

A philosophical investigation of the role of teachers: A synthesis of Plato, Confucius, Buber, and Freire

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Abstract

This study proposes the ideal role of teachers through the examination of Plato, Confucius, Buber, and Freire on the subject. Teachers not only contribute to the development of individuals and societies but also attain self-realization through teaching. As such, the role of teachers is important as a goal as well as a means. To examine such role, this study selects four major approaches to understanding teaching. Plato regards teaching as guidance into objective knowledge through the reasoned understanding of causes. Confucius regards teaching as leading self-cultivation. Buber sees the role of teachers as building a relationship with their students. Freire focuses on critical consciousness towards oppressed situations. This study regards the role of teachers as a complex of various aspects. Thus, it tries to show a more complete understanding of the role of teachers through the synthesis and comparison of these four aforementioned approaches.

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1. Introduction

We cannot conceive of a teaching activity that does not involve teachers. Even progressive educators who focus exclusively on the role of learners would at least not ignore the role of teachers as a guide. It is very difficult, indeed almost impossible, for a learner to learn and grow without any help from a teacher. A learner needs help when he or she faces difficulties in understanding properly, thinking logically, and acting morally. William Ayers (1995, p. 126) points out that teachers try to lead people to think, question, speak, write, read critically, work cooperatively, consider the common good, and link consciousness to conduct. In other words, teachers

play an important role in facilitating the growth of individuals and the formation of a good community, in which the members behave democratically and morally.

If the role of teachers, however, was limited to promoting the good of individuals and societies, the following fundamental question might arise: Is the role of teachers only a means? Alasdair MacIntyre insists that teaching is only a means because it does not have an internal purpose, only an external one—that of serving learners and societies (MacIntyre & Dunne, 2002, p. 9).¹ This claim,

¹According to MacIntyre, “Teachers are involved in a variety of practices, and teaching is an ingredient in every practice” (MacIntyre & Dunne, 2002, p. 8). In other words, the role of teachers is to guide learners into a set of practices formed by a society. Teachers and teaching do not have their own purpose.

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however, cannot escape two important counterarguments. First, I think that teaching aims to promote not only the good of individuals and societies but also the good of the doer. Teachers can obtain happiness—the final goal of all humans, according to Aristotle—by experiencing satisfaction and self-realization while teaching. Moreover, teachers can learn something while preparing for the teaching process or interacting with their students. Teachers should think things over, look at these things from different perspectives, and come to discover new facts while they are teaching. While teaching, they should realize their own limitations, shortcomings, and flaws, and they should reflect, try to improve themselves, and consequently attain spiritual, moral, and esthetic growth. In this context, teaching is not just a functional action but involves the whole being of teachers: the personal or spiritual transformation and relationships with learners. For this reason, *the role of teachers* is used in this paper in place of teaching as I want to focus on the person who teaches rather than on the activity of teaching. Focusing on the person involves the teacher's personal growth and personal relationship with his or her learners, which is beyond the activity of teaching. However, the difference between the two is more a nuance than an essential difference because, understood existentially, teaching involves the being of the teacher and his or her relationship with his or her learners. This matter will be discussed further in the following section on Martin Buber's views.

Second, the claim of MacIntyre is based on the dualistic approach between the internal/end and the external/means. According to this claim, teaching or the role of teachers is a means, and learning or the achievement of learners is the end. Fundamentally, though, teaching cannot be only a means for learning because it also involves learning. Teaching cannot be separated from the act of learning; the former cannot exist without the latter. When we say A is a means and B is the end, we can distinguish A from B. If earning money is a means and buying a car is the end, we can clearly separate the act that is the means from the act that is the end. On the contrary, when a person teaches others, his or her

act of teaching is *combined with others'* or his/her own act of learning (see the first counterargument). Teaching without learning is a monologue in which no change or growth happens, and it cannot be considered teaching. Teaching should involve learning at the same time, or acquiring essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Learning does not happen alone as a result of a totally independent act of teaching. Even while a person is reading a book, he or she learns through indirect communication with the author of the book. During self-contemplation, a person interacts with his or her inner self—the inner teacher, according to St. Augustine. Indeed, there can be no distinction between (A) a situation in which only teaching happens and (B) a situation in which only learning happens. On the contrary, teaching and learning are connected acts that happen together. If teaching cannot be separated from learning, then it cannot be said that teaching is a means and learning is the end. For this reason, teaching and the role of teachers are important in themselves and in reference to their contribution to others' development.

If the role of teachers is nothing more than a means, then there is no need to explicate it as an independent topic. If it is only a means, then it is enough to list some of the functional roles it can play to enable it to attain its end. But if the role of teachers would be discussed philosophically, it should be articulated speculatively, analytically, and normatively as it has a unique meaning and goal. In other words, a philosophical discussion of the role of teachers should involve a clarification of what teaching should be and an ethical evaluation of what values teachers should aim to develop in their students. Of course, such discussion does not exclude the social and historical contexts because these influence the role of teachers even though it has its own significance.

When an agreement is reached as regards the importance of the role of teachers, there will be a need to clarify characteristics of such role because an important role cannot be properly accomplished if it is not sufficiently understood. First, if the role of teachers has a particular nature, teachers cannot lead their students towards the right direction without a thorough or proper understanding of *such* nature. Second, if there are different characters of the role of teachers, the approaches and attitudes of teachers towards teaching will change according to what they will select as an important character among these. In either case, it is necessary to clarify

(footnote continued)

Hogan (2003) objects to MacIntyre's view, suggesting that teaching, along with learning, is a way of life, not just a means to something. Also, Noddings (2003) challenges MacIntyre by stating that teaching involves relations of care and trust, which are ends in themselves and not only a means.

the role of teachers because, in the former case, a particular nature of the role of teachers must be discovered so that the right kind of leadership can be exerted, and in the latter case, there is a need to evaluate the different characters of the role of teachers so that a better approach to teaching learners can be chosen and used.

Historically, many thinkers, especially educators, have examined and explained the role of teachers from various perspectives. Some regard it as the act of leading the search for the truth through knowledge; some as the act of aiding self-cultivation² or growth; some as the act of building a relationship for a humane existence; and some as the act of facilitating liberation through critical consciousness and behavior. Of course, there might be other aspects of the role of teachers, but these four aforementioned perspectives represent and include many other aspects. For example, developing intellectual excellence through logical or critical thinking is related to the first category in that intellectual capacity or logical thinking involves or aims at searching for knowledge and truth. On the other hand, fostering a democratic attitude is connected to the last category in that democracy involves a critical and autonomous participation in society for individual and social freedom and justice. In this sense, this study tries to highlight the major aspects of the role of teachers by synthesizing the four aforementioned representative perspectives. To examine these, this study selects four thinkers for each category: Plato, Confucius, Martin Buber, and Paulo Freire. The following sections will show how they represent each category of the role of teachers, and how its whole picture can be approached through the synthesis of the four. One important reason for the selection is these thinkers' diverse backgrounds and influences. Plato lived in ancient Greece and heavily influenced Western thought and culture. Confucius was a master and a thinker who lived in ancient China and who enormously influenced Eastern thought and

culture. Buber and Freire are both contemporary philosophers, but the former is a Jewish scholar who has significantly influenced existentialism in Germany and Europe, while the latter is a Brazilian scholar who has led critical pedagogy and liberal movements in South and North America. These thinkers' differences in terms of time, space, and interests will offer various views or perspectives on the role of teachers, which may facilitate a more complete understanding through the synthesis and comparison of their similarities and differences, as each perspective can make up for the deficiency of the others. This study does not intend to show a dualistic contrast, or to argue that one is right (good) and the other is wrong (bad). Rather, it tries to show that each has its own value although it has a different context, but that it is also possible to connect them, or that they can complement one another, through mutual dialogue and collaborative criticism.

This paper is organized into five sections. The first, second, third, and fourth sections of the paper deal with the views of Plato, Confucius, Buber, and Freire on the role of teachers, as reflected in their major works and in others' commentaries on these. In the last section, these thinkers' approaches are compared and synthesized, and their similarities and differences are pointed out. The philosophical approach was used in this paper to discuss and propose the role of teachers. The study will not list the effective and functional roles of teachers as taken from statistics and data. On the contrary, it is concerned with defining the role of teachers and pointing out what values teachers should pursue, and why. These matters are discussed in this paper speculatively, normatively, and analytically.

2. Plato

In *The Republic*, Plato demonstrates how a man confined within a distorted sense experience arrives at true knowledge. He starts Book VII with a clear statement that the human conditions in education (*paideia*) and in the absence or lack of education (*apaideusia*) are compared to the situations described in Book VII of *The Republic* (*Republic* 514a). It can be considered that Plato intends to show the difference between the conditions of the educated man and those of the uneducated man. It can be said that he does this by presenting the allegory of the cave, in which a prisoner experiences gradual changes in his viewpoint. First, the prisoner

²When a disciple asked about exemplary persons, Confucius replied, "They cultivate themselves by being respectful" (*Analec* 14:42). Ivanhoe (2000, pp. xiii–xiv) observes that Confucius and his followers emphasize that one could and should transform himself or herself in order to live ethically and spiritually, and this transformation affects others. Ivanhoe (2000, pp. 2–4) points out that Confucius guides people to contemplate the deep meaning of filial love and to practice it with enhanced sensitivity, but this process needs a considerable balance between study and reflection through continuous self-cultivation.

is confined, his body shackled, and he only sees shadows of artificial things. Second, he is released and is suddenly compelled to gaze at the light itself but cannot see it because of the glare. Then, he sees shadows of real things, reflections of men and other things in water, and real things in due order. Finally, he comes to see the sun, which is *the cause of all things*, after looking at the light of the moon and stars in the night (*Republic* 514a–516b).

This allegory shows that human beings start from the darkness of ignorance, but some of them can realize their own ignorance and finally come to the light of truth through a gradual process of understanding. Annas (1981, pp. 252–253) points out that the cave symbolizes not just a bad society but the human condition that is confined with passive conformity to ordinary experience and received opinions. The point is we are bound if we passively accept what we see or hear. We must use our own mind to examine the immediate causes and final cause of all things, beyond the passive reception of the mere appearances of things through our sense experiences. This positive effort is portrayed by the process of being released from shackles, going out of the cave, and seeing a series of objects. In other words, the bound situation in Plato's allegory symbolizes the uneducated being, and Plato shows how the uneducated condition is converted to the educated condition through the gradual process of enlightenment.

Many scholars understand the allegory of the cave in relation to the allegory of the line (*Republic*, Book VI). According to the allegory of the line, there are two worlds: the intelligible world and the visible world. Images (on the bottom line) and real objects (on the third line) belong to the visible world while mathematical hypotheses (on the second line) and the first principle (on the top line) belong to the intelligible world. We can recognize images through illusions or imagination (*eikasia*), real objects through belief (*pistis*), hypotheses through understanding (*dianoia*), and the first principle through pure reason (*noesis*). Linking this allegory of the line with the allegory of the cave, it can be regarded that illusion is a state of confinement where one sees only shadows of artificial things, that belief is to see objects in water, that understanding is to see reality, and that pure reason is to see the sun. Then the goal of humans is to attain the first principle through pure reason, which goes beyond understanding, belief, and illusion. In other words, to reach the first principle or the Idea (Form) of the Good is the

educated human condition or the educational goal. As such, it can be said that the role of teachers is to guide or lead persons to the attainment of their rightful goal.³

What, then, is the Idea of the Good? According to Plato's own explanation in his allegory of the cave or the line, it is the cause of all things or the first principle. Rosen (2005, p. 255) observes that Platonic ideas are not subjective but objective, and, as such, they are not points of view. There are many beautiful things in the world, such as a red rose or a white parrot. We can see them, and they may or may not be beautiful according to different points of view. They are instances of beauty and are neither beauty itself nor the cause of beauty. However, there is an attribute that they all share. This is what makes beautiful things beautiful—that is to say, the cause of beauty—and it does not change according to different points of view. We come to know the cause only through reason. In other words, we approach the attribute or the Idea of beauty not through our sense experiences but through knowledge or thought (*Republic* 507b) because the Idea is unchangeable while sense experiences are changeable or different according to the case. In short, the Idea is the unchangeable attribute and the cause of things, and we can approach it not through our sense experiences but through knowledge. In other words, the educational goal, according to Plato, is the search for truth through knowledge.

Some might think, though, that this goal can be attained through self-realization, not through teaching. There are three points in the allegory that we can link to the role of teaching. First, Plato (through Socrates) points out that the prisoner who comes to see the sun itself and realizes true wisdom feels pity for the other prisoners who are still shackled in the darkness, so he *goes down to them*. Scholars see this as representing the philosopher-king, who educates the people. Maybe the educator will try to lead people from the darkness of ignorance to the light of truth following his own process of realization. Second, after citing the allegory of the cave, Plato explains that the real nature of education is not that which some teachers do—that is, trying to infuse knowledge into the

³Plato points out that the Idea of the Good is the most important learning (*to megiston mathema*), and that it leads to generation and growth and is the cause of knowledge and of being (*Republic* 505a, 509b).

minds of people. On the contrary, people have a faculty that enables them to learn, and this faculty should be developed to allow the person to contemplate the real world and the Form of Good. In addition, there should be art, *teaching*, which facilitates the change best. Its aim is not to generate a person's power of seeing but to correct the direction in which he or she looks (*Republic* 518c,d). Thus, Plato, through the allegory, intends to show that the role of teachers is required to lead learners to change their direction—that is, from ignorance or distortion to the reality or the truth.⁴

Third, we can see someone intervening to compel the prisoner to state what the objects are and to gaze at the light itself during the process of ascending to the light. The intervener tries to drag the prisoner by force up to the light, but the prisoner cannot see the real things and the light because of the glare. As he feels pain due to this compulsory and rash leading, he escapes to his familiar cave. Plato indicates that this kind of abrupt leading will never succeed if it ignores the gradual process of enlightenment (515d,e). The hasty and compulsory leading is the opposite of what Plato thinks is the role of teachers. Plato observes that learners obtain knowledge in steps, and he believes that teachers must follow these steps so that they can lead their students, or the latter will not proceed. In short, in the allegory of the cave, three points can be linked to the role of teachers. First, teachers must sympathize with others who are still in the darkness of ignorance, where teachers themselves stayed for a time, and teachers should use their own experiences in the

process of enlightenment to lead these people towards the light. Second, teachers should not indoctrinate their students but should correct their misdirected views and help them turn towards the contemplation of the truth through their own capacity of learning. Third, learners learn gradually, in steps, and teachers should not lead them to skip any of these steps. The steps that teachers should consider start from the formation of images, proceed to belief and understanding, and finally come to the pure reason of the first principle.

Plato tries to demonstrate the role of teachers more concretely through the dialogue between Socrates and others. Beck (1985, p. 119) points out that Socrates denies he is a teacher who imparts knowledge, but he limits himself to the one who investigates together with the learner. This point is relevant to the allegory of the cave, in which a compulsory infusion of knowledge is described as a fatal mistake. In *Meno*, Socrates is asked whether virtue is acquired by teaching or by practice (70a). He answers that he does not know what virtue is and much less whether it is acquired through teaching or not (71a). Then he asks Meno about his understanding of virtue. Socrates says that he will be fortunate if he gets to know from Meno that his view is wrong (71d). This opening dialogue indicates that Socrates cannot or does not pass certain information in response to the question of Meno, but that he likes to discuss it with him. He encourages Meno to explain his own view, and he acknowledges that the wrong idea could be corrected through the dialogue. The point here is that the role of teachers in initiating the teaching–learning process is to let their students know that teachers are not omniscient and that they (the students) are not totally ignorant, and that teachers, therefore, should not simply pass on knowledge to them but should investigate matters with them; that the students themselves should think and explain their own ideas, and that teachers as well as their students should correct their views through the dialogue. White (1976, p. 37) explains that the opening dialogue highlights the necessity of investigating a matter ourselves rather than relying on hearsay. Just as we must know who Meno is before believing he is handsome, so, too, must we examine by ourselves what a virtue is before believing that a person is virtuous or that virtue can be taught. This point is relevant to the insight regarding the allegory of the cave in that we should contemplate reality rather than simply believe our sense experiences.

⁴Some might misunderstand the Socratic Method as open-question teaching. However, Woodruff (1998, pp. 19–21) points out the contrast between the Socratic Method and open-question teaching. The former does not approve inconsistent thinking and claims that are not supported by evidences, whereas the latter does not control the evaluation of answers. Teachers in open-question teaching leave students to take all questions and answers as they will in order not to weaken students' confidence. Plato, as shown in the allegory of the cave, does not think that teachers should allow students to take any opinion freely. According to Plato, teachers should not infuse knowledge into students, but they should *lead* students to think consistently with supporting evidences. Woodruff's point supports the approach of this paper that Platonic teachers should correct distorted or ignorant learners and guide them into the right mainly through reasoning. However, as will be shown in this section (I mean even in Plato) and later, this paper also regards other crucial roles of teachers as the same importance as leading to the right. Comparative and synthetic approach to teaching rather than either—or is the very characteristic and contribution of this paper.

Socrates exemplifies how teachers should lead their students to investigate reality.

In his response to Socrates, Meno points out that virtue changes according to age, gender, and the conditions of life. Then, giving an example involving bees, Socrates asks about the quality in which things do not change (72a–c). This dialogue exemplifies that Socrates is leading a learner to think about the nature that all things share. What is important is that Socrates does not try to directly inform the learner of such nature. Rather, he continuously asks Meno so that the latter, by himself, can perceive the common attribute of things from their changing images. Meno finally concludes that virtue is the same for all human beings based on his observation that all the common virtues, such as temperance and justice, are the same for everyone (73a–c). In *Meno*, Plato tries to show that learning is the recollection of what one already knows. In his dialogue with a slave boy, Socrates leads him to understand a principle of geometry through a series of questions and answers (82c–85b). The point here is that Socrates does not infuse a new fact into the boy's mind but simply guides him to think in the right direction. This process corresponds with the explanation after the allegory of the cave—that is, that people have a faculty that enables them to learn, and that teaching involves making the process of learning easy and leading it towards the right direction.

In the latter part of *Meno*, Socrates points out that recollection, the process of learning, is the reasoned understanding of causes (98a). He points out that a person who has a true opinion can be as good a guide as one who knows the truth (97b). A person who has the right opinion about the way can lead people towards the right direction. But the key is that true opinion can be considered good only when it is founded on a reasoned understanding of causes; otherwise, it will depart from the human soul. Socrates highlights the fact that when a true opinion is bound to reasoning, it becomes knowledge and abides in our minds (98a). When we have true opinions of certain matters but do not understand their causes, we cannot attain certainty and we will lose our ideas because we do not know why things are what they are. Even if Meno knew the conclusion before his long dialogue with Socrates commenced, he would easily have forgotten it because he did not know how the conclusion was reached. Socrates could be a good guide because he would guide the learner to deduce the causes, to

understand them, and to attain knowledge of the truth; Meno comes to a firm ground that could not be shaken. Furthermore, firm knowledge with reasons will facilitate the actions of learners because understanding reasons leads to conviction and to a strong motivation to act. In short, the role of teachers exemplified in *Meno* is that of guiding learners to investigate a matter with their teachers, to think about the common attribute or nature of things, to deduce their causes, and finally, to attain knowledge of the truth that abides. Through this whole process, teachers must ask questions and give comments to encourage their students to think and reason out.⁵

3. Confucius

Confucius believes that enjoyment and the continuous passion to learn and to teach are the most important goals in life. Confucius says, “To learn and to mature through what we have learned, is this not a pleasure? (The *Analects* 1:1)” He also says, “To quietly review what we have learned, to continue studying without respite, to teach others without growing weary, is this not me? (The *Analects* 7:2)”⁶ Pleasure is not a means but the goal in itself, so that “to learn is pleasure” means “to learn is the goal itself.” Moreover, doing something without growing weary needs voluntary motivation and should be sustained in our lives. Thus, the continuous voluntary motivation for teaching points to the fact that teaching is man's ongoing pursuit in life. Zhu Xi, one of the founders of Neo-Confucianism, believes that to learn means to try to emulate a person. He explains that everyone has a good nature, but some people realize this good nature fast and others gradually; therefore, one who has yet to realize his good nature should try to emulate the one who has already realized it (*The Analects and Collected Commentaries* 1:1).⁷ Two important points can be gleaned from this explana-

⁵However, Plato warns that if we apply the method of dialectic reasoning to early education, young people may use it to defeat others, as in a sports game (*Republic* 539). As such, *elenchus* (dialogical investigation) or *epagoge* (reasoning through examples) should be substantially used with grown-ups to promote philosophical thinking and the observance of proper manners in discussions.

⁶The *Analects* (論語) will be referred to as *AN* in this paper.

⁷The *Analects and Collected Commentaries* (論語集註) is referred to as *ANC* in this paper. Many Eastern Confucian scholars use this text to interpret the words of Confucius, which have deep philosophical meanings and backgrounds.

tion. First, learning, in the Confucian context, is relevant to realizing one's good nature. Second, we need models who can guide us to realize our good nature. According to this view, the role of teachers is to become models or to introduce models whom their students could emulate or who could help the latter find or realize their good natures.

There is another view, however, as regards Confucius' concept of learning. Ames and Hall (1987, p. 44) point out that the original character of 學 (to learn) is 斆 (to teach); scholars during the pre-Ch'in period sought to become learned men through teaching as well as studying. One becomes aware of life's difficulties and strengthens himself through teaching; the top part of the character, 學 (to learn) is 臼 (to lock), which means two hands interlocked in mutual support (Ames & Hall, 1987, p. 339). The point here is that "to learn" in the Chinese character indicates personal growth through the mutual efforts of teaching and studying. In other words, we improve ourselves both by teaching and studying. We can understand something more clearly by explaining to others what we have studied about it since in many cases, an explanation presupposes a logical understanding of concepts. Moreover, when we teach others, we realize that we lack knowledge or skills, and we can supplement these by studying further. We can also realize our limitedness or some fault in our attitude or character when we teach others. For example, teachers reflect on themselves when there is a disparity between what they teach and what they really do, but they can then grow ethically and spiritually through the reflection and the effort at self-cultivation. In short, teachers not only help others grow but also improve themselves by teaching others.

The second passage above (AN 7:2) indicates that Confucius tried to cultivate himself by continuously studying and teaching. This point is supported by the following passage (AN 7:3), in which Confucius points out that he worries about his failure to cultivate excellence, to explain (or discuss: 講) what he has learned, to pursue righteousness, and to reform himself. This passage shows that the effort to explain what one has learned goes with the effort of self-cultivation. It supports the above point; in explaining concepts to others, one thinks logically, organizes his ideas, and understands these more clearly. Furthermore, one can broaden his horizon while discussing certain matters with others who have different views regarding these. Teachers can modify their ideas and conduct when these are

challenged by the insights of their students. This kind of continual reformation through teaching leads teachers to cultivate excellence and to pursue righteousness. Thus, teaching greatly fosters self-cultivation. Confucius says, "To review the old and to realize the new are the role of teachers" (AN 2:11). Yak Yong Jeong explains that we may eventually forget what we have previously learned, but we can renew it and discover new points by teaching it to others. Thus, in so doing, teachers improve themselves (Yeo Yu Dang Jeon Seo 2:7). To be able to teach others, teachers should review what they have learned before. Then, they can discover what they did not know before and rediscover what they have already forgotten.

The whole life of Confucius demonstrates learning for self-cultivation. He says, "From fifteen, my will was set upon learning; from thirty, my heart was set upon the firm ground; from forty, I was no longer tempted; from fifty, I realized the great principle of the cosmos; from sixty, I came to understand the deep motivation of people; from seventy, my every conduct agreed with the great principle" (AN 2:4). This passage indicates the continuous growth of Confucius as a whole person throughout his life. He becomes a man of character through his tireless effort to overcome temptation and to understand and harmonize with people and nature. When we connect this passage with the above passages, which show the passionate effort of Confucius to teach ("without growing weary," "worry over"), it is evident that teaching for Confucius is considerably relevant to self-cultivation because there is a logical connection between the fact that, for his whole life, Confucius aimed at self-cultivation and the fact that teaching was his major effort in his life. In other words, for Confucius, teaching is an important factor that contributes to self-cultivation.⁸

⁸Tu Wei-Ming (1985, p. 55) understands self-cultivation as "an independent, autonomous, and inner-directed process." He argues, "Self-cultivation is a precondition for harmonizing human relations; if human relations are superficially harmonized without the necessary ingredients of self-cultivation, it is practically unworkable and teleologically misdirected" (1985, pp. 55–56). I agree with him about the centrality of self-cultivation in Confucian philosophy. However, I do not agree that self-cultivation is an independent process and a precondition for building relationships. Confucian self-cultivation cannot happen independently because all the Confucian virtues such as ren and li are developed through relationships. Contemplation or reading books alone does not bring self-cultivation. Self-cultivation is realized while persons are enacting Confucian

He actually dedicated almost his whole life to teaching. According to *Shiji* (*The Historical Records*), Confucius taught *li* (ritual propriety) to several of his disciples in his early days, hundreds of disciples followed him when he was already in his thirties, and he taught various people, including kings and ordinary people as well as his disciples, even until his death. Many Confucian scholars argue that the teachings of Confucius are mirrored in his real life and that therefore, knowing the facts of his life will allow us to realize the core of his teaching. As mentioned earlier, Zhu Xi says that learners need to emulate their seniors who realized their good natures first. He emphasizes very often in *ANC* that Confucius is the one whom learners should emulate. Confucius tried to teach others not only for self-cultivation but also to help them grow. Confucius says, “My young friends, you think that I have something hidden away, but I do not. There is nothing I do that I do not share with you—this is the person that I am” (*AN* 7:24). Here, “my young friends” refers to the disciples of Confucius. Zhu Xi explains that the disciples of Confucius thought about the Confucian philosophy so deeply but they could not understand and follow it. Confucius stressed that his every act and word in his daily life was the exemplification of his teaching (*ANC* 7:23).⁹ The disciples gradually learned how Confucius taught, so they investigated every act and word of Confucius and tried to emulate these.¹⁰ When a disciple asked about *ren* (love or ideal conduct), Confucius taught five attitudes: deference, generosity, trustfulness, diligence, and benevolence (*AN* 17:6). Another disciple described Confucius as being gentle, righteous, deferential, frugal, and respectful (*AN* 1:10). We can see continuity between his teaching and his real character. Ames and Hall (1987, pp. 302–304) observe that in Confucius’ teaching, there is a modeling relationship between the model (Confucius) and the modeler (disciple), in which the modeler strives to harmonize with the

model by attuning his behavior to that of the model; Confucius directly communicates with his disciples through associated acts of evocation rather than through defined concepts. In other words, for Confucius, the role of teachers is not so much to explain or discuss what is good or right as to show it directly in their lives so that the learners can try to emulate it.

The focus of Confucius’ teaching is to become a man of character rather than knowledge. Confucius says, “One who loves the good is better than one who knows it, and one who enjoys it is better than one who loves it” (*AN* 6:20). The meaning of this passage is clarified by the following passage. Confucius says, “When one comes to knowledge but does not sustain it through *ren* (love or the ideal conduct), he is sure to lose it” (*AN* 15:33). For Confucius, knowledge itself is not enough for the realization of the ideal person; a person realizes his or her ideal state by practicing the knowledge he or she has acquired, or by living in accordance with it. In relation to Confucius’ self-cultivation, the stage of knowledge involves setting one’s mind upon the firm ground, while the stage of love or enjoyment involves attaining a natural and voluntary harmony between one’s own conduct and the great principle. Knowledge becomes a way of life through its voluntary practice. The concept of *ren* demonstrates the way to realize the ideal. Confucius says, “A man of *ren* establishes others in seeking to establish himself and promotes others in seeking to get there himself. Correlating one’s conduct with those nearby is the method of achieving *ren*” (*AN* 6:30). This passage shows that *ren* is achieved by helping and nurturing others as a reflection of one’s own heart. The role of teachers can be considered here. First, to help their students grow up to become ideal persons, teachers should guide them in practicing good conduct in their relations with others.¹¹ Second, teachers should lead their students to sympathize with others. Third, teachers should sympathize with their students and promote the latter so as to promote themselves (the teachers). The following text exemplifies how Confucius as a

(footnote continued)

virtues towards and with others. In the same way, self-cultivation cannot be a precondition for relationships because it develops from and through relationships. In this paper, especially, I highlight how both teachers and learners realize self-cultivation through interactive relationships between them.

⁹The numbering of the chapters in the English translation of the *Analec*s is slightly different from that in *ANC*.

¹⁰For example, Book 10 of *AN* describes every act and word of Confucius in detail. The introduction to Book 10 of *ANC* shows that the disciples recorded it in order to try to emulate Confucius.

¹¹Confucius points out that learners should first try to be filial at home and deferential in the community, be cautious in communicating and relating with others in trust, love the multitude broadly, and try to emulate the ideal person. To study is the last thing (*AN* 1:6). As Confucius guides his disciples, teachers must guide their students to practice good conduct in their relations with others.

teacher leads learners to sympathize with and care for others:

Yan Hui and Zilu were with Confucius when the Master said to them, “Why won’t each of you tell me what it is you would most like to do?” Zilu said, “I would like to share my horses and carriages, my clothing and furs, with my friends, and if they damage them, to bear them no ill will.” Yan Hui said, “I would like to refrain from bragging about my abilities, and not to give others a hard time.” Zilu said, “We would like to hear what it is that you, Master, would most like to do.” Confucius replied, “In regard to the aged, to give them rest; in regard to friends, to show them sincerity; in regard to the young, to embrace them tenderly” (*AN* 5:26).

This text shows that by telling his disciples his wish, Confucius shows through his example the way to care for the aged, for one’s friends, and for the young. Cheng Xi¹² explains, “The teacher is going to do *ren* naturally, Yan Hui is not going to leave *ren*, and Zilu is going to look for *ren*. The three are willing to relate well with others, but there is a difference among them in terms of the magnitude of what they want to do. What Confucius’ disciples want to do are to be done consciously, but what the teacher wants to do are to be done unconsciously” (*ANC* 5:25). Confucius develops the caring attitude of his disciples to a higher degree through his example. The disciples also wish to help others, but Confucius tries to lead his disciples to sympathizing with and helping others more naturally by revealing to them his own wishes. He uses the friendly way of open dialogue (conveying wishes) to enable the learners to share with their teacher what is in their hearts. By revealing his dreams to his disciples, Confucius sympathizes with them and tenderly guides them in caring for others more naturally and sincerely. About this text, Jong Jeong (1980, pp. 86–88) points out that “to give the aged rest,” “to show friends sincerity,” and “to embrace the young tenderly” show the practical aim of Confucius’ teaching and the fact that he uses a harmonious method of teaching—that is, he gives his disciples a hint, upon their request, in the most natural atmosphere, in which the teacher and disciples open their hearts and communicate with one another intimately. In other words, Confucius exemplifies the way to care for others: he embraces

his disciples through a friendly dialogue and interaction with them. Therefore, he shows his disciples sincerity through the continuity between his teaching and behavior.¹³ This shows that the focus of his teaching is to guide learners to become fully grown individuals who practice the good naturally rather than obligatorily.

Jong Jeong (1980, p. 96) emphasizes Confucius’ observation that human growth is mostly dependent on self-effort and willingness; as such, he uses a learner-centered way of teaching. Confucius says, “I do not open the way for students who are not driven with eagerness; I do not supply a vocabulary for students who are not trying desperately to find the right words for their ideas. If after showing students one corner they do not come back to me with the other three, I will not repeat myself” (*AN* 7:8). In Confucius’ teaching, the will and effort of learners is the main driving force. The role of teachers is to guide their students to find the way to proceed when they want very much to understand or realize something but cannot. Furthermore, teachers help their students express their opinions accurately when the latter are desperately looking for the right words to express their ideas but cannot find them. Thus, the role of teachers is secondary to the efforts of the learners. Even if teachers show learners the way, the latter must respond by expressing their own ideas. This point is relevant to the fact that the main focus of Confucian learning is to become a man of character through the practice of good conduct. Becoming a man of character is almost wholly dependent on the learner himself; he needs to reflect on himself as well as develop good traits and discard bad ones. Confucius regards this kind of continuous reflection and reformation as the love of learning. He believes that his disciple Yan Hui loves learning because he does not make the same mistake twice and always enjoys learning even on extremely difficult days (*AN* 6:3; 6:9). Confucian learning does not involve memorizing simple information but developing one’s whole person. It is dependent on the learners’ own efforts at doing away with their bad traits and at forming and maintaining a

¹³Confucius tells his disciples, “Even if I am a bit older than you, do not hesitate on my account” (*AN* 11:26). Creel (1949, p. 80) points out, “His [Confucius] attitude was that of a father, an older brother, or an older friend. He had no attempt to impress his disciples with mystification and declared that he kept no secrets from them. Rather than constantly demanding loyalty from them, he gave the much more effective lesson of being ‘loyal’ to them.”

¹²He founded Neo-Confucianism with Zhu Xi.

harmonious and consistent character. Teachers act only as guides when their students face obstacles in the process of becoming whole persons.

It is important for teachers to individualize their teaching method, or to make it relevant to each learner, so as to cultivate their students' characters. Creel (1949, p. 79) points out, "Confucius' first task was to take the measure of each pupil. He was a careful student of character. Once he had made his analysis of an individual student, he shaped his instruction accordingly." Each learner has a different character; therefore, to further develop good characters and restrain bad ones, teachers must examine the unique characters of their students and guide them to overcome their flaws and develop their merits. The following text shows how Confucius individualizes his teaching according to the characteristics of each learner:

Zilu inquired, "On learning something, should one act upon it?" The Master said, "While your father and elder brothers are still alive, how could you, on learning something, act upon it?" Then Ranyou asked the same question. The Master replied, "On learning something, act upon it." Gongxi Hua said, "When Zilu asked the question, you observed that his father and elder brothers are still alive, but when Ranyou asked the same question, you told him to act on what he learns. I am confused. Could you explain this to me?" The Master replied, "Ranyou is diffident, and so I urged him on. But Zilu has the energy of two, and so I sought to rein him in" (AN 11:22).

Zilu was so energetic that Confucius knew he would immediately act upon what he had heard. If one acts too hastily before thinking sufficiently, he will make a mistake easily. Confucius knew that this was Zilu's weakness, so he sought to rein him in.¹⁴ On the contrary, Confucius knew that Ranyou was too diffident to act upon what he had heard when he should. If one hesitates too much in acting on something, he will find it hard to practice good conduct even if he has it in mind. Thus, Confucius urged Ranyou on.¹⁵ Teachers are helpers who try to

find out the unique character of each of their students and guide him or her to accomplish the golden mean, which harmonizes the poles of character—the excesses and the defects—and thus enables a learner to grow up to become a man of character.

4. Martin Buber

Martin Buber observes that the authentic existence of man is realized in a relationship. According to Buber (1965, pp. xiv–xv), a man becomes authentic when he continuously tries to relate with people directly. A direct encounter will build a relationship as the end, without any intervention, while an indirect encounter is like a conditional contract in which one relates with the other to pursue profit. Buber regards the direct encounter as an I-Thou relation, and the indirect encounter as an I-It combination. Buber (1965, p. xiv) says, "I-Thou is a relationship of openness, directness, mutuality, and presence" while "I-It is the typical subject-object relationship, in which one knows and uses other persons or things without allowing them to exist for themselves in their uniqueness." In the I-It combination, "I" analyzes "It" as the object and takes a partial point from "It." "I" uses "It" to further his or her ("I"s) ends. On the contrary, in the I-Thou relation, "I" encounters the totality of "Thou," in which all the parts, qualities, and characters are present in a single whole (Buber, 1958, pp. 7–8). In other words, in the direct encounter, "I" does not analyze or use the other to further his or her ends. James Walters (2003, p. 45) observes that in the I-Thou relation, "I" responds to "Thou" without set rules, while in the I-It combination, "I" cannot respond to "It" because the former takes it as an idea or an object. The relationship begins as we try to meet and respond to each other with our whole being, in which no external objective intervenes. Buber (1958, p. 63) highlights the fact that the more we meet each other directly, without any intention to appropriate, the fuller we share, but there is no reality in us if we do not share. In other words, we can discover or recover our reality or authentic being when we build relationships with others through immediate sharing. According to this relational theory of Buber, the building of direct relationships and the continuous effort to recover these should be the goal of teaching as long as teachers and students want to live in reality.

¹⁴Confucius said, "With Zilu, his boldness certainly exceeds mine, but he does not make a right decision-making" (AN 5:6).

¹⁵Ranyou said, "It is not that I do not rejoice in the way of the Master, but that I do not have the strength to walk it." Confucius replied, "Those who do not have the strength for it collapse along the way. But with you, you have drawn your own line before starting."

There are many factors, however, that intervene in or block the direct encounter between teachers and their students. McHenry (1997, p. 342) points out that the present curriculum is set upon a systematic structure in which individual feelings and commitments are ignored. Even though teachers and their students want to encounter each other directly, the set rule that requires a certain level of academic achievement in standardized tests precedes the encounter. Learners in this situation will regard their teachers as mere professional instructors; learners try to appropriate useful information from their teachers while teachers try to get rewards by transmitting academic information and satisfying the set standards. How, then, could or should teachers encounter their students or lead them to establish a direct encounter with others? The key is trust. Buber (1965, p. 98) observes that trust is “the most inward achievement of relations in education.” In the following passage, Buber discusses the trust that exists between a mother and her child and compares this to the relations in education:

The child lying with half-closed eyes, waiting with a tense soul for its mother to speak to it—the mystery of its will is that it is not directed towards enjoying (or dominating) a person, or towards doing something of its own accord, but towards experiencing communion in the face of a lonely night, which spreads beyond the window and threatens to invade (Buber, 1965, p. 88).

The child trusts that its mother will be with it even while it is sleeping. The child believes that its mother, even when she is out of sight, does not pursue her own interest but desires wholeheartedly to be with it. Buber (1965, p. 98) points out that children in “a dialogue that never breaks off” do not even wait for their mother to speak because they trust that their mother is always there, even when it is dark. In the present classrooms, teachers should teach a subject; they cannot always interact with each student personally. But once a teacher and a student trust that they care for each other sincerely, their relationship, or at least its root, continues even during formal instruction. Buber (1965, p. 98) emphasizes that “he [the teacher] should gather the child’s presence into his own store as one of the bearers of his communion with the world, one of the focuses of his responsibilities towards the world,” and “if he [the teacher] has really gathered the child into his life then that subterranean dialogic, that

steady potential presence of the one to the other is established and endures.” The point here is that teachers should regard their students as their primary concern. Many teachers today focus on how to transmit information on a subject in a set curriculum, but while doing so they easily forget the importance of their students. To focus on caring for the being of learners rather than on subjects is the way to build trust, which leads to a continuous solidarity or connection with one’s students because they, in this case, like children relying on their mother, know that their teacher thinks of their well being more than of the subject he or she is teaching. To illustrate trust in the works of Buber, Murphy introduces zaddik, a teacher celebrated in Hasidic legend, in the following passage:

Unlike their rabbinic forebears, who were seen by their subordinates as hierarchical, erudite figures, the zaddikim stood as simple personal witnesses to truth, in their lives exemplifying their active and loving concern for their followers and their wholehearted communion with them. While learning was important to them—many were notable Talmudists—it occupied a secondary place to the personal integrity they exemplified. Their influence was ascribed not to their superior learning but to the way they lived (Murphy, 1988, p. 99).

The above passage shows that trust between teachers and their students grows when the former exemplifies sincere love towards the latter. The authoritative transmission of knowledge cannot generate trust; learners develop trust in their teachers depending on how the latter live and interact with them. Murphy (1988, p. 100) points out that the works of Buber show that the teaching and counseling functions should be integrated. Teachers listen to the hardships or difficulties of learners and encourage them to try to overcome these. The role of teachers is not to dictate what is good and evil in general but to answer their students’ queries concretely, in a given situation (Buber, 1965, p. 107). To be able to do so, teachers should participate in their students’ lives. The point here is that teachers should not approach their students in a formal or generalized way. Students can perceive if their teachers are not concerned about their real problems but deal with them only superficially. Teachers must first receive and confirm what each of his or her students wishes, thinks, and feels from the latter’s standpoint (Murphy, 1988,

p. 102). Participating in the lives of one's students begins this way.

To be able to empathize with one's students or see things from their perspective, teachers must respect their uniqueness. Every student has a particular personality; thus, teachers should not lump them into one mould. When teachers lump their students into one mould, their relationship with them turns into a superficial connection that admits only the preconceived notions of the teachers and does not consider the uniqueness or the whole being of each learner.¹⁶ Buber (1965, p. 94) points out, "Eros is choice made from an inclination, and this is precisely what education is not." When teachers see their students with their own set standards, they easily come to select or classify them: for example, student A is excellent, B is pretty good, C is normal, and D is bad. This classification is set based on the generalized standards of the teacher. However, when teachers approach their students from the point of view of the latter, they can all be excellent: A excels in the arts, B has an excellent character, C excels in sports, and D excels in cooking. Buber (1965, p. 95) emphasizes that teachers should embrace all their students as their particular lives and beings, are the decisive factor to which the hierarchic recognition of teachers is subordinated. Buber (1965, p. 94) describes how a teacher should receive the diversity of students as follows:

He enters the school-room for the first time, he sees them crouching at the desks, indiscriminately flung together, the misshapen and the well-proportioned, animal faces, empty faces, and noble faces in indiscriminate confusion, like the presence of the created universe; the glance of educator accepts and receives them all. He is assuredly no descendents of Greek gods, who kidnapped those they loved. But he seems to me to be a representative of the true God. For if God "forms the light and darkness", man is able to love both—to love light in itself, and darkness towards the light.

¹⁶Blumenfeld-Jones points out that teachers and their students should not see each other through categories such as race, class, and gender. Rather, teachers and their students should share "the humility of knowing" that each cannot know the other fully. Also, teachers should not regulate their students with typical classroom rules that put all of them on the same footing. Instead, teachers and their students should create classroom ethics through the sharing of life stories and art (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2004, pp. 276–277).

This text shows that teachers or schools should not select students. Intellectual as well as physical differences of a class reflect the created world in which all differences exist together and contribute to the harmony and well-being of one another. The analogy of light and darkness indicates that teachers should realize that differences among students can contribute to the whole class. Suppose there were only day or only night. As both day and night are necessary, even slow or disabled learners are necessary to a class even if they seem to impede the academic achievements of other learners. In a class consisting of diverse students, students will realize that there are various people in our society, and therefore society's members should help and care for one another. Rapid learners should care for slow learners, and by doing so they will be able to develop compassion. Slow learners should see the way rapid learners do, so they can develop their learning abilities. Teachers should help and lead this kind of cooperation between different students. The cooperative skills and attitudes that students develop in a class with diversity must be a very important preparation especially to culturally diverse societies.

Each learner has his or her own potentials. A learner with a particular potential interacts with the environment, which draws out his or her creative power. The learner examines, experiments, and discovers while interacting with nature and society. He or she uses his or her creative power and develops it during the process. The world also demonstrates what is significant to each teacher. A teacher creates his or her own insight as regards the given significance (Buber, 1965, p. 89). For example, when a teacher sees a mountain, he or she may come to think of its beauty. Another teacher, however, may come to think of the mountain's greatness. Each teacher presents to or shares his or her insight with each learner. The point here is the unique potential of each learner. If a teacher interacts with a student who has artistic talents, the former can ask the latter to draw or create something that would depict the mountain, or they can create something together. After completing his or her work, the teacher can discuss the mountain's beauty with the student. If a teacher meets a student who has talents in sports, the former can do mountain climbing with the latter. While climbing the mountain or after doing so, they can talk about the greatness of nature.

These examples demonstrate three important points about the role of teachers. First, the

interaction between teachers and their students or between learners and the environment is aimed at building a relationship between them. While climbing the mountain together and experiencing hardships together, teachers and their students come to establish a solidarity or connection. This is most important because building a relationship is itself the goal of life, according to Buber. Second, teachers present the world to their students and share their own insights with them.¹⁷ This presentation is not a transmission of certain items of knowledge but the expression of a voluntary responsibility towards the learners as well as a demonstration of true humility. Teachers show that the environment is the real educator while they, the teachers, are guides who sincerely help their students build relationships with their environment. Third, teachers discover the unique potentials of each of their students and help develop these fully by giving their students valuable opportunities to interact with the environment. Teachers can select the best environment in which each learner can develop his or her unique creative power. Through the sincere effort of presentation and sharing, students come to develop trust in their teachers—that the latter are trying to participate in their lives rather than simply going about their own business (Buber, 1965, p. 106).

5. Paulo Freire

Freire observes that men become dehumanized through their oppression, exploitation, and unjust treatment by their oppressors, but that men attain humanization through their continuous efforts to recover their freedom and to re-establish justice. Freire regards humanization as the vocation of men. Through exploitation and alienation men distort their own vocation; both the oppressors and the oppressed become dehumanized (Freire, 1970, pp. 43–44). Men cannot be fully human within the restrictions of their freedom. They cannot think, express, act, and communicate well, which are necessary for men to live, if their behaviors are politically restricted and if their needs and aspirations are ruined by socio-economic discrimination and inequality. This restriction and oppression makes men passive robots, who do not have feelings

and autonomy. As such, to become fully human, men must overcome their oppression,¹⁸ must recover freedom, and must re-establish justice (which makes freedom possible). The contemporary situations are not free from oppression or injustice. McLaren (1998, p. 432) points out that the current phenomena of intensive free markets and globalization further promote inequality through vicious competition, the redistribution of wealth in favor of the rich, and the legitimization of the suppression of labor income. The oppressive conditions today consequently promote dehumanization through the political and socio-economic restriction of the wills of the oppressed. Thus, we should liberate ourselves from our oppressed conditions in order to become more human. For as long as education is concerned with promoting a humane existence and the current situation is still characterized by oppression, the goal of education will always be to liberate the oppressed from the bonds of dehumanization, and the first step towards attaining this goal is a critical discovery of the oppressed and dehumanized situation (Freire, 1970, p. 48).

Freire connects the oppressive situation with teaching and learning practices. He demonstrates the *narrative* character of the teacher-student relationship, in which the teacher infuses a static content of information into the student. “Static content” means data that lack dynamism and concreteness, and that are so far removed from the realities of the student. In narrative teaching, the student does not understand the true meaning of the contents that are taught but only tries to memorize them (Freire, 1970, p. 71). The student does not know what the contents mean in a concrete

¹⁷McHenry (1997, p. 347) points out that teachers can share their lives with their students only when they can “share a naming of the world” with them.

¹⁸Recently, many post-modern scholars state that terms such as “oppression” and “liberation” in the works of Freire are too universal. For example, Macedo and Freire (1993, p. 170) argues, “In theorizing about oppression as a universal truth, you fail to appreciate the different historical locations of oppression.” In other words, post-modernists think that there is no universal oppression but that different oppressive situations emerge from concrete contexts such as race, gender, class, region, religion, culture, etc., and that consequently, there is no universal “liberation” but only different approaches of coping with various problems. Freire observes, however, that though he agrees that there are many modes of oppression and that there is a need to dispel the simplistic binary between oppression and liberation, a particular oppression only makes sense in relation to a broader theory of oppression, and the oppressed groups in a real context must unite in order to fight against the more powerful unified Right (Roberts, 2003, pp. 456–459).

situation or in his or her life. The student in narrative teaching is a machine that is operated only for gathering given data. The will of the student is totally restricted and alienated. In other words, narrative teaching, which dehumanizes learners, goes against the educational goal of humanization. Freire compares narrative teaching to banking. Here, the teacher knows everything, selects the contents, and talks while the students do not come to know anything and only listen and comply. Teaching as banking dehumanizes learners because it blocks their autonomous and critical consciousness, through which they try to participate in the world and transform it (Freire, 1970, p. 73).

To liberate learners from the dehumanizing banking educational system, Freire suggests the problem-posing educational system, in which the teachers and students share educational contents and learn collaboratively through a dialogical interaction. In the problem-posing educational system, it is the teachers who present the problem, but the teachers and students teach and learn at the same time—that is, they critically investigate a problem together, relate it to their lives in concrete situations, constantly challenge each other by sharing new ideas, and reform their old ideas (Freire, 1970, pp. 79–81). Thus, the role of teachers, first of all, is to know the reality of their role as a co-investigator. Freire (1998, p. 30) argues, “To teach is not to transfer knowledge but to create possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge.” The construction of knowledge results from the curiosity of the learner, and curiosity is created through the learners’ realization that they are the very ones who will examine a problem. If teachers will pour sets of information into their students, then the latter will lose their consciousness of subjectivity and consequently, their curiosity. On the contrary, if teachers will show their students that they will not teach them something directly but will learn with them, then the students will realize their autonomous role of investigating. Here, the students, who construct knowledge subjectively, are no longer learning machines but become truly human.

Freire (1994, p. 65) points out that teachers should respect their students. This means that teachers, while defending their own opinions on given issues, should lead their students to recognize that there are other options for them and that they have the right to disagree with their teacher. Teachers, in other words, should stimulate counter-

arguments by their students.¹⁹ Teachers and their students should discuss their own subjective views of the world and should continuously reform these. Teachers should neither teach nor guide their students to *the objective truth* because their opinions are not necessarily such. Rather, teachers, through dialogical co-investigation, should encourage their students to view the world through their own critical lens, and to see how it is related to them. Dialogical co-investigation develops a democratic attitude in learners, which can help them learn to listen to and criticize others as well as to participate in forming public policies and to resist or transform these. In addition, teachers realize the limitedness of their thoughts and reform or improve these through their discussion with their students. Teachers should not teach only certain items of knowledge regarding a subject; rather, they should discuss with their students the historical, social, political, and cultural relevance of the knowledge they are imparting. For example, through literacy education, teachers encourage their students to read the world as well as a given text (Freire, 1994, p. 66). Giroux demonstrates that learners can develop a critical consciousness through reading and writing. Teachers give their students writing assignments through which the latter form insights regarding their own experiences rather than just receive others’ opinions, ponder how they reflect the factors of the dominant culture, develop their own opinions about various social issues, and criticize traditions, structures, and customs (Giroux, 1997, p. 172). In this way, learners come to realize their oppressed situation, especially in relation to their own experiences, and to develop a critical consciousness against the social injustice. Teachers encourage the critical process by presenting topics, organizing student discussion groups, and giving the students various reading assignments relevant to the topic at hand (Giroux, 1997, pp. 174–176).

¹⁹Aronowitz explains that the teacher in the theory of Freire is not a mere facilitator of commonsense wisdom. Both teachers and their students bring their different thoughts and experiences to a learning situation. The previous knowledge they bring is a necessary factor for the dialogical synthesis between the old and the new (Freire, 1998, p. 9). The mind of students is neither *tabula rasa* (a blank paper) on which knowledge is written nor totally distorted that it should be corrected or led towards the right direction. Learning takes place when learners (both students and teachers) evaluate, compare, and synthesize the difference and continuity between the old and the new and then preserve some elements and transform the others.

As they guide learners to read the world and to develop critical consciousness, teachers also encourage them to participate in the effort to resist social injustice and educational oppression (the banking educational system). Freire emphasizes that the role of teachers is not just to impart knowledge on the topics reflected in the school curriculum but to contribute to building a democratic society. Teachers are politicians who fight against social injustice, which oppresses schools and students as well as the teachers themselves. Teachers, acting politically, talk with their students, sharing with them their own critical consciousness, which would lead to the realization of the democratic vision (Freire, 2005, p. 121). Learners will *try to emulate* the democratic and critical behavior of their teachers. Thus, teachers should exemplify democratic thought processes and behaviors towards their students and society.

Teachers must love their students and their jobs, but this love should be “armed love,” which not only cares for the students but also protects their (the teachers’) own rights, making sure that these are not infringed upon through their arbitrary treatment as teachers (Freire, 2005, p. 74). Freire regards teaching as a profession and teachers as professionals, different from parents or ministers who serve and sacrifice for others without expecting any reward. Unlike parents, teachers should have intellectual qualities that are necessary not only for what they are teaching but also for a critical consciousness of social injustices. The critical consciousness of teachers would push them to stage protests against unjust governmental policies that affect teachers, such as policies regarding the minimal wage, despotic supervision, and punishment for offenses committed. Such protests sometimes involve strong united actions such as strikes, which parents cannot stage. Freire explains this point in the Brazilian context, in which the dominant power, based on the ideology that regards teachers as parents, prohibits teachers from staging formal protests. However, unless teachers protest against unjust policies, they cannot create or preserve the best educational environment in which teachers and their students interact freely (Freire, 2005, pp. 7–9). For example, if a government watches over the acts of teachers and punishes them when they do not follow its orders, teachers cannot teach their students freely. When teachers follow only set policies and a set curriculum, they become passive robots that receive and carry out even unjust

orders. If teachers become passive robots, then their interaction with their students will also become passive, and dehumanization will result.

Giroux (1988) argues that teachers must analyze the factors that threaten the democratic actions of schools, and that they should carry out a critical role in transforming these. Through textbooks, the curriculum, schedules, examinations, and tracking, schools, under the competitive neo-liberal policies, are set only to attain a formal productivity and effectiveness, without any critical consideration. Teachers should analyze how these factors restrict the critical learning process and should try to participate directly in the formulation of the school policies so as not to become passive recipients. Moreover, teachers, together with their students, should investigate how discrimination in relation to race, class, and gender comes about and is legitimized in the school curricula. This investigation will promote a critical consciousness in the learners and will become a basis for transforming the unjust and oppressive learning practice into one that is liberated and humane. Freire (1998, p. 44) argues, “Thinking critically about practice, today’s or yesterday’s, makes possible the improvement of tomorrow’s practice.” If we regard Freirean teaching only as a learner-centered or problem-solving methodology, then we will overlook the critical and transformative ethos in his pedagogy. McLaren (2000, p. 12) explains this point as follows:

Because Freire believed that the challenge of transforming schools should be directed at overcoming socio-economic injustice linked to the political and economic structures of society, any attempt at school reform that claims to be inspired by Freire—but that is only concerned with social patterns of representation, interpretation, or communication, and that does not connect these patterns to redistributive measures and structures that reinforce such patterns—exempts itself from the most important insights of Freire’s work.

If teachers want to transform the Freirean pedagogy into a teaching practice, they should first know how school structures are created and re-created in relation to socio-economic structures. This process is different from mere logical analysis, which only tries to discover causes and reasons. Rather, the critical consciousness of Freirean teachers involves transformative action towards a

democratic society and towards their own liberated educational field.

However, Freire does not think that teachers should lead students only to be contesters or strikers. Rather, what Freire really means by “progressive” in teaching is to foster the autonomy of students. And the key for this autonomy is the development of critical curiosity in which both teachers and learners autonomously and cooperatively work to explore new knowledge and continuously reconstruct their ideas. This mutual teaching–learning process itself is the starting point for reforming the world in that the process leads students to realize a democratic way of life. In order for teachers to lead this kind of mutual learning process, they should devote themselves to their profession in all its aspects: “scientific formation, ethical rectitude, respect for others, coherence, a capacity to live with and learn from what is different, and an ability to relate to others” (Freire, 1998, p. 24).

6. Synthesis and conclusion

I have examined four different views regarding the role of teachers. First, Plato observes that the role of teachers is to help learners “turn around” and contemplate the Form of Good. Teachers should lead their students to go beyond their fleeting sense experiences and to attain wisdom through a reasoned understanding of causes. By asking questions and issuing comments, teachers should guide their students to ponder the logical mistakes they committed, the common attributes of things, and the final cause. Second, for Confucius, the role of teachers is to exemplify the good character to their students rather than to argue with them regarding what the good is. In Confucian philosophy, knowledge itself is not very important unless one puts it into practice. As such, teachers should guide their students to practice good conduct in their relations with others.

Third, according to Buber, building a relationship through the direct encounter between a teacher and his or her student is the goal of teaching and learning. Towards this end, teachers should avoid every intervention that would block the direct encounter. In any situation, the key to building a relationship with one’s students is earning their *trust*. Teachers should respect the unique potentials of each student, and they should interact with each of them in order to help them develop their unique

potentials. Fourth, Freire preaches that man should eliminate oppression and injustice in order to attain liberation and humanization. To realize such liberation, teachers and students must first become aware of and overcome the oppressive realities inside the classroom, in relation to teaching and learning. Narrative teaching, in which teachers transmit knowledge and students receive it, mirrors the oppressive conditions in the society. To eliminate narrative teaching, teachers and students must share educational contents, critically investigate the problem together, relate it to their lives, constantly challenge each other by sharing new ideas, and reform their old ideas. Teachers should guide their students to realize how the knowledge that they stumbled upon inside the classroom are related to historical, social, political, and cultural realities. Teachers should show their students how to criticize and react to social injustices, thus making the students want to emulate the critical behavior of their teachers.

What are the similarities and differences among these four aforementioned views regarding the role of teachers? Plato, Confucius, Buber, and Freire agree on the fact that the role of teachers is that of *co-investigation* with their students. None of them believe that teachers should transmit knowledge and that the students should only receive it. On the contrary, they all believe that students should not rely on the information transmitted to them by their teachers but should investigate matters by themselves, and that teachers should participate in and promote their students’ investigative endeavors by holding dialogues and interacting with them. They believe that teaching is not a transmission but a mutual learning, that teachers also come to know something during the co-investigation, and that teachers come to contemplate their own conditions and to attain personal development by teaching in a co-investigative way. If these four thinkers, who have varied historical and social contexts and different views, agree on the above point (the promotion of mutual learning through co-investigation), then we can safely conclude that it is the nature of the role of teachers to promote mutual learning through co-investigation if we understand “nature” as a common attribute of people across ages and spaces and not as the truth beyond all historical contexts. It is a common ground among the different perspectives on the role of teachers. Different human beings have different characteristics, backgrounds, and perspectives, but there is

something common among them all which makes communication among them possible. This can be regarded as nature.²⁰

Plato and Confucius share the view that learners have their own abilities to learn and that their will, reactions, and efforts are crucial to learning. They agree that teachers should sympathize with their students and should help them by addressing their needs. However, Plato sees the role of teachers as that of an intellectual guide while Confucius sees it mainly as that of a model of good character. According to Plato, teachers should focus on changing the wrong direction that learners are pursuing—that is, not towards but away from the truth. Towards this end, teachers should discuss with their students dialectically to discover their common attributes and the final cause. According to Confucius, knowledge without practice has no meaning; as such, teachers, throughout their lives, should model what they teach to their students. Moreover, Confucian teachers should lead their students to practice what they have learned and to become men of character who personify the knowledge they have acquired. In addition, Plato does not highlight the significance of the individual characteristics of learners while Confucius points out the importance of individualizing teaching, or teaching according to the character of each learner.

Both Plato and Buber emphasize the importance of mutual dialogues between teachers and their students. They believe that teachers introduce the world to their students and help the latter to see it clearly. Plato believes, however, that the main focus of teaching is to lead the students to know the truth through reasoning; for Buber, on the other hand, the main focus of teaching is to build direct, humane relationships between man and man or between man and the world. Knowledge for Plato is the same for different situations and objects, while a relationship for Buber is unique because it is built on an encounter between two unique beings. Platonic

teachers guide learners to discover the unchangeable truths through a universal way of reasoning while Buberian teachers help each learner to cope with his or her own particular situation by giving a concrete answer to his or her question.

Both Plato and Freire demonstrate that teaching is based on the autonomous thinking of learners, which teachers should try to promote. They also agree that teachers and their students should discuss and discover matters collaboratively. For Plato, however, the knowledge that teaching aims at attaining is objective and unchangeable while for Freire, teachers should not aim at guiding their students to the objective truth but at leading their students to constantly construct new ideas and reform their old ones. Both present the concept of restriction in man, but Platonic restriction is that of a distorted understanding that mainly relies on sense experiences while Freirean restriction is actual oppression through political and socio-economic structures. For both these kinds of restriction to be overcome, the narrative way of teaching must be done away with. For Plato, narrative teaching corresponds to learners who only accept information offered by others; for Freire, it signifies the banking concept of education, which mirrors the oppressed situation the society is in. Platonic teachers stress the need to correct the direction taken by their students through a reasoned understanding of causes while Freirean teachers aim to guide their students into a critical consciousness of their oppressed situation in relation to the existing socio-economic structures. The former try to lead ignorant or distorted learners to the unchanging truth while the latter do not assume that learners are ignorant or distorted and that there is an unchanging truth that they should pursue. Freirean teachers and learners exchange critical ideas and continually reform their old ideas. Furthermore, Freirean teachers investigate injustices that threaten the liberal conditions of teaching and learning, and protest against these.

Confucius and Buber share the view that teaching is not a mere transmission of information but the formation of a humane person. They demonstrate that teachers encourage their students to develop a good character, which ultimately helps them form good relationships with others. The caring relationship between teachers and their students serve as the basis for the development of good relationships between the learners and others. Teachers show their students that they care for them, and their

²⁰There are important challenges to the notion of the unchanging nature or reality as regards human beings or the world. These challenges are developed mainly by several philosophical schools such as pragmatism, post-modernism, post-foundationalism, post-structuralism, and historicism. They question and challenge the belief that there is something universal beyond different historical and cultural situations. I do not claim that these challenges are wrong and there is the nature or a single universal reality beyond space and time. Rather, I propose a ground for the role of teachers on which many different people in different situations can share and communicate with one another.

students try to follow their example. Both Confucius and Buber emphasize the uniqueness of learners. They stress that teachers should respect the particular character of each of their students and should individualize their teaching to make it suit each student. The major goal of Buberian teachers, however, is to establish an encounter with their students; this encounter is the teaching goal itself. Confucian teachers think much of having a humane interaction with their students, but the interaction is aimed at promoting the self-cultivation of the teachers and their students. Of course, Buber also observes that men discover their human identity through their encounters with others, but he holds that the discovery or recovery of one's human identity cannot be achieved through individual efforts of gradual self-cultivation but through existential encounters, which are always mutual and momentary. Buberian teachers and learners encounter in a moment and discover human existence; the encounter is not by gradual steps of self-cultivation. On the contrary, Confucian teachers try to cultivate themselves through lifelong gradual steps of realization. They develop themselves by teaching—having interaction with their students—but they also improve themselves by studying and through self-reflection. They influence their students through the mature character they are able to form from their gradual, ongoing self-cultivation. Students learn from the good character of their teachers, but the learning involves the continuous self-reflection of the students.

Confucius and Freire share the belief that teachers and their students influence each other through the interconnected activity of teaching and learning. They both highlight the subjective role of learners during the teaching–learning process. According to Confucius, teaching cannot happen without the voluntary participation of the learners through their wills, efforts, and reactions. Freire also shows that teaching becomes mere banking without the participation of learners through their demonstration of curiosity, sharing of ideas, critical thinking, act of linking the knowledge gained to their personal lives, and discussion with their teachers. Both indicate that teachers present to their students the topics for discussion and their views on these, and they encourage their students to think about these matters and to state their reactions to their teachers' views. Both emphasize modeling by teachers, but Confucian teachers focus on exemplifying good character while Freirean

teachers focus on exhibiting critical consciousness. Both show love for their students, but Freirean love is “armed love” that involves protests against unjust policies affecting teachers and learners. Freirean teachers investigate political and socio-economic oppression and discrimination in a society and seek to determine how these injustices are connected to school practices. They then try to reform these realities and to encourage their students to think critically on these issues. Confucius does not point out that teachers should protest directly against unjust policies in a society. Rather, Confucian teachers try to form learners who will think and behave righteously and who will have the passion to extend assistance to the weak members of the society. In other words, they select the indirect way of fomenting social reform.

Both Buber and Freire show that teaching and learning should aim at promoting the humane existence of man. Buber points out the need for direct encounters in discovering or recovering a humane existence. Man finds his real being only through an immediate meeting with another man, without any secondary intention, and through mutual dialogue, in contrast to monologue. In comparison, Freire sees humanization in relation to liberation from oppressed, discriminated, and alienated conditions. Man needs a critical consciousness of how political policies and socio-economic structures are legitimized to oppress the weak. Humanization is possible only when the oppressed realize their oppressed conditions through a critical consciousness and try to challenge and reform these.

Buberian teachers should try to have direct encounters with their students. They should focus on their students—their lives, needs, and experiences—more than on the subjects they teach, the curriculum, and the standards of achievement. They should foster the creativity of their students by encouraging them to develop their unique potentials, and they should help their students develop their relational abilities with their environment. Freirean teachers also should encourage their students to relate the topics being taught to their experiences, but their real focus should not be just establishing relationships with their students or developing the latter's relational abilities but developing their critical consciousness of the oppressive conditions in schools and societies. They should constantly encourage their students to try to find out how socio-economic structures worsen

discrimination and how this is related to schools and teaching–learning activities. Freirean teachers should emphasize the importance of sincerely loving their students, but they believe that this love should involve actual protests against unjust policies affecting teachers and learners.

Both Freire and Buber emphasize mutual dialogues between teachers and their students. Buber (1958, p. 16) points out that a teacher can learn from a student, but he also indicates that there must be a safe distance between a teacher and a student in order to maintain their educative relationship. When a student bridges this gap and comes to understand his or her teacher's standpoint, their educative relationship turns into friendship (1965, pp. 100–101). Thus, Buber distinguishes educative relationship from friendship. According to Buber, the educative relationship is not a full mutuality, in which a teacher becomes a learner and a learner becomes a teacher. Freire (1970, p. 80, 93), however, sees teachers and students combined into “students-teachers” as a perfect mutual interaction, in which a student can become a teacher and a teacher can become a student. That is to say, what Buber regards as friendship is the teaching–learning activity in the Freirean perspective. As such, Freirean teachers are also learners. They both teach and learn at the same time. On the contrary, Buberian teachers believe that they cannot switch roles with their students if they want to keep their educative relationship as teachers and learners, not friends. They believe that teachers can learn from learners and that they can investigate issues together, but learners cannot fully take the role of teachers as long as they are in an educative relationship.²¹

When climbing a big mountain, we should investigate it from various viewpoints so that we can perceive its various aspects. The more vigorously we investigate it from different perspectives, the more complete our knowledge of it would be, and the more complete our knowledge of the mountain is, the safer and more comfortable our climbing will be. Teaching can be seen as climbing a big mountain. One who teaches should know what

teaching is or what the role of teachers is. When teachers investigate their role from various viewpoints and synthesize these views, they arrive at a more complete knowledge of the matter. Transmitting knowledge to the students is not the only way to teach. Teachers should guide their students into a reasoned understanding of causes, should engage in self-cultivation by modeling a good character, should build relationships with their learners, and should promote liberation and humanization by developing a critical consciousness in their students. If teachers would only harmonize these four important roles and actualize them in appropriate situations, their teaching activity will be more complete. Harmonization—diversification and balance—between various values and needs is the key concept as regards the role of teachers because teachers hear various voices, such as those of different kinds of learners, those of the government/school policies, and those of the parents. Each voice argues for fostering knowledge, rational ability, a democratic and critical attitude, or a good character. Teachers contribute to learners, parents, and societies by harmonizing and fulfilling their needs. Moreover, teachers develop themselves into harmonious people who realize their various values as they try to become a model of values to their students (modeling is relevant to Confucius and Buber).

If teachers will select only one among these voices, some voices will be neglected. Consequently, conflicts will arise with those who have been neglected. If teachers will focus only on reasoning, their students will need to develop a loving relationship with them and others. If teachers will only try to build relationships with their students, parents and societies will demand for the instruction of knowledge to their children and the formation of their character. If teachers will focus only on instructing knowledge to their students and developing their character, they can overlook the significance of a critical consciousness towards injustices in schools and societies. Unless teachers care for these diverse values in a balanced way and contextually according to particular situations, they will fail in forming integral persons and in responding to the various needs of the society. In conclusion, teachers should try to harmonize these different values and needs in order to fulfill individual and social needs, reform unjust structures in the society, and make their lives and those of their students more harmonious.

²¹We cannot find any clear explanation in the works of Buber of what the educative relationship is. We only know that Buber regards the educative relationship as different from friendship. But why is friendship not educative? Is it impossible for friends to teach and learn from each other? And is it not their interaction part and parcel of an educative relationship? There should be a more detailed explanation of this matter.

Finally, I would like to discuss two crucial issues for the understanding of the role of teachers through the four thinkers. First, we can assume that Confucius, Plato, Buber, and Freire developed culturally specific philosophy in origin, so it is impossible to apply their perspectives to culturally diverse or mixed contexts. However, reading and interpreting their philosophy in the reader's own historical context are not the same as the original literal sense or the historical context of the four thinkers. I mean that even though the four thinkers developed their ideas in or towards culturally specific contexts, we can rediscover in their works insights into a culturally diverse context. Shaun Gallagher (1992, p. 126), from the Gadamerian perspective, points out, "The historical distance between reader and author, between their relative circumstances and concerns, accounts for a difference of meaning, an interpretive productivity that goes beyond original intentions." He further observes that "this productivity as a transformation affected in an act of interpretation that is inescapably informed by contemporary interests." This point supports the possibility that we can rediscover in the works of these four thinkers insights into a culturally diverse educational context. And one important common point among the four is the dialogical co-investigation between two (or more) different subjects. This point is a ground on which different races, genders, classes (if still existent), and religious groups can talk, learn, and teach one another. Especially, Freire reflects diverse voices in his works. Peter Roberts (2000, pp. 12–13) points out that Freire embraces feminist, Marxist, and post-modernist insights into his works.

Second, somebody might think that these four thinkers are mainly concerned with informal rather than formal teaching in schools, so we cannot discover any insight into schooling. However, a good model of teachers explicated from these four thinkers is not limited to informal educational fields. Teachers in schools are also able to and need to foster intellectual rationality, moral self-cultivation, relational skills, and critical attitude through teaching subjects in classes or interacting with students outside classes. For example, when teachers discuss the French Revolution in a history class, they should lead students to *reason* why the Revolution took place rather than just to infuse a series of information into them. In this way, teachers should also guide students to discover and criticize injustices and oppression at that time in France.

And during the class, teachers and students ask, answer, and criticize one another, enabling them to develop, complement, and reform their ideas. This dialogical teaching enhances relational skills and the caring attitude of students towards others as they come to know how to listen to, respect, politely criticize others' opposing opinions, and argue their own ideas and synthesize them. Schools also can foster relational and caring attitude of students by offering many chances for teachers and students to collaborate. Volunteer activities in which both teachers and students participate would be a good example. While they are serving poor people together, teachers unconsciously exemplify how to care for others, and students learn more about compassion by living and practicing it with their teachers instead of merely learning about it through a class on morals.

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