one of AGYA's most promising youth leaders.” After losing her mother to the Rwandan Genocide, and being raised by her single parent father in the slums of Uganda, Sarah has high aspirations of becoming a journalist:

“If I became a journalist, I would talk about the lives of women, how women are treated in Uganda. That’s why we are here. Here in Uganda, women are not helped. But, what AGYA is doing now, I know will take the women somewhere. Most of the women here are very smart. We have some editors, we have some powerful politicians, we have some great women. Before, women were not supposed to eat first, women had no rights to be in bigger spaces but we are getting kind of developed. Our mothers were denied their rights but our generation, we can change that.”¹⁴¹

Sarah is aware of the political and historical happenings of the past that affected women like her mother and are affecting women like her and her students today. According to Freire, the restrictive systemic education or banking theory often practiced in traditional educational institutions needs to be replaced with problem-posing education, one that “[poses the] problems of human beings in their relations with the world”¹⁴² and constantly unveils reality.¹⁴³ He argues that the more one diminishes their historical and political immaturity, the more difficult it becomes for them to be manipulated by the dominant group looking to maintain their power. Sarah recognizes the importance of knowing her history in order to be an active agent of social change in the present and this is something she looks to pass onto her fellow women in the Girls Program. The following words of co-founder Matovu prove that this focus on historical awareness as a means to attaining a critical consciousness is not solely something Sarah aspires to bring to her students, but is something that is fostered throughout the organization as a whole:

¹⁴¹ Ope Bukola, “Sarah Mulekatete: From Genocide Victim to Womanist Leader in Uganda,” *Zora & Alice*, 19 July 2010, 1 Dec 2010 < <http://zora-alice.com/2010/07/sarah-mulekatete-victim-to-leader/>>.

¹⁴² Freire 79.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* 81.

“We constantly talk about our culture, where we come from, about the history of Uganda and politics. However much you may not want to learn about this, if you don’t know where you’re from, you don’t know where you’re going.”¹⁴⁴ General Secretary Mulinde seconds this notion in stating that, because AGYA is “an open space for all kinds of young people from different walks of life, we maintain a sense of humanity and we do very much respect the culture, beliefs and tradition of each of our members.”¹⁴⁵

Beyond the implementation of Freire’s historical awareness focus, the Girls Program also employs a dialogical structure and a sense of unity among participants, both of which are, again, requisites for an effective liberation process. Sarah discusses how such ideas are worked into the Sisterhood Class that forms part of the program:

“We also have a sisterhood class. This class empowers young girls. For example, one of us could come when she’s kind of miserable. Maybe a sister will call a class and we all write down something to encourage her. She feels more encouraged, she feels like she has sisters at AGYA who cares, she feels really at home. Sisterhood class is most important, especially for girls. The main purpose of this class is to learn more about our everyday lives, especially as females. It’s focused on education, how AIDS is spread, how we can avoid that. Also, as I told you, when someone is discouraged, the class is also there to help her feel more comfortable. We share our lives and our ideas.”

By becoming a journalist, Sarah feels she can be the spokesperson for AGYA, someone who makes the organization known and is a part of the betterment of her generation: “If I become a journalist, and someone becomes an editor, and someone else becomes a fashion designer – you know Uganda will really build a good generation. I have the skills they teach me here at AGYA– how to use a camera, how to explain myself, how to talk with people and how to handle different types of people.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Abraham Matovu, Personal Interview, “Thoughts of AGYA Co-founder,” 1 Dec 2010.

¹⁴⁵ Mulinde, Personal Interview.

¹⁴⁶ Bukola (Mulekatete Interview)

The problems within the traditional school system that AGYA is seeking to supplement or, in the case of some students, replace, are by no means limited to the aforementioned problems among young women. In classes observed at the Good Hope Primary School Nabulagala throughout the months of May and June, most of the way in which class was conducted and students behaved points to the use of the banking system. Students were all so timid and unwilling to speak freely, as if they only spoke when they knew the “right answer.” This was, however, more prevalent among the female students, who were then often mocked as the teacher sat back and watched—thus furthering Barkley’s statement about gender struggles in the country. Further evidence of the use of systemic education was the deferential, robotic pledge students made to the visitors whenever they walked in, showing the school’s emphasis on rote memorization and a sense of inferiority in comparison with the visiting Americans. Even when teachers attempted to give students some sense of agency or a decisive role in determining the structure of a lesson, students were completely out of order, making fun of each other and yelling. While the teacher was going around hitting children’s desks with a ruler as a supposed way of creating order in the room, the children “leading” the activity had no guidance and clearly had not been given the proper tools to take charge. While this seemingly points to a lack of “hinged themes,” there was, in fact, too large of an emphasis on hinged themes during the rest of the exercises and classes, as mentioned before with children’s fear to express their personal perceptions or provide an innovative answer in any context.

Freire does not deny that leaders should take control when it comes to coordination and logistics, however, he emphasizes, “leaders who deny praxis to the oppressed thereby invalidate their own praxis.”¹⁴⁷ Revolutionary praxis must thus combat the following dichotomy: treating the oppressed as a possession and perpetuating a praxis that becomes solely following decisions

¹⁴⁷ Freire 126.

made by the dominant elite.¹⁴⁸ In the aforementioned ways, this traditional school environment did, in fact, perpetuate this dichotomy and thus failed to employ co-intentional or dialogical structures. The situation with art classes at the school is also an interesting extension of the contradictory nature of this school's system. There is no emphasis on art in the school, though teachers and the headmaster emphasized that they wanted the visiting teachers to conduct art classes. While this is, of course, positive on some level—in terms of at least somewhat fostering the creativity that students seem to be so fearful of in classes—having outsiders come in and teach “their specialty” will not have a lasting effect and may only perpetuate the idea that art and creativity are the domains of others, not something these children are capable of. This is a structure that Freire would undoubtedly deem a key strategy of oppressive action. Furthermore, the deferential nature students displayed around American visitors implies that students are most likely not being taught that *they* have value, which is a perpetuation of the colonized mentality, as well as the dependency that has set so many African nations behind. Children are, again, largely not clued into the potential that they have in struggling societies and countries such as these, as keeping people uneducated is often a strategy for maintaining the extremely corrupt government systems that maintain all wealth on one, upper level of the government, while the rest of the country is left to starve. It is realities of urban education in Uganda such as these that AGYA seeks to counter.

According to Abraham Matovu, education is the biggest problem that plagues Ugandan youth:

“Among the youth that I have seen and met and worked with, I think the major problem is education. Most of them have what it takes to do whatever they want to do but because they lack the education, or the skill, or someone to tell them how or when to do things, they end up being caught up somewhere or doing things they shouldn't be doing...[simply] because they didn't have the knowledge or anyone to help them.”

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

When asked about problems with traditional education, Matovu was in no way opposed. In fact, he highlighted that about 92% of AGYA members are enrolled in school. However, the problem according to Matovu is *what* is being taught:

“If it’s going to help you better your life, there’s no problem. The problem comes in because they teach you stuff that is not going to help you. If they are only teaching you about witchcraft, for example, that is not going to help you in a professional life. We all go to school to better our lives so if that is going to help you somehow in this world, I have no problems with that but if it is something setting you back or not helping you move forward, that is a problem. Take my personal example: why did I study physics or chemistry, for what reasons? I was an artist and if I had have studied art, I promise I would be Uganda’s best but I went to school and did things that were not going to help me in any way—you study about Canada and Napoleon and those are things that don’t help us here in Uganda.”¹⁴⁹

AGYA General Secretary, Mulinde, furthers Matovu’s sentiments regarding the flaws of the Ugandan education system:

“The traditional school system of Uganda is experiencing a series of problems. On the other hand, regardless of the loopholes, it has been so influential to the fortunate children who can afford school fees. However, to a larger extent, it has left many young people ignorant due to the poor academic syllabus that is so theoretical and inapplicable. This type of education system produces more job seekers than job creators thus rendering the whole system dysfunctional. Schools in Uganda, especially private owned, have a very high school fees structure that has marginalized many youth living in urban poverty. The result of this is the victims of such situations have resorted to robbery, theft, immorality and other associated crimes. Above all, the schools have very poor and underdeveloped infrastructures with high populations associated with threatening hygiene and sanitation. The school facilities are so inadequate and inefficient. For example, science students in some schools fail their examinations simply due to inadequate apparatus and laboratory equipment. The story is so annoying and endless!”¹⁵⁰

Though only 8% of AGYA youth are not enrolled in school, members regularly choose to attend AGYA after a full day of classes. When asked why Matovu highlighted differences between AGYA’s practices and those of schools in the community:

“They come to AGYA because they feel like AGYA is not telling them what to do. They can do what they want to do here and this makes them feel a part of whatever is going on. This is not a place where people come to be told, like, we have professionals teaching so

¹⁴⁹ Matovu, Personal Interview.

¹⁵⁰ Mulinde, Personal Interview.

you have to come and just see what they are doing a follow. You are involved in everything and when you come to learn, you are also a teacher—you teach and you learn. It's different they don't have that at school. I feel like everybody needs something different and that is the number one reason people come to AGYA—it's just different from what they know."¹⁵¹

This statement shows that AGYA is actively seeking the co-intentional educational practices that are characteristic of an educational project that contradicts the more prevalent banking projects.

Freire explicitly urges the reader not to confuse development with modernization, as a modernized society will, without true development, remain dependent on other, more stable societies. In order to truly gauge development, one must examine determine whether or not a society is “a being for itself.” In “dual, ‘reflex,’ invaded, and dependent” societies, all authority to make decisions (political, economic and cultural) is maintained outside the country and out of the hands of the oppressed group: this represents “mere transformation...*not* their development.”¹⁵² Conversely, however, AGYA is striving to create beings for themselves, capable and desiring of re-creating the reality in which they live and humanizing the people with which they live. The presence of this effort is detected in sentiments expressed by various Youth Leaders. Nelson Kazibwe, for example, is the Facilities Manager at AGYA, responsible for managing the property of the AGYA Community Center. In addition, Kazibwe facilitates educational workshops with primary-school children ages 3-10, because he believes art and music can provide youth with a platform to evolve as strong and intelligent leaders of today and over generations. Brian Sseguya is Kazibwe's Assistant Facilities Manager who also participates in hip-hop, poetry, and painting classes at the AGYA Community Center. Brian loves reaching out to his peers through music and other forms of art. He believes youth have the power to influence positive lifestyles in their communities and the world at large. Freire agrees

¹⁵¹ Matovu, Personal Interview.

¹⁵² Freire 161-162.

“humankind, as beings of the *praxis*, emerge from the world, objectify it, and in so doing can understand it and transform it with their labor.”¹⁵³ As praxis is comprised of action and reflection, this should not be broken down into sole verbalism or activism. The above “verbalism,” the spoken desire of Youth Leaders, is coupled not solely with “activism,” which is carried out in their classes, but also with reflective processes conducted with the subjects in efforts to bring everyone to the more positive future these Ugandan students seek.

The intricacies of relationships among members of leadership, and between leaders and the people, is something Freire emphasizes from numerous angles: “Neither invasion by the leaders of the people’s world view nor mere adaptation by the leaders to the (often naïve) aspirations of the people is acceptable.” According to the author, cultural synthesis is, thus, “the only way.”¹⁵⁴ This is something that has really successfully been done at AGYA, with an equal leadership role played by Abraham Matovu, the “insider,” and Divinity Barkley, the technical “outsider.” Furthermore, by so integrally involving the youth they target, the organization also satisfies Freire’s call for not developing programs based solely on what the educator believes best but what the students want to learn more about. In these ways, the organization avoids invasion and mere adaptation and employs a synthesis of concerns derived from members at all levels of the endeavor. One potential area for concern at AGYA in this regard, however, is their partnership with outside organizations and the possibility that this may have an effect of demeaning or belittling the structure that leadership and youth have co-intentionally established.

An often-encountered problem among NGO’s is that outside partners or donors often treat the target population as a group in need of the “salvation” that Freire denounces. According to Freire, “attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of

¹⁵³ Freire 125.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.182.

liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building; it is to lead them into the populist pitfall and transform them into masses which can be manipulated.”¹⁵⁵ This idea seems to coincide with Barkley’s concept of traditional sponsorship:

“Traditional sponsorship – give \$20 a week to support this one kid, that kind of stuff – I just feel like that’s not sustainable. People need to be focused on providing jobs and ways for people to earn their own money and be entrepreneurs, especially youth. This sponsorship stuff makes people dependent on the sponsors. It’s so individualistic. It’s so Western. We’re more focused on income generating activities that can benefit a multitude of students. With the jewelry, if you don’t participate, you don’t get any money. Right now, we’re employing 18 youth at our community center. For them, that’s so much more empowering than getting a handout from some charity.”

While this perception regarding sponsorship seems to be the proper foundation for combating the dependency that so often plagues marginalized populations and perpetuates oppression, the question for many such organizations becomes: how does one ensure that partner organizations that come in to “help” are not doing essentially the same thing. The action and reflection process is aimed toward avoiding the submersion of one’s human consciousness and the domestication of oppression.¹⁵⁶ However, if an aid group comes in, diagnoses the problem for the oppressed group, and creates a solution for them, this is denying them this praxis that is so crucial to their liberation and it must be examined whether or not organizations are combating this.

Despite potential disruptions in the preexisting system and conflict among resident leadership and visiting leaders, AGYA has formed a system with outside partners to avoid such ruptures in the praxis that is so important to the success of their educational project:

“The involvement of international volunteers doesn’t disrupt our system at all because we lay a special program for their curriculums in advance. This is possible because we become aware of each one of them and what they intend to facilitate before they come, like in two months [ahead] of time. In this process, we link them to country youth leaders with whom their curriculums align. So this creates a [productive] work plan that works for both the youth leaders and international students. Therefore, our system is not affected in any way.”

¹⁵⁵ Freire 65.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 51.

AGYA, therefore, successfully contradicts the banking notion often imposed by outside partners and centers on the idea that “one must seek to live *with* others in solidarity...[not to] impose oneself, nor even merely co-exist with one’s students. Solidarity requires true communication.”¹⁵⁷

Despite the above successes with solidarity, which Freire highlights as a critical component of an effective educational project, especially a grassroots endeavor such as this, positive results in programs of this sort often remain internal or concentrated within a small subset of the population. “Many of the oppressed who directly or indirectly participate in revolution intend—conditioned by the myths of the old order—to make it their private revolution. The shadow of their former oppressor is still cast over them. The pursuit of full humanity, however, cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity.”¹⁵⁸ According to Freire, we must believe in the power of solidarity and the collaboration of human beings in transforming oppressive realities. In order to see to it that a meaningful solidarity is maintained, one that extends beyond simply the youth that lead and participate, community involvement is a key component. In efforts to maintain a dialogical solidarity with the community, AGYA has developed the community meeting system:

“The community meeting is a weekly AGYA member gathering that takes place on every Sunday of the week. It is chaired by a Youth Leader and minutes are taken by the General Secretary. At the community meeting, Youth Leaders give public speeches, there is entertainment and communication from the official leaders of AGYA. The [purpose] of these meetings is get to know the new members and visitors, [give] updates on the different AGYA happenings and programs, and for public speech training in order to create self confidence among the youth.”

In this way, AGYA ensures that the community remains informed of the happenings of the organization and the information available to them through the organization. To further this and

¹⁵⁷ Freire 77.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. 46.

extend their efforts to a larger target group, some AGYA Youth Leaders even hold classes for adults, such as English lessons. To take these efforts beyond the walls of this community, AGYA hopes to expand and bring their message and work to other African nations, something that will be further examined in the final section of this research.

IX. Conclusion: Seeking a Cultural Revolution

While some may be able to find truth in Freire's argument that dialogue cannot exist without profound love for people and the world and that the revolution is an act of love, it may be bold statements such as these that cause opposition to his theories that, at their core, are rather sound. Should one replace this idea of love with words such as open-mindedness, equity, non-prejudicial or non-marginalizing views of others, arguments such as these might prove to be more accessible to a wider audience. It is with this in mind that one should view Freire's idea of an educational "revolution." For the purposes of the forthcoming arguments, "revolution" should be understood as "a drastic and far-reaching change in ways of thinking and behaving"—nothing more radical or violent is implied for these circumstances.¹⁵⁹ According to Freire, "a true revolution...must be accountable to [the oppressed], must speak frankly to them of its achievements, its mistakes, its miscalculations, and its difficulties."¹⁶⁰ For this reason, it is imperative to examine both the achievements and limitations of these revolutionary institutions.

Prior to analyzing the challenges these organizations face and whether or not they are overcoming such challenges, one must verify whether or not CNCA, PLACE and AGYA are truly revolutionary entities. According to Freire, the educational process may also evolve into a "cultural revolution," which is, of course, a positive outcome, so long as the dialogical quality remains constant, as this quality is "one of the most effective instruments for keeping the

¹⁵⁹ "WordNet Search: Revolution," Princeton WordNet, 6 Dec. 2010 <<http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=revolution>>.

¹⁶⁰ Freire 128.

revolution from becoming institutionalized and stratified in a counter-revolutionary bureaucracy.”¹⁶¹ It has been established in the preceding research sections that each of these bodies maintain and practice the various qualities that Freire’s theories deem crucial to educational projects. Additionally, it can be argued that in this process, these institutions become the catalyst for a cultural revolution among the populations they target and serve.

Freire notes, “In order to communicate effectively, educator and politician must understand the structural conditions in which the thought and language of the people are dialectically framed.”¹⁶² For an authentic cultural revolution to take place, leaders must somehow become attuned to the critical awareness of their target population and the language in which said population develops such thought. One way of doing so is, of course, through development of a cultural or language program. CNCA and PLACE both implement bilingual programs aimed at validating who students are culturally, through the use of their native languages and knowledge of their ethnic histories. In this way, these institutions avoid the banking theory and practice that “fail to acknowledge men and women as historical beings” and instead employ “problem-posing theory and practice [which] take the people’s historicity as their starting point.” According to Freire, problem-posing theory thus becomes revolutionary as it “accepts neither a ‘well-behaved’ present nor a predetermined future [but] roots itself in the dynamic present.”¹⁶³ Though AGYA does not have a comparable language initiative, an implementation of this problem-posing theory is, nevertheless, visible. The action and reflection praxis is conducted entirely with, if not solely by, students at the grassroots level of this society; this inherently signifies the creation of revolutionary action within the structural domain of these youth and the acknowledgement of their historicity as an important factor for consideration in moving forward.

¹⁶¹ Freire 137.

¹⁶² Ibid. 96.

¹⁶³ Ibid. 84

Despite the fact that, through use of a language or grassroots emphasis, these organizations are successfully moving toward a cultural revolution, such programs inevitably encounter struggles in such processes. At PLACE, for example, the program's intercultural, bilingual nature is a positive—in the abovementioned respect—if not a requirement for a successful educational project targeting such a population. However, the problem mentioned by MINED representative Dixon regarding teachers' use of Creole in the English and Spanish classrooms is a struggle that PLACE also faces. Pedagogical Assistant Powell believes there is a need for the creation of a space where teachers can practice English before entering the classroom environment, in order to avoid involuntarily resorting to the use of Creole. For this reason, teachers are working with a specialist twice a week to overcome this problem and according to Powell, “[they] are getting there.”¹⁶⁴

In order to further this language acquisition process, the school plans to establish a system in the upcoming school year under which only English will be spoken on campus, even among people who are solely aiding in tasks such as meal distribution. Despite the apparent extremity of this system, Powell emphasizes the importance of maintaining the mother tongue and using it as a strategy. The goal is to “make comparisons so children become conscious that [English and Creole] are two different languages” and not to perpetuate the widely held idea that “Creole is broken English.” The point of this system is to emphasize practicing English, as this is the foreign language for these children. In doing so, Powell wholeheartedly encourages using “the child's mother tongue to clear up any doubt or uneasiness, but only in extreme cases.”¹⁶⁵

The school is also facing other challenges with regard to this tool for a cultural revolution, even in areas where they have been largely successful. One challenge has been trying

¹⁶⁴ Powell, Personal Interview.

¹⁶⁵ Powell, Personal Interview.

to get the municipal MINED to incorporate this Intercultural, Bilingual model on a regional level. According to Powell, however, “MINED has not been paying us any mind.” Fortunately, though, PLACE “has a positive relationship with the directors of all the public schools” and is able to try to exert their influence directly. Because Dr. Taylor “did not want this to be a competition with other schools,” which Powell states would simply be unfair, as these schools do not have the same resources, PLACE has incorporated other schools into their affairs as much as possible. For example, the school tries to invite two or three teachers from public schools, as well as a MINED representative, to their training sessions. Unfortunately, she argues that, though MINED representatives consistently attend, they then return to their offices and continue carrying out business as they previously had, without implementing any lasting changes:

“It has been difficult because we all know what is wrong, but no one is doing what is necessary to make what is wrong right. We don’t have the right people in the right place. For example, sometimes I look up materials when I see teachers need help in an area after looking through their daily plans. Sometimes people [simply] don’t do things because they don’t know how and all they need is an extra push [like this].”¹⁶⁶

Powell does not see other leaders giving their fellow community leaders this extra push. One indication of this is the fact that it is nearly impossible to make an appointment with the MINED delegate because he is “never around.” Nevertheless, Powell believes that with the relationships PLACE has forged with public schools and more insistence on their part, there is potential for making a difference. One example of the school’s effort to work around this defective system is as follows: PLACE has created a scholarship program for students’ uniforms and supplies to aid them in their attendance to various public schools. With programs such as these, the school has created direct lines of communication with parents of public school students and Powell hopes that, through this medium, PLACE can light a fire under these parents and

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

influence them in speaking out and “making their directors more active.”¹⁶⁷

Camino Nuevo has implemented a similar language program, as integrating students into mainstream society through the validation of their language and culture is one of the school’s main goals. Principal Howard does not deny, however, that successfully creating such a scenario is not a simple task:

“We continue to hone our ability to develop our students into truly bilingual, biliterate students who have a solid command of standard English. This is a challenge for many of our students who come from predominantly Spanish speaking homes. Some of our students come from homes where Spanish is the second language (indigenous dialects), so English is the child’s third language. Obviously, language acquisition takes a long time under the best circumstances, let alone in a predominantly Spanish speaking, underserved community. As a result, we are always working to get better at strategic, purposeful language instruction to ensure our students have a solid command of both languages and can succeed in college and beyond.”¹⁶⁸

Though AGYA does not have a specific language program that mirrors the above programs, their revolutionary aims are similar in this cultural regard. One main challenge according to Matovu is that people often become so reliant upon the organization that their expectations often begin to exceed the feasible level of contributions the organization can make:

“People expecting you to do things you can’t do for them...I think, personally, that has been the biggest challenge for me. When you get to the center and there are 15 women there asking you to pay for their kids’ school fees, or a child shows up at your door and has been kicked out of the house and has nowhere to go. There are expectations that you can’t meet at the moment and you are like, I would love to help you but we have 6 kids living in the house already and I unfortunately just can’t do that.”¹⁶⁹

This is one manifestation of the ways in which dependency can often lower the level of sustainability in an NGO. Such dependency difficulties also tend to present themselves with regard to donors and large partner organizations, especially with organizations such as AGYA that represent an unconventional endeavor, attempting to help youth start a cultural revolution.

¹⁶⁷ Powell, Personal Interview.

¹⁶⁸ Howard, Personal Interview.

¹⁶⁹ Matovu, Personal Interview.

According to co-founder Barkley, AGYA is seeking grant opportunities and currently has various small grants. Nevertheless, this has presented the organization with its own set of difficulties, more conceptually and principle-based than logistically or economically related:

“We are going after grants but it’s very difficult because the big names are the bullies of the nonprofit sector. It’s difficult when you’re doing this new thing and saying I don’t think the old way is the best, here’s my way and you should fund it. We have gotten some smaller grants including one which is funding our free lunch program and right now we’re providing free meals to 300 kids at our community center. That was from an organization called Save Africa for Children. We’ve also got a grant of laptop computers from One Laptop for Child and we’re bringing technology to kids who may not have touched a laptop for the next 10 or 15 years of their lives.”¹⁷⁰

Though the grants AGYA currently has serve very valuable purposes, Barkley has struggled with the deeper meaning of this process and the implications transactions such as these have for the organization and the greater African continent:

“I just have to say what I really feel and I think sometimes that may hinder us because I’m telling them straight up, sponsorship is not the way to go—it’s not the way to go unless you want to keep Africa dependent on the west. People don’t want to hear that, especially people of money in the West.”

All of the aforementioned challenges are openly acknowledged by leadership, which Freire claims is essential, and appears to have great implications for combating such obstacles.

As a result of being realistic about needed improvements and alterations, these educational organizations have been successful in seeking innovative alternatives and solutions that have allowed them to continue their revolutionary pursuits and continue making successes in their work with these at-risk populations. At Camino Nuevo, the following achievements highlight the truth in the above statement:

“Despite the economic challenges faced by residents of this community, Camino Nuevo students are defying the odds by demonstrating exceptional academic excellence. Camino Nuevo ranks 10 out of 10 compared to similar schools and 6 out of 10 statewide. Our students have achieved unprecedented gains, going from a 453 API (Academic Performance Index) score in 2002 to an 815 API score in 2009. CNCA now ranks among

¹⁷⁰ Barkley and Matovu, Informal Interview.

the top 25% of all LAUSD elementary school and top 10% of all LAUSD middle schools, far outperforming all neighborhood LAUSD schools by 62 to 162 API points.”¹⁷¹

Similar economic struggles could potentially create hindrances in the progress of movements at AGYA and PLACE, however, both institutions have realized that money is not the object of a revolution. Despite often-severe economical hurdles, approximately 475 students are receiving an education at PLACE that, according to Powell, would cost them up to \$200/month in a similar school in Managua (the countries capital city on the Pacific Coast). For this reason, leadership has accepted that the importance of this effort far surpasses that of money: “We all need money but that must not be the motivating force. I remember something Dr.Ray told me and Ms. Marlene when we were having a problem, something I will never forget. He said, ‘when you believe in a cause, you do what you need to do because you believe it will make a difference, not because you’re expecting thanks of any kind.’”¹⁷² Similar sentiments regarding the difference between the value of money and the true value of the endeavors and the youth being served seem to be shared by AGYA leadership, as well.

As previously mentioned, Divinity Barkley admittedly struggles with whether or not seeking grants is right for AGYA, and for Africa more generally, and this is a conflict for which the organization fervently seeks alternatives:

“I’m not willing to compromise my beliefs in order to get a little bit of money. That’s why the revenue generation is so important to us because it also keeps us independent. I don’t want some people telling us how to run our program when I’ve already learned from the youth on the ground in the field how to run my program. It’s been very difficult to negotiate that. Should we go after these big grants? We might spend more time reporting on the grant than actually implementing any activity.”¹⁷³

This independent revenue generation mentioned by AGYA’s co-founder has been crucial in finding a solution to this widely seen problem among NGO’s:

“I think some organizations grow too big too fast and then before you know it, 30% of your budget is administrative expenses. We want to have a bunch of small community

¹⁷¹ Charter Renewal Petition.

¹⁷² Powell, Personal Interview.

¹⁷³ Barkley and Matovu, Informal Interview.

centers that serve no more than 500 youth in different communities. We want to start replicating these youth centers in other communities in continental Africa and in the Diaspora. Right now, we're focused on revenue generating activity. For example, we sell jewelry the kids make. The kids have a great time in the workshops. The proceeds go toward the community center, buying new supplies, paying the rent on the facility, and putting some money in the pocket of the kids. That has been important to me.”

Co-founder Matovu highlights that in order to achieve their goals, AGYA needs to continue working on becoming as independent as possible. He therefore argues that one of the current most important challenges is finding their own space, so they can begin to gain the sense of freedom they are seeking. AGYA is well on their way to this full autonomy, however, as they recently became officially registered as a non-profit, tax exempt 501c3 organization, and no longer have to take portions out of their revenue to pay organizations on which they had previously been dependent, such as the Africa Millennium Fund.

According to Freire, one of the prominent qualities of cultural, dialogical action is as follows: “Cultural action, as historical action, is an instrument for superseding the dominant alienated and alienating culture.”¹⁷⁴ However, in order to supersede the deep-seated realities of oppression—which affect not solely the target populations of these organizations, but also the greater communities, ethnic groups, or countries—one must analyze how the discoveries made by these alternative models may have implications for existing, perhaps more traditional models efforts, and for the greater ethnic populations these endeavors seek to serve. Even in programs that are for the most part successful in helping the marginalized supersede this culture of alienation, some level of “failure” is inevitable. Acknowledging and working to repair inadequacies is as important as maintaining aspects of a program that have proven powerful, something that these organizations have all shown they understand, and future educational

¹⁷⁴ Freire 180.

projects must always keep in mind.

Edgar Lopez, a former CNCA student that Principal Howard says was quite bright, did not finish school and has become a shot-caller for Eighteenth Street, one of the notorious Los Angeles gangs that plagues the MacArthur Park area. Though Lopez was kicked out of school for repeated violence and has been in and out of jail since his early teen years, he still returns to his former school with some frequency to “show appreciation.”¹⁷⁵ Lopez is, unfortunately, an example of the fact that even a strong program is bound to be unable to reach its goal with every target. However, Howard says “I still haven’t given up, I’m still hopeful for Edgar.” Though there are, again, inevitable weaknesses in the three models examined in this project, the attitude maintained by the CNCA Principal sends a positive message about the way endeavors as daunting as creating a cultural, educational revolution should be approached: with persistence and dedication, even when efforts may, to some, seem futile. Lisa Powell of PLACE seconds this notion: “As long as you can get together dedicated and responsible people, with some amount of economical help, they will be able to do it. Principal Marlene is sometimes here from 6:30am to 8pm. When you want efforts to continue to improve, that takes real dedication. Yes, it is a challenge but when you really want to make a difference, it can be done.”

When asked if she thinks the CNCA model can be replicated in non-charter school environments, Assistant Carrillo’s response served as further prove of how deeply embedded the goal of creating community-wide change is in this school’s principles: “It could definitely happen at other public schools but it needs to be based on decisions that are jointly made by teachers, leadership and the community because it needs to be a collective wish.”¹⁷⁶ Carrillo argues that the capped number of students at Camino is an advantage because, though each

¹⁷⁵ Edgar Lopez, Personal Interview, “The Real Meaning of ‘Failed’ Cases,” 26 Apr. 2010.

¹⁷⁶ Carrillo, Personal Interview.

classroom of twenty is comprised of students who often have “intense issues,” there is so much that can be done with such issues when classes are small. Nevertheless, in schools at the district level and other educational project settings where the structure may not match that of CNCA, Carrillo does believe their model can be replicated: “It just needs to be a joint effort. Also, such programs need to have ways to compensate if one of the areas isn’t as strong. For example, if we have a student whose parent isn’t supportive, we try to balance that out by giving them more in another area—more counseling or afterschool or *something*.”¹⁷⁷ This statement points, once again, to the importance of the holistic approach that these organizations seek to employ.

Future programs must strive to address the risks their target populations are confronted with across domains, always keeping in mind the validity and importance of the whole child and all they bring with them historically, culturally, and in their personal perspectives on the world and their personal reality. Furthermore, they must be honest when their approach to dealing with one of these areas is subpar, so as to allow for increased efficiency in one of the various other areas that, according to Freire, should theoretically be worked into their program in some way. For this reason, CNCA’s approach to working with their population is, according to Carrillo, not reactive: it is proactive. New and existent educational projects must be proactive in deciphering all possible ways to assess the multi-faceted issue of aiding marginalized populations in their search to rise out of the cycle of generational poverty. Like Camino Nuevo, these programs must seek to “catch kids before they fall.”¹⁷⁸ If this is not successful, they must remember that it is never too late, as the Principal’s relationship with student Edgar Lopez suggests. Perspectives on the way to approach such a proactive program structure may vary. According to AGYA’s Matovu:

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Carrillo, Personal Interview.

“There are many ways we are trying to create a more conscious youth, but the main way is by having them feel like nobody owes them anything. It’s not your mama, your dad or the government. Don’t blame things on your parents, like why didn’t my mama give me this, why didn’t my dad give me that, or why didn’t my mom end up marrying Obama? We try to teach our kids, you are here and this is about you now. That’s the way. That’s how you can be a better person. It’s not President Museveni, it’s not the government: it’s you. We try to show our kids that if they want do something, they have the power to, and should, do it.”

Though AGYA—as well as CNCA and PLACE—wholeheartedly supports Freire’s concept of focusing on historical and political awareness, the organization does not want this to lead to the perpetuation of the victim or colonized mentality that is frequently present among marginalized societies. Matovu thus urges that we must always remind target populations of their agency and power to evoke change, the untested feasibility that will, ultimately, aid them in superseding their own marginalization.

In the future, AGYA hopes to expand their model to other communities in Uganda and East Africa:

“By opening community centers, AGYA hopes to empower, educate, and enrich the lives of African youth so they can live healthy, productive lives, pursue their dreams, develop their talents and leadership skills, and evolve as socially active, responsible citizens to build a better Africa and a better world. By 2020, AGYA plans to open 5 new urban community centers in Africa that will train and mobilize 10,000 youth to use performing and media arts as a platform to advocate for education, economic development and social change in their communities.”

Some may argue that once the efforts of AGYA leadership are no longer present, these communities will merely return to the status that they had previously occupied, as these leaders cannot continue these already small-scale efforts for a lifetime. The same could be said of leadership at PLACE and CNCA, individuals who clearly have perspectives on education that lay outside the norm and may later be altered if not utterly contradicted by their successors.

However, this very idea proves the need for involving the oppressed in their own liberation, and

thus validates the most central theory of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

According to Freire, exposure among the marginalized to the problems caused by their status and place in the world—if executed correctly through an implementation of all of the above researched strategies—inevitably causes students to want to work against these problems, to challenge and respond to them.¹⁷⁹ Though one might argue that the youth involved in these projects are being guided by others and are thus not necessarily capable of continuing this cycle when leadership is no longer present, this notion negates the power of developing a critical consciousness in the marginalized. Though action and reflection are to be simultaneous processes, Freire highlights that there may be cases in which action in the present moment is not practical. It is in cases such as these when it must be understood that “critical reflection is also action.”¹⁸⁰ By being given the tools for critical reflection, our youth is prepared to act, to continue the revolution when their time comes. After all, as AGYA co-founder Abraham Matovu states, “youth are the future of anything you start: even in creating a forest, you have to begin with young trees. The impact is there and, even when I am no longer, I know it will always be there with these youth.” With an effective educational project, impacts such as those of the Pearl Lagoon's Academy of Excellence, Camino Nuevo Charter Academy and the Amagezi Gemaanyi Youth Association will remain, as youth are today's learners and tomorrow's revolutionaries. Furthermore, as rates of generational poverty persist despite existing attempts to educate the oppressed, it appears clear that the revolution must go on.

¹⁷⁹ Freire, 81.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. 128.

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