

**WAGES OF NICENESS:
THE FOLLY AND FUTILITY OF EDUCATORS WHO STRIVE TO
NOT IMPOSE**

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Abstract

In a bid to curb violence incurred via the abuse of teacher authority, some educators appear to denounce all forms of imposition. The author of this paper refers to this aversion to imposition and the romantic practices it promotes as *educational niceness*. This essay is written to furnish a theoretical justification for educational imposition. Using tools of language and philosophical analysis the author argues that education without imposition is both futile and irresponsible. The paper exposes four fallacies associated with educational niceness, traces its philosophical roots, discusses its perils, and concludes by proposing a more defensible alternative—a pedagogy of coercive restraint.

I was born in Trinidad and raised in Grenada—two former British West Indian colonies. By the time I graduated from high school, I knew a lot more about European and North American history and geography than I did about the history and geography of the countries in which I was born and raised. Moreover, my colonial educators (mostly people of African descent like myself) made sure that I had a greater liking for things European than for things African or West Indian. As I can recall, most of my primary and secondary school teachers were polite, friendly, and well meaning: nice teachers just doing their jobs. However, during the era of the black power movement (late 1960s through 1970s) I came to realize that many of my well-intentioned teachers were inadvertent perpetrators of what Carter G. Woodson (1972) refers to as *The Miseducation of the Negroes*. Woodson used the term to refer to educational activities that were colonizing of the mind and body. So by the time I showed up in graduate school in Wheaton, Illinois in 1987, I was already experientially aware that education is, ipso facto, political. Authors such as Paulo Freire and Michael Apple furnished a language and intellectual support for experiences I had already known. I had already known that one does not have to be hostile or aggressive to impose. I had already known that an entire educational establishment could impose foreign and subjugating values and ideas on students without intending to. So I am always more than a little leery of those who assume that if educators were genteel and courteous in the ways they practice their craft, such niceness would translate into non-imposition. The paper you are about to read bears the scars of those experiences.

The phenomenon discussed in this paper is *educational niceness*—a practice predicated on the belief that it is possible and desirable for educators (and other educational stakeholders) to share their views with each other without imposing their will and opinions upon each other. This

paper is neither an empirical study nor a review of the literature. It does not attempt to empirically describe or explain educational niceness; nor does it attempt to provide evidence of its incidence. The paper uses the tools of language and philosophical analysis to phenomenologically examine and illustrate educational niceness. In that sense the paper falls within the genre of works such as Plato's *Republic* (Lee, 1974), Rousseau's (1979) *Emile*, Alfred Whitehead's (1929) *Aims of Education*, John Dewey's (1938) *Experience and Education*, or William Frankena's (1965) *Philosophy of Education*. I, therefore, urge my readers to judge this paper, not by how much empirical support it garners, but on the clarity and cogency of the arguments and on the extent to which the arguments relate to their experiences.

I begin by making the case that all education is political. Then I draw upon the writings of Paulo Freire (Freire 1970, 1973, 1985, 1985, 1998; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Freire & Shor, 1987) to a lesser extent, Myles Horton (Horton, Kohl, & Kohl, 1998; Horton & Freire, 1990) to illustrate educational niceness. Note: whether or not educational niceness is a widespread phenomenon, is not a focus of this paper. I use the works of Freire and Horton to *illustrate* the phenomenon, not to provide empirical support or conclusive evidence of the preponderance of educational niceness. I wish only to illustrate that highly influential and critical educators (such as Freire and Horton) can fall prey to the lure of educational niceness.

I chose Freire for two reasons. First, I concur with Macedo, who, in the foreword to Freire's post-humus book, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, contends that Freire (1998) is probably "the most important educator of the last half of [the twentieth] century" (p. xiv). Second, I chose Freire because no other phrase probably captures the essence of his lifelong work and struggle than the idea that *education is political* (Freire, 1970, 1973, 1985, 1998; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Freire & Shor, 1987). I have chosen Myles Horton not only because he is one of North America's most influential educators, but also because, like Freire, he has spoken and written articulately on the dangers of value-neutrality (Horton & Freire, 1990; Horton, Kohl, & Kohl, 1998). I believe that there is cause for concern if educators, as influential and as astutely political as Freire and Horton, could succumb to the lure of educational niceness.

After discussing fallacies associated with the practice of educational niceness, I trace its philosophical roots and discuss some of its perils. I end with a few suggestions on how this disease of educational niceness might be prevented or treated.

Education is Political

I concur with critical pedagogists such as Michael Apple, Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, bell hooks, and Ira Shor that education is, *ipso facto*, political. Critical pedagogists reject a consensual view of society that denies or trivializes social conflict and over emphasizes social harmony. They believe that societies are made up of groups possessing differing interests and power. This differential interests and power imbalance set the stage for possible "culture wars." Critical pedagogists believe that culture wars between and among different social groups and classes often result in the domination of some groups by others.

According to critical pedagogists, the institution of education is one of the sites in which these culture wars are fought. Critical pedagogists believe that to educate is to select from among competing values and, consequently, to privilege certain ways of being and knowing over others.

Paulo Freire, for instance, argues that to teach literacy as merely alphabetization or numeracy is to privilege that conception of literacy over other conceptions such as teaching literacy as a critical engagement with one's world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Freire would also readily concede that, in his decision to promote education for critical consciousness (Freire, 1973), he is simultaneously discounting what he calls banking education (Freire, 1970).

Accordingly, a maxim of critical pedagogists is that *education is political*. By that they mean that, whether intended or not, every educational endeavor promotes certain values while discounting others. In other words, it matters not whether, when, where, how, or why educators choose to act or communicate; whether they chose apathy over active involvement; whether they teach biology or political science; whether they teach people how to build web pages or how to engage in social protest; whether they assume a disinterested, technical stance or an overtly political posture; whether they are aggressive or passive; whether they scream and holla or speak in soft, subdued tones. As philosophers John Dewey (1938) and George Counts (1932) have observed, wholly independent of desire or intention, the ideas and actions of educators inexorably promote certain values and ways of knowing and being while discounting others. It is this denial of values-neutrality that renders all educational endeavors political, by nature. On the issue of value-neutrality Horton cautions:

As soon as I started looking at the word *neutral* and what it meant, it became very obvious to me there can be no such thing as neutrality. It's a code word for the existing system. It has nothing to do with anything but agreeing to what is and will always be—that's what neutrality is. *Neutrality is just following the crowd*. Neutrality is just being what the system asks us to be. Neutrality, in other words, was an immoral act. (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 102)

To the same issue Freire responds:

...it is impossible for education to be neutral; educators have to confront some practical problems. A biology teacher must know biology, but is it possible to *just* teach biology? What I want to know is whether it's possible to teach biology without discussing social conditions, you see. Is it possible to discuss, to study the phenomenon of life without discussing exploitation, domination, freedom, democracy, and so on? I think that's impossible ... (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 104)

Because it is impossible to attain values neutrality, Horton suggests that teachers have a responsibility to put whatever they're "...teaching in a social context, relating it to society; not just acting as if it had nothing to do with people, with humanity..." (Horton & Freire, 1990, p.105).

Four Fallacies of Educational Niceness

I attempt to demonstrate, below, that despite their denial of the possibility of values-neutrality, critically aware educators such as Freire and Horton remain ardent advocates of a non-imposing educational practice. With illustrations from their work, I discuss four fallacies associated with the practice of educational niceness, namely: (a) unwelcomed acts are unethical; (b) freedom is an unqualified good; (c) titular authority is inherently superior to other forms of

power; and (d) power is a weapon wheeled by malevolent subjects, at their whim and fancy.
Fallacy 1: Unwelcomed Acts are Unethical

Some educators with whom I come in contact assume that unwelcomed acts (such as unwelcomed educational assignments and exercises) are unethical. This assumption finds expression, for instance, in Freire's (1998) admonition concerning parenthood. Adolescents, he concedes, do not always make the best decisions regarding their future. And for that reason, parents ought to discuss with children their future plans. But Freire (1998) is adamant:

[Parents] cannot, ought not, deny that they must know and assume that the future of their children belongs to their children and not to their parents. In my view, it's preferable to emphasize the children's freedom to decide, even if they run the risk of making a mistake, than to simply follow the decision of the parents....

The position of a mother or father is that of someone who, without any risk of her or his authority, is able to accept, humbly, the extremely important role of adviser to their son or daughter. And as an adviser, will *never* [italics added] impose a decision or become angry because the parental point of view was not accepted. (p. 97)

For Freire (1998) then, even if a mother knows that the action (or inaction) of her adolescent son will most certainly result in death or irreparable physical or psychological injury to himself or others, that knowledge is not sufficient for her to justify any attempt to force her will upon her son. For Freire, it appears that there can never be a situation in which parents could justifiably force their will upon their teenagers. Freire provides this example (of parenting) to illustrate what he believes is the appropriate use of teacher authority. Like a parent to an adolescent, there are apparently (for Freire) no conditions under which it is appropriate for a teacher to attempt to force her will upon students.

Unwelcomed acts are assumed to be evil because they apparently restrict students' choices—either by educators forcing their will and opinions upon students or by educators preventing students from voicing their own opinions. But this need not be the case. When my mother forced me to eat broccoli, she did not restrict my nutritional choices; she expanded them. Likewise, when my high school teacher forced me to do algebra, she did not restrict my educational choices; she expanded them. Forcing students to engage in particular exercises does not necessarily constrict their choices. In fact, in many cases, unwelcomed educational assignments often expand rather than contract students' horizons.

Fallacy 2: Freedom is an Unqualified Good

A second fallacy associated with the practice of educational niceness is that freedom, defined crudely as the absence of external constraints, is an unqualified good. Advocates of educational niceness tacitly assume that it is always undesirable and unethical to constrain the actions of their students. Let us turn, again, to Horton and Freire (1990) for examples of this form of fallacy. Horton and Freire distinguish two categorically distinct forms of educational communication—*sharing* and *imposing*. In the cited text, both authors use the term *imposition* to mean coercion. I take issue with the equation of the two terms—a matter I shall discuss later. For now I shall stick to the term *coercion*. Commenting on the distinction between sharing and

coercion in relations to how teachers might transmit their ethical positions, Horton notes: “I think it’s ineffective to try to *impose* that on anybody. Sharing it with them is one thing, but trying to impose it is another. You honestly say these are my ideas and I have a right to my opinion, and if I have a right to my opinion then you have a right to your opinion” (p. 105). Freire echoes Horton’s sentiment: “It’s not a question for the biology teacher to impose on the students his or her political ideas. Do you see? But it *is* a question for the teacher to discuss the issue in a broader way, and even to express her or his *choice*” (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 104).

Neither Horton nor Freire tells us exactly what sharing entails. However, in the contexts in which they write, sharing connotes welcomed communications: free and un-coerced exchange of ideas. Sharing conjures up images of hushed tones, subdued voices, and the use of non-aggressive, non-judgmental modes of communication. So instead of saying, for instance: “*that comment you just made is racist; I will not tolerate it in this class;*” the teacher who just shares might say: “*your comment may be interpreted as racist; do you care to elaborate?*” This way of thinking erroneously assumes that when educators share, students have the freedom to refuse what is being shared; but when educators coerce, students are forced to accept because, unlike sharing, coercion completely robs students of the ability to resist.

The ethical superiority of sharing lay, presumably, in the fact that it is freely chosen (i.e., voluntarily; without external pressure). Let us lay aside for the moment problems associated with defining freedom as the absence of external constraints. We shall address the matter later on in the paper. Beginning with his early writings (Freire 1970, 1973) and continuing throughout his career Freire writes eloquently of situations in which oppressed peoples participate, *voluntarily* and *willing*, in their own oppression. He locates the root of such self-inflicted injury in what he calls massification and false consciousness and proposes critical consciousness (the dialectic of collective action and reflection) as an antidote. Given his astute understanding of self-inflicted oppression, given that Freire understands, quite well, that paths voluntarily chosen may not always result in a person’s best interest, why does he assume that sharing is always ethically superior to coercion? I believe the answer lies, in part, in the romantic notion that freedom is an unqualified good.

The assertion that freedom is an unqualified good may be justified on one of two grounds: (a) that voluntarily chosen paths are never harmful, and (b) that the benefits derived from voluntarily chosen paths always outweigh the injuries inflicted by more coercive alternatives. Neither justification is tenable. The first justification (that voluntarily chosen paths are never harmful) is untenable even for a romantic like Freire. For, in his parenthood illustration (above), Freire leaves open the possibility that a student’s voluntary actions might be harmful to him/her. However, Freire’s romantic proclivity compels him to assert that teachers have no right to coerce students into alternative (less harmful) pathways—even when they (the teachers) know that the students’ voluntarily chosen paths may lead to injury to themselves and others. “The position of a [teacher] is that of someone who, without any risk of her or his authority, is able to accept, humbly, the extremely important role of adviser to their [students]. And as an adviser, will *never* [italics added] impose a decision [on her or his students]” (Freire, 1998, p. 97).

Justification 2—that the benefits derived from voluntarily chosen paths always outweigh the injuries inflicted by more coercive alternatives—has no empirical support. As Freire himself notes, people (including students) engage voluntarily in acts that are injurious to themselves. I

can think of no logical or empirical basis for asserting that voluntarily chosen paths are always more beneficial than coercive alternatives. The relative benefit or injury of an act rests, not simply in whether or not it is undertaken voluntarily. Given the prevalence of unintended consequences (both beneficial and harmful), the cost-benefit ratio of any act is assessed by the specific circumstances leading up to and following the act (Merton, 1996). Universal claims of the superiority of voluntary acts over coercive ones are baseless—resting on naïve romanticism, rather than on any systematic empirical evidence.

Fallacy 3: Titular Authority is Inherently Superior to Other Forms of Power

Another fallacy buttressing the practice of educational niceness is that titular authority is inherently superior to other forms of power. By titular authority I mean power vested in one's title, official status or position; one's official or legal authority, so to speak. Those who believe in the inherent superiority of titular authority assume that, regardless of situation or context, persons with higher titles or statuses are always more powerful than their subordinates. Thinking along those lines, one would erroneously conclude that, by virtue of their superior title and status teachers are always in a position to exert more power and influence in educational transactions than their students; presidents than citizens; managers than their employees; and so on.

Horton represents well this belief in the inherent superiority of titular authority:

People sometimes say they're afraid to [share their views with others] for fear they'll impose their ideas on people. You know, I remember that this same discussion came up back several years ago, talking to some of my friends and former colleagues at the University of Chicago. They said that I was always advocating democracy and decision making when I was a student, campaigning for the rights of dissidents to express themselves. They said, "Now here you are, you're imposing your ideas on people who come to Highlander." I said, "Do you impose your ideas?" "Oh, no we are very careful not to impose our ideas." And I said, "Well, you have one problem I don't have. You're such powerful teachers that if you even breathe what you believe, it will influence everybody. I don't have that problem. I've always been glad I could get somebody to pay attention to my ideas, just to share them with them. I don't have to worry about being so overpowering that everybody will take everything I say for granted. (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 106)

For Horton then, regardless of context or situation, the inherently superior titular authority of University of Chicago faculty forever endows them with more power and influence than affiliates of Highlander. Being a lowly affiliate of Highlander and not a mighty University of Chicago faculty, Horton perceives himself as having little or no power. Accordingly, Horton does not have to worry about "overpowering anyone." Horton presumes that in whatever situation he finds himself, that his lowly Highlander estate would make it impossible for him to coerce anyone—except, presumably, through open hostility. By contrast, Horton assumes that mighty University of Chicago faculty need not engage in open hostility to effectively exercise their power over others. Given their inherently superior titular authority, all mighty University of Chicago professors have to do for their power to be felt is simply "breathe."

A non-relational and overly transparent conception of power buttresses Horton's view of

titular authority. It is non-relational because in the passage just quoted, power is presumed to be a commodity that individuals possess or uses, without regard to context. It belongs to them, and they have the prerogative to use it as they see fit, whenever and however they see fit. In this non-relational conception, power is viewed as a static inheritance: a fixed quantity or quotient that individuals carry around with them wherever they go. It changes not regardless of whom one is interacting with, or the circumstances and purposes of the interactions. Moreover, Horton's (and Freire's) conception of power relations is overly transparent. Teachers and mighty University of Chicago professors can, apparently, exert power and influence, by simply breathing. But for the less powerful (such as students or lowly Highlander affiliates) to exercise power, they must, apparently, do so via open hostility (e.g., speaking and writing in a forceful, threatening manner) or via some other very intentional, purposive act of malevolence.

Fallacy 4: Power is a Weapon Wheeled by Malevolent Subjects, at Their Whim and Fancy

In Horton's example (above), power appears to be defined as "the ability to gain favorable outcomes at another's expense" (Lovaglia, Mannix, Samuelson, Sell, & Wilson, 2005, p. 144). Such a view of power does not allow for mutuality and reciprocity in power relations. In Horton's conception of power, a more powerful, malevolent subject always gets the better of a less powerful object. The less powerful object, apparently, is never able to successfully exert power or influence over the more powerful subject. For example, teachers (more powerful subjects) are presumed to always exert super-ordinate power and influence over less powerful students (objects), never the other way round.

I take issue with this, and similar conceptions of power, that treat it as a weapon (an absolute negative force) in the hands of a malevolent subject. Power is not a necessary evil. Without power, nothing happens. Power is needed to keep things as they are, and to change them. I concur with Hobbes (1651/1968) and Locke (1947) that power is the present means by which persons, groups, and organizations obtain and secure future goods and services. Such a view strips the term of any *independent* moral character. Power, like knives and guns, always possess a moral character; but that character is attributive, not objective: it depends on who is making the assessment; when and where the assessment is being made. An exercise of power may be deemed by one person as negative and by another as positive. Moreover, the same individual may deem an exercise of power to be negative at one time and later, in the light of new information, as something positive.

I conceive of power as both an entity and a relation. As an entity, power is always something that people possess; it stands outside of ourselves and confronts us and others independently of our knowledge or intentions. But this entity is manifested only in and through relationships (direct and indirect). We may refer to the former as the latent dimensions of power and to the latter as manifest power. Both dimensions exist in every human transaction. Latent power, without opportunities to manifest itself, is like a sleeping giant that has been locked away in a deep dungeon, beyond the physical or psychological reach of anyone--out of collective sight and mind. We have to put the sleeping giant out of sight and mind because once "in view" the slumbering colossus will have an inevitable effect on others. "What if he suddenly wakes up" a frightened observer might say. Conversely, manifest power, without a latent source, is like a proverbial massive air bubble. One tiny prick will result in its disappearance.

The dual dimensions of power (latent and manifest) demand that we analyze the exercise of it as a dynamic relation: between its latent sources and the particular context of operation. Because of its dynamic nature, the exercise of power is always relative, never absolute. Such a view of power finds support among theorists who have studied the topic (Foucault, 1982, 1984; Hayward, 1998; McHoul & Grace, 2002). Foucault, for instance, reminds us, that power is relational, not categorical. It finds force and expression in and within relationships and transactions. No one has absolute power, and no one has an absolute amount of power. The power of individuals varies from situation to situation. An individual may be highly powerful in one context and relatively powerless in another. Moreover, this relational view of power allows for the co-construction of subjects and objects in social transactions (Marx, 1973; Vygotsky, 1978). In human transactions (wholly independent of desire or intentions) subjects transform objects and objects transform subjects, via a process of mediation (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Vygotsky, 1978).

This relational, dynamic conception of power applies equally to the president of the United States and to homeless women in the streets of Washington, D.C. It is this relational view of power, above all things, that allows for human agency through collective struggle. Through collective struggle, disenfranchised groups change the conditions that enable and preserve the superior influence of certain dominant individuals and groups. These changes in conditions make it possible for the disenfranchised to effectively voice their concerns. Without this relational and dynamic conception of power, the only way for disenfranchised individuals and groups to have their voices heard is for them to wait patiently on the mercies of their benevolent dictators.

Given that the exercise of power is relational, dynamic and often tacit and non-intentional, it is imprudent for educators (especially those as influential as Horton) to assume that the only way to effectively impose their will on students is via deliberate and overt directives. In a myriad of unconscious, unintentional and tacit ways, educators impose their will on students--sometimes to the benefit of students, sometimes to their injury. I posit, however, that one reason for educators' seeming aversion to coercion is their conflation of the terms "imposition", "coercion" and "violence." I turn now to an examination of this issue.

Conflation of Imposition, Coercion and Violence

One instance of educators' conflation of the terms imposition, coercion, and violence is Michael Welton's (2002) critique of my work on coercive restraint (Baptiste, 2000a). In that work I advocate the use of ethical coercion – which I argue may range from mild manipulation and intimidation to all-out credible force. In response, Welton argues that, as citizens there may be times when it is appropriate for persons to act coercively; but as educators, acting (knowingly) in a manner that is coercive is always inappropriate. On that matter, Welton (2002) writes:

Once persons don the robe of the adult educator, they must seek to enlighten the other, and engage in non-violent, educative acts whenever possible. Under no circumstance can adult educators use coercion, deception or manipulation to achieve educational purposes. (p. 79)

Welton's use of the term "can" in the last sentence may be a typographical error. If it is not, then Welton is suggesting that it is technically and philosophical impossible for educational purposes

to be achieved via the use of coercion. I beg to disagree; but that is not the thrust of my argument here. In the quotation above, Welton also conflates the terms coercion and violence to make me an advocate of violence.

In my article (Baptiste 2000a) that Welton (2002) has critiqued, I employed the term violence seven times, and each time, my intent was to denounce it and, simultaneously, to find ways to curb it. As an example, I used the term to critique Freire for assuming that “one could sufficiently stem the tides of violence and injustices perpetrated by misguided foes simply by appealing to their senses” (Baptiste, 2000a, p. 38). I go on to suggest principles that might guide educators who are interested in curbing violence in their practice. It is only by conflating the terms that Welton is able to make me an advocate of violence.

If imposition, coercion, and violence are all synonyms, Welton’s charge is fair, and an unqualified aversion to imposition is justified. However, I contend that these three terms are not synonymous. Permit me to offer some distinctions. I define imposition as the insertion into mental or physical space elements that were not there before or the removal from mental and physical space elements that were previously there. By that definition, coercion is a special form of imposition: coercion is unsolicited imposition. It is “the use of physical or moral force to compel to act or assent” (*Webster’s Dictionary*, 1986, p. 439). Coercion stems from “formal and informal pressures exerted on [entities¹] by other [entities] upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p.150). These pressures may be encountered in the form of physical force, persuasion, fear, and so on. To coerce people is to prevent them from doing what they would otherwise have done or to cause them to do what they would not have voluntarily done. We may compel them by the promise of rewards or by the threat of punishment (proverbial carrots or sticks). The desirability or undesirability of a coercive act is assessed, not simply or primarily by the mode adopted (carrots vs. sticks) but by the net short-, and long-, term benefits or injury resulting from the act.

Two criteria distinguish coercion from other forms of imposition: the presence of an external force and the experience of feeling pressured. First, coercion requires an external force. I cannot coerce myself. Some entity outside of myself must put pressure on me to act or not act. When I do something voluntarily (i.e., on the basis of my own internally-held values or convictions), I am not being coerced, even if my actions consistently result in injury to myself. Let me illustrate. While writing this paper, one of the things I did to take a break was to don myself with a machete and go to a parcel of land I own that has all the features of a tropical rain forest. Its dense vegetation blocks out the sunlight even at mid day in tropical Grenada. For hours I would chop vines, and bushes, and shrubs, and trees, ‘till my clothes are drenched with sweat and every muscle in my body aches, gloriously. The act just described is physically exhausting and exerting. Moreover, I have injured myself more than once during these “events in the rain forest.” I have cut my finger, sprained my ankle, and pulled a hamstring muscle, more than once. But each day, I can’t wait to get back to my rain forest. I take on the task gladly and willingly. It’s a kind of reward I give myself after long hours of mental exertion. Though they cause injury and pain, my escapes into the rain forest are not coercive because I am under no pressure or obligation (from any entity outside myself) to perform or continue them.

¹ Writing from the “environment as institution” perspective, DiMaggio & Powell focus on coercive pressures in organizations. I have replaced the word “organizations” with “entities” to reflect a broader view of institutional forces.

Similar kinds of physical exertion and exhaustion are felt by amateur athletes and persons performing manual labor. And many of us who engage in scholastic activities are quite familiar with the mental and psychological exertion and exhaustion they elicit. Indeed, physical, mental, and psychological exhaustion is the stuff of everyday living. Success (however defined) is hardly possible without it. But self-induced instances of exertion and exhaustion are coercive only when they are sustained by some external force, either in the form of rewards (carrots) or punishment (sticks).

Second, in the definition presented above, there is always a subjective dimension to coercion. I cannot be coerced unknowingly. The one being coerced must experience the feeling of being pressured from outside. For instance, teachers often shout directions and instructions at students, but the students pay them (the teachers) no attention. The students pay no attention to the teachers because they (the students) perceive in the teachers' shouting no credible threat. In such situations, the teachers' shouting is not coercive. A coercive act must, therefore, be sustained by an external force that is experienced by the one being coerced as a credible threat. When coercion is stripped of this subjective dimension, the term loses much of its utility (or explanatory force) because it includes too wide a range of human behavior. Human beings subject themselves, willingly, to experiences that are painful and unpleasant (experiences associated with athletic preparation or medical care come to mind). We seek out these unpleasant and painful experiences not because of any external pressure but because of the net benefit we anticipate.

Note also the absence of intentionality in coercive acts. Persons performing coercive acts may not intend to do so. The coerciveness of an act is judged, not by the intentions of the coercer, but by its consequences. Let's turn our attention now to defining *violence*.

In its 2002 *World Report on Violence and Health*, World Health Organization (WHO) defines violence as: "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation" (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002, p. 6). The *Report* goes on to state:

The inclusion of the word "power", in addition to the phrase "use of physical force", broadens the nature of a violent act and expands the conventional understanding of violence to include those acts that result from a power relationship, including threats and intimidation. The "use of power" also serves to include neglect or acts of omission, in addition to the more obvious violent acts of commission. Thus, "the use of physical force or power" should be understood to include neglect and all types of physical, sexual and psychological abuse, as well as suicide and other self-abusive acts. (p. 6)

I like the distinction the *Report* makes between "intent to act" and "intent to injure." Consider, for instance, a teacher, Jack, who throws a duster at a disruptive student, Mary. Mary had turned her back to the teacher to chat with a classmate sitting behind her. The teacher (Jack) threw the duster simply to get Mary's attention, not hurt or injure her. Unfortunately, Mary turns around while the duster is in flight and the duster hits her in the eye, causing serious injury. Jack had no intention of injuring Mary. Had Mary not turned around at the time she did, the duster

would have hit her shoulder and fallen harmlessly to the floor. This is an example of an intent to act but not an intent to injure. By the definition given above, Jack's behavior is violent, even if it did not result in any physical or psychological injury to Mary. It is violent because the act fulfilled two defining criteria: intentionality and high probability of injury. First, the act was intentional. It was not an accident. Jack intended to throw the duster at Mary. Second, before acting, Jack knew that throwing dusters at students could result in injury to them--injury that is avoidable and unnecessary. Jack had other, less potentially injurious, options to get Mary's attention.

Now consider the same situation with one difference. The duster accidentally flew out of Jack's hand while he was demonstrating a point, and hit Mary in the eye. Injury still results, but the act of throwing the duster is no longer intentional. It is an accident. By the definition above this second situation is not violence because the criterion *intent to act* is missing. By the same token, reckless driving or driving under the influence of alcohol is violent, because persons engaged in such acts are conscious of their behavior and its probable injurious consequences. Even if the reckless behavior never results in injury to self or others, it is still an instance of violence because the perpetrators knowingly engage in behaviors that have a high probability of injury to self and others.

I would add to WHO's discussion of power (above) the notion of symbolic violence: that is, injury resulting from communicative acts—whether written, verbal, and non-verbal. Symbolic refers to the assignment of meaning and/or significance. An entity, A, be it an individual or a collective, commits symbolic violence when it gets B to define B's reality in ways that are detrimental to B. An example of symbolic violence is when White Europeans get Black Africans to define physical beauty in European terms (e.g., when Black Africans define physical beauty by the lightness of skin complexion or by the thinness of the lips). The act is violent because, biologically, Black Africans have darker skin and thicker lips than White Europeans. So for Black Africans to define physical beauty by the lightness of skin color or the thinness of lips is to disadvantage *oneself* (Black Africans) while privileging *the other* (White Europeans).

If we grant that violence may be symbolic, it follows that violent acts need not be aggressive or coercive. That is, violence may not be experienced as overt hostility or the use of unsolicited, credible external force. A violent act may be quite amiable, palatable, and welcomed. As the foregoing example regarding beauty suggests, individuals may willingly engage in self-inflicting behavior; that is to say, they may voluntarily engage in behaviors that result in injury to themselves. To their own disadvantage, many Black Africans have internalized White European standards of beauty. They do so, not out of fear of or persuasion by any credible external threat. They do so because the hegemonic forces of European Colonization have brainwashed them into believing that being beautiful is being or appearing to be White European (Fanon, 1967).

By the foregoing definition, acts in and of themselves cannot be regarded as violence. For example, the infliction of unwelcomed, unsolicited pain is not, *ipso facto*, violence. If that were the case, a large portion of the activities of medical professionals--surgeons, anesthesiologists, dentists, etc.--would be justifiably regarded as violence. For example, though painful, the cleaning of my teeth is quite beneficial. When performed with sensitivity and with efforts to minimize pain, few would regard tooth-cleaning as a violent act. Some acts of medical

professionals are, no doubt, violent. I concur with Illich (1987) and McKnight (1996), that iatrogenesis does occur; sometimes medical professionals (advertently or inadvertently) cause avoidable and unnecessary injury and harm to their patients. Iatrogenesis is violence. But a lot of the physical pain inflicted by medical professionals is beneficial; such pain is necessary to alleviate illnesses and diseases, and it does not result in injury and harm that are avoidable and unnecessary.

The foregoing example underscores an important distinction I wish to make between imposition, coercion, and violence. Imposition and coercion are morally neutral categories. Like “killing”, the terms (imposition and coercion) indicate the types of behavior that are being enacted, but they do not specify a moral or ethical direction. Killing might be a highly ethical act, as when a ranger kills a grizzly bear that is threatening to dismember a child; or it might be highly unethical, as in the case of a person who rapes and takes the life of an innocent child.

As noted earlier, the term imposition indicates that something has been inserted in or removed from a mental or physical space. The term coercion indicates that that something has been *forcibly* (i.e., without solicitation) inserted or removed. Neither term indicates whether or not the act is beneficial or harmful. On the other hand, the term violence signifies a moral direction: it indicates that the act (of insertion or removal) is harmful. Violence does not merely signify an act; it indicates a moral interpretation or assessment of the act.

The “banking education” of which Freire’s (1970) speaks is an example of educational violence--not because it is coercive, but because it robs students of any meaningful decision-making role in their educational content or process. Moreover, banking education often utilizes educational content and processes that are not only insensitive to students’ cultures and contexts; banking education often results in the indoctrination of students and their subjugation to “foreign” domination (as was the case, for instance, with my colonial education). Banking education is violence. But we should be careful not to equate all forms of coercion with violence. I believe that much of the aversion to imposition and coercion that I encounter may be attributed to the fact that they (imposition and coercion) are often equated with violence.

Toward a Typology of Educational Imposition

The foregoing suggests that impositions may be palatable or unpalatable, beneficial or harmful. By palatable I mean that which is easy to accept; that which brings comfort, inflicts little or no pain and requires little or no effort. By beneficial I mean that which expands a person’s range of options for participation in improving human well-being¹. By harmful I mean that which impedes or contracts a person’s range of options for participation in improving human well-being. Based on these two dimensions (relative palatability and relative beneficence), I have erected a rather crude 2 x 2 typology of imposition (see Figure 1). The crudeness of the typology stems from the binaries (palatable/unpalatable; beneficial/harmful) I have erected. Many acts defy classifications into these neat binaries. Different evaluators assess the worth of the same act differently. Moreover, with time, the same individuals tend to reinterpret and reevaluate their

¹ A discourse on human well-being requires an engagement in social and political theory that is beyond the scope of this paper. For good treatments of the subject see, for instance, Arendt’s (1998) *The Human Condition*; Nussbaum’s (1999) discussion of human functional capabilities; or Rawls’ (1999) *A theory of Justice*.

prior experiences and evaluations. So I admit that my typology is crude. However, I believe that it represents an improvement over the prevailing view that treats imposition as always unpalatable and harmful. On the basis of their relative palatability and beneficence, I identify four forms of imposition: nurturance, challenge, placation, and plunder.

	Beneficial Effects	Harmful Effects
Palatable	Nurturance (Non-coercive)	Placation (Non-coercive)
Unpalatable	Challenge (Coercive)	Plunder (Coercive)

Figure 1. A typology of educational imposition.

Nurturance refers to impositions that are both palatable and beneficial. To say that an act is nurturing is to assert that it is palatable and beneficial to the one who is being nurtured. Educators are nurturing, for example, when they respond sensitively to students' plea for guidance—for instance, by modeling appropriate behavior, furnishing user-friendly information and materials, and so on. A great deal of educational practice qualifies as nurturance. Educational practice, however, is not limited to nurturance. Sometimes educators *placate* students; that is to say, they engage students in activities that are palatable but knowingly harmful, injurious, or miseducative. An example of placation would be educators who shower praises (with little or no critique) on students for work that they (the educators) deem highly unsatisfactory. In such situations, a more ethical option would be to challenge the students.

Challenge refers to impositions that are beneficial but potentially unpalatable. Significant learning often requires a challenging environment (i.e., one involving debate and critique), where old and new ideas are fiercely interrogated; where strongly held, but false and sometimes dangerous, assumptions are uprooted; and where comfortable but stagnating identities are exorcized. Challenge, then, ought to be the hallmark of all educational practices. But challenge, by its very nature, is potentially coercive because it is often unwelcomed, unsolicited, and unpalatable.

Challenge devolves into *plunder* when it disregards the well-being of persons engaged in the activity (students, teachers, etc.). Plunder is coercive and violent, harmful and unpalatable. Both teachers and students engage in plunder when they are abusive to each other; when they utterly

disregard each others' interests, emotions, and desires. Although quite prevalent, there could be no moral justification for educational plunder. I suspect that much of what educators such as Horton and Freire (1990) (rightfully) disdain about educational practice may be classified as plunder. Their error is in assuming that plunder is the only form of impositions that exists.

A Deep-Seated Belief in Absolute Goodness and Freedom

We have just discussed one reason for the continued practice of educational niceness—the conflation of imposition, coercion, and violence. Another, and probably more vexing, reason for the practice of educational niceness is a liberal humanistic belief in absolute goodness and freedom. Carl Rogers (1983) epitomizes this romantic proclivity. In *Freedom to Learn* he boldly proclaims: “The basic nature of the human being, when functioning freely is constructive and trustworthy” (p. 292). For humanists such as Rogers, then, evil (the willful infliction of injury and harm) is unnatural—a distortion of human nature—contorted by ignorance and external control. Liberal humanists assume that if people were left to “grow wild and free” their conduct and obligations would always be honorable. Liberal humanists operate under the conviction that people hurt others (and themselves), either because they do not *really* know better or because they are not *really free* to do better. Furthermore, they assume that people will do better once they become free, critical thinkers.

Writing in 1932, George Counts has challenged, quite brilliantly, this liberal humanist doctrine of absolute freedom and goodness. The child, Counts reminds us, is born helpless. He achieves freedom, as a race and as an individual, through the medium of culture. The most crucial of all circumstances conditioning human life, Counts maintains, is birth into a particular culture. And, regarding the matter of absolute goodness, Counts notes: “The evidence from anthropology, as well as from common observation, shows that on entering the world the individual is neither good nor bad; he is merely a bundle of potentialities which may be developed in manifold directions” (p. 13). As a consequence, Counts argues, parental and educational guidance is found, not in some romanticized version of human nature, but rather in the dialectic relationship between the individual and his environs. For Counts, this dialectic relationship goes by the name, *socialization*. Education, Counts reminds us, is a major and necessary socializing force. Through education (formal or informal), a society establishes and transmits what it considers good and virtuous. Educators, by necessity, are either supporters or opposers of particular virtues. There is no sitting on the fence. As educators we may have some choice over *what* we impose and *how* we impose it, but to impose, we must. Listen to Counts as he argues for the inevitability and desirability of imposition:

I am prepared to defend the thesis that all education contains a large element of imposition, that in the very nature of the case this is inevitable, that the existence and evolution of society depend upon it, that it [imposition] is consequently eminently desirable, and that a frank acceptance of this fact by educators is a major professional obligation. I even contend that failure to do this involves the clothing of one's own deepest prejudices in the garb of universal truth and the introduction into the theory and practice of education of an element of obscurantism. (p. 9)

It appears that educators such as Horton and Freire (1990) are guilty of this obscurantism. In their humanistic yearning for a non-imposing practice they have not heeded their own advice. As

Counts correctly contends, the dictum that education is political demands that educators accept and embrace wholeheartedly that imposition is a major professional obligation.

The humanistic belief in absolute goodness finds some of its clearest and most creative expression in educators' unqualified veneration of participatory democracy. The hallmark of participatory democracy is *maximum* participation of all stakeholders in decision making (Walters, 1989; cf. Barber, 1984; Pateman, 1970). Maximum participation means un-coerced, unfettered involvement of all stakeholders up to the level of their commitment (i.e., willingness and effort). Elsewhere (Baptiste, 2000b), I have argued that to achieve such participation one must disallow the use of authority (i.e., the use of disproportionate influence or power). That is so because the use of disproportionate power prevents others from participating maximally--necessarily so. Freire exemplifies this unconditional veneration of participation. Throughout his writings (Freire, 1970, 1973, 1985, 1998; Freire & Shor, 1987), when Freire advocates participation, he does so with unqualified adulation. One is hard pressed to find in Freire's writings an *articulated support* for restricting the people's participation. This passage in *We Make the Road by Walking* typifies his position on the issue:

The more people participate in the process of their education, the more the people participate in the process of defining what kind of production to produce, and for what and why, the more the people participate in the development of their selves [sic]. The more people become themselves, the better the democracy. The less people are asked about what they want, about their expectations, the less democracy we have. (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 145)

Note the absolute and unselfconscious veneration of democratic participation in the foregoing quote. Freire does not envisage (not in this quote, at least) any situation in which it might be desirable to restrict the participation of any one. The people, all of the people--oppressors and oppressed, racists, sexists, xenophobes, etc.,--must participate equally and maximally. "The more people participate, the more they become themselves, and the more they become themselves, the better the democracy" (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 145). For Freire, then, participation is an unqualified good. We could never have too much of it. And this is so, presumably, because people (all the people) are absolutely good, and because evil is a product of non-freedom (non-participation or involuntary participation) rather than a constituent of human nature.

Herbert Marcuse (1965) cautions us regarding this unqualified veneration of democratic participation. Referring to it as repressive tolerance, he writes:

This pure tolerance of sense and nonsense is justified by the democratic argument that nobody, neither group nor individual, is in possession of the truth and capable of defining what is right or wrong, good or bad. Therefore, all contesting opinions must be submitted to "the people" for its deliberation and choice. But I have already suggested that the democratic argument implies a necessary condition, namely that people must be capable of deliberating and choosing on the basis of knowledge, that they must have access to authentic information, and that, on this basis, their evaluation must be the result of autonomous thought. (Marcuse, 1965, p. 94)

As unpalatable as it might sound, participation is not an unqualified good. A sobering educational implication in both Marcuse's (1965) and Count's (1932) argument (above) is that there are conditions under which it is ethical to restrict the participation of learners. If optimal learning is to occur, it is sometimes necessary in class discussions, for instance, for teachers to limit the frequency and length of learners' responses. Because of time limitations, only a finite amount of participation is possible in any learning transaction. This means that participation of some students will inexorably restrict participation of other students. With limited time, it is impossible for everyone to participate, *maximally*. So the issue is not whether to restrict students' participation but rather *how*! Does the teacher use her power to restrict and regulate participation such that optimal learning occurs? Or does the teacher leave such regulation to a few domineering students or to some other forces in the environment?

The necessity to restrict learners' participation is even more evident when one considers that some learners engage in frequent and lengthy discourses that are uninformed, prejudicial, and deliberately harmful to other learners. Unqualified freedom to engage in classist, racist, sexist, xenophobic, and other oppressive behaviors leads to what Marcuse calls repressive tolerance--a matter I take up in the next section.

The Perils of Educational Niceness

History is replete with injury and harm inflicted on others by nice people doing nice things. Just ask Ralph Estes (1996) who, in *Tyranny of the Majority*, cautions that corporations sometimes make nice employees do bad things. Or ask Tenner (1996) who in *Why Things Bite Back*, reminds us of the "revenge of unintended consequences" when we benignly and uncritically apply technology. Below I examine four perils of educational niceness: (a) wrongful assignment of credit or blame, (b) deployment of weak and ineffectual means of coercion, (c) repressive tolerance, and (d) negation or masking of teacher power.

Wrongful Assignment of Credit or Blame

Those who practice educational niceness tend to assume that impositions are limited to overt, intentional behaviors (i.e., hostility). As we have seen above, this assumption, in part, fuels Freire's and Horton's preference for sharing over imposing. Sharing always stems, apparently, from noble intentions. And, apparently, noble intentions cannot reap harmful effects. Imposition, on the other hand, stem, apparently, from ignoble intentions. And, apparently, all ignoble intentions reap harmful effects. The privileging of intentions over concrete consequences leads, logically, to the belief that if educators do not intend to impose, they cannot impose.

The privileging of intentions over concrete consequences is philosophically flawed. It assumes that those we refer to as sharers and those we call imposers are fully aware, and in complete control, of the consequences of their behavior. It assumes that "sharers" and "imposers" possess total clarity of thought, and complete control of their utterances and actions. To imply (as Freire and Horton have done) that sharing is always ethically superior to imposing is to presume omniscience and total transparency in the communicative process. To imply that sharing is always ethically superior to imposing is to leave no room for blind spots between and among senders and receivers in the communicative process. To assume otherwise is to leave open the possibility that I may impose unknowingly. But if I am able to impose without knowing

it, I have no basis for asserting that I am merely sharing not imposing. I know of no one who possesses absolute clarity of thought or complete control over his or her utterances and deeds. The status of communicants (sharers and listeners alike) is a state of partial insight and partial control. Sharers have limited understanding of what they are sharing, and of the effects of their message on others. Likewise, listeners seldom fully comprehend what they are hearing or perceiving, and quite often they can only partially control how they are impacted by those things they hear and perceive.

The tendency to limit educational impositions to intentional behaviors runs the risk of simultaneously over-, and under-, estimating the coercive powers of educational participants (teachers, students, administrators, etc.). By putting too much credence on intentional behaviors advocates of educational niceness overestimate the impact of intentionality. Conversely, by trivializing or discounting unintentional behaviors, advocates of educational niceness underestimate the impact of unintended consequences. The upshot is that educators take credit and blame for things that are beyond their control or fail to give credit or to assign blame where it rightfully belongs.

Deployment of Weak and Ineffectual Means of Coercion

I have argued above that, because of its political nature, education is always a form of imposition. I have also advanced the thesis that to uphold quality and rigor, to encourage critique, and, ultimately, to facilitate an intellectually and morally enriching pedagogical environment, all competent, responsible educators must challenge students. I have also argued that challenge (by one entity of another) usually involves some form of coercion. It is my contention that advocates of educational niceness (like all other well-meaning educators) use coercion--necessarily so. But because they have no intellectual or moral justification for using the term, advocates of educational niceness end up promoting weak and ineffectual forms of coercion.

Again, Freire is a good case in point. While he openly denounces coercion, Freire tacitly upholds it. In *Pedagogy of Freedom*, for instance, Freire (1998) applauds a young Brazilian professor for imposing his will upon students who were blatantly disruptive. Of the incident, Freire (1998) writes:

Recently, a young professor with democratic principles was telling me about what seemed to him as abuse in his way of handling authority. He told me with a certain air of affliction, that he reacted to the presence of a student from another class who was standing at the half-open door gesticulating to one of the students of his class. In fact he had to interrupt his teaching because of the disturbance. In so doing, he managed to focus attention on what was central, namely, his teaching activity and the climate necessary for its proper execution, to say nothing of his right and that of his students not to be interrupted by a clearly unacceptable expression of freedom without limits. Even so, he thought his decision had been arbitrary. Not so, in my view. In fact, not to have intervened amounted to a demonstration of a lack of real authority, an act of omission in the face of a clearly unacceptable and prejudicial intrusion into his teaching space. (p. 95)

Freire (1998) omitted to say what specific action the young professor undertook in order to “execute his proper authority.” But I suspect that it must have entailed, at the very least, some form of mild intimidation or censure. Put differently, the young Brazilian professor must have successfully imposed his will upon the misbehaving students. But instead of naming the Brazilian professor’s action for what it was--coercion--Freire (1998) devises a grotesque construction he calls “coherently democratic authority” (p. 86). And to make matters worse, without bothering to define or trace the etymology of this grotesque construction, Freire heaps unto his transfiguration (coherently democratic authority) all that is virtuous in the world. I agree with Freire that the young Brazilian professor’s actions were warranted. But it seems more than a little disingenuous to disguise a blatantly coercive act under a more delectable name. Such educational honey may catch unsuspecting flies, but the inconsistency it engenders also has the potential to undermine Freire’s legitimacy and, ultimately, weaken his influence. Some flies get smart!

Repressive Tolerance

However serious the foregoing perils might be, they nevertheless constitute relatively benign consequences of educational niceness. In its most lethal form, educational niceness promotes what Marcuse (1965) calls repressive tolerance. According to Wolff, Moore, and Marcuse (1965), this kind of tolerance treats every idea with equal dignity and respect. Of repressive tolerance Marcuse (1965) laments:

All points of view can be heard: the Communist and the Fascist, the Left and the Right, the white and the Negro, the crusaders for armament and for disarmament. Moreover, in endless dragging debates over the media, the stupid opinion is treated with the same respect as the intelligent one, the misinformed may talk as long as the informed, and propaganda rides along with education, truth with falsehood. (p. 94)

In his critique of unbridled tolerance, Marcuse (1965) raises the bar far above liberal humanist educators’ petty focus on individual learners’ needs. Marcuse has noted that, under the guise of unbridled tolerance, democratic and authoritarian governments alike continue to justify legalized violence. Marcuse cites as examples of this violence institutionalized racism (evidenced, for instance, in the way the US criminal justice system treats black males), police brutality, nuclear arms proliferation, the propping up of totalitarian regimes, the massacre of dissidents, the moronization of children and adults through publicity and propaganda, outright deception in merchandising, environmental pollution, waste and degradation, planned obsolescence, and so on. Closer to home, Marcuse notes that authorities in education, morals, and psychology employ the rhetoric of unbridled tolerance to shout vociferously against the increases in juvenile delinquency, while comfortably tolerating, in word, and deed and pictures, the proud display of powerful missiles, rockets and bombs—the mature delinquency of a whole civilization.

Unbridled tolerance, Marcuse (1965) notes, has the potential to be liberating only when it is truly universally practiced--when it is “...practiced by rulers as well as the ruled, by lords as well as by peasants, by the sheriffs as well as by their victims” (p. 84). For tolerance to be truly universally practiced, Marcuse (1965) argues, three conditions necessary for true democracy must be present: “namely that people must be capable of deliberating and choosing on the basis

of knowledge, that they must have access to authentic information, and that, on this basis, their evaluation must be the result of autonomous thought” (p. 94). In the absence of such democratic conditions (which seldom exists inside or outside classrooms with which I am familiar), Marcuse argues that “... the conditions of tolerance are ‘loaded’: they are determined and defined by ... institutionalized inequalities” (p. 84), such as the classist, racist, and sexist structures of society. Advocacy of unbridled tolerance is therefore a tacit denial that the bases are loaded in favor of the more powerful. The astute and highly influential critical pedagogist, Paulo Freire, appears to be doing just that in his unqualified veneration of participatory democracy (see above).

For those who advocate unbridled tolerance, consensus (i.e., majority rule) is regarded as the only legitimate method of decision-making. But as Marcuse (1965) points out, without the three conditions of true democracy, majority rule quickly deteriorates into tyranny of the majority. And in such situations, unbridled tolerance becomes a brilliant strategy for sustaining and advancing the privileges of dominant groups, while further marginalizing already disenfranchised sectors. In the end, unbridled tolerance serves, ultimately, to maintain repressive status quos inside and outside the classroom.

Abnegation or Masking of Teacher Power

When internationally renowned educators such as Horton and Freire (1990) say that they are just sharing but not imposing, they are either abnegating their power or masking it. As noted earlier, power is the present means by which persons, groups, and organizations obtain and secure future goods and services. It is the ability to influence (alter, change, modify, etc.) the thoughts and actions of others (Hobbes, 1651/1968; cf. Locke, 1947). Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, and others have noted that the exercise of power is often independent of our motives or intentions. Power is often conferred on us by our affiliations. As such, Freire and Horton are vested with institutional power. In certain situations and contexts, they have the ability to influence others, not only by intent, but also by virtue of their gender, race, knowledge, institutional affiliations, status and position, and so on. Educators who deny this structural (i.e., institutional) aspect of power are either naive or deceptive. Whatever the reasons, such a denial only serves to purchase democratic forms (appearances) at the expense of democratic substance. Denial of our institutional power allows us to foist it on others in much the same way as honey is foisted upon unsuspecting flies. And as Marcuse (1965) has shown, we end up (advertently or inadvertently) supporting heinous inequities when we abnegate our institutional power.

Conclusion: A Cure for Educational Niceness

Marcuse (1965) proposes “partisan tolerance” as an antidote to repressive tolerance. According to him, partisan tolerance is “intolerant toward the protagonists of the repressive status quo” (p. 85). It is a tolerance “that calls for intolerance toward [oppressive] prevailing policies, attitudes and opinions, and extension of tolerance to [progressive] policies, attitudes and opinions which are outlawed and suppressed” (p. 81). In this regard, Marcuse’s partisan tolerance is quite similar to my notions of coercive restraint and ethical disempowerment (Baptiste, 2000a, 1998).

In those two articles, I extend the work of Michael Newman (1994) by arguing that educational situations may be divided in three forms, based on the severity of conflict they

exhibit: *consultations, negotiations, and disputes*. It is the responsibility of the competent and responsible educator to match situations with pedagogical strategies--consultative situations with consultative strategies, negotiative situations with negotiative strategies, and so on.

“Consultation is a process whereby two or more parties *whose common interests outweigh any conflicting ones* come together to talk with a view to sharing information and solving problems to their mutual advantage” (Newman, 1994, p. 154). Consultative situations parallel Marcuse’s truly democratic conditions. In consultative situations stakeholders treat each other as allies. The parties know and trust each other; their common interests vastly outweigh conflicting ones; and interactants work in mutually supportive ways. Injuries inflicted in such situations are unintended--resulting truly from mistakes, ineptitude, neuroses, and such like. Consultative situations, I have argued, demand consultative strategies; these are non-coercive, communicative actions in which information and resources are freely shared between and among interactants.

The problem, however, is that advocates of educational niceness presume that all educational situations as consultative; hence their resort to sharing, only. But as Newman (1994) has pointed out, those are not the only kinds of situations educators encounter. Educators also encounter negotiative situations and disputes--situations involving vexing and, sometimes, intractable conflicts of interests. In such situations, competent teachers resort to a pedagogy of coercive restraint (Baptiste, 2000a). Under coercive restraint, the responsible educator continuously assesses the intensity of the conflict and the severity of the harm such conflicts might engender. And, on the basis of such assessment, he/she employs a combination of consultative and coercive strategies that is conducive to an intellectually and morally enriching environment. I have argued elsewhere (Baptiste, 2000a) that depending on the severity of the situation, coercive strategies may move from manipulation, to intimidation, to credible force. I might also argue that it is only by employing such measured coercion, that educators are able to effectively address some of the injustices they encounter, inside and outside the classroom.

Those of us who work in situations involving what Newman (1994) calls enemies know that we must coerce perpetrators if we are going to seriously combat injustices--in our classrooms, homes, places of worship, workplaces, and the larger community. Until we stop believing that we can share without imposing, or that we can be political without interfering; until we reject the dictum that maximum participation (as exemplified in participatory democracy) is *always* a good thing; until we accept the premise that (as educators) sometimes it is ethical to restrict people’s participation; until we rid ourselves of the romantic (but untenable) notion that all forms of coercion are evil; until we do those things, we will not articulate a theory of coercive restraint. And, without such theory, we are likely to coerce people and deny it, or we are likely to use weak and ineffectual coercive strategies--strategies that leave unchecked the perpetrators of violence and injustices while we focus our attention entirely on “sharing” and “discussing” with the victims.

It is still true that it is easier to catch flies with honey than with vinegar. When we discount the harmful consequences of our niceness, by calling what we do, “sharing,” we run the risk of using educational honey to catch unsuspecting flies. What Horton says of neutrality may be said of sharing:

There can be no such thing as [just sharing]... It's a code term for masking the negative consequences of niceness... [Just sharing] has nothing to do with anything but agreeing to what is and will always be... [Just sharing] is just following the crowd... [Just sharing] is just being what the system asks us to be... [Just sharing], in other words, is an immoral act (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 102).

In this paper I have argued that, whereas highly critical educators (such as Freire and Horton) deny the *possibility* of political neutrality, they, nonetheless, crave a non-imposing educational practice. Assuming that people are absolutely free and good, humanist educators (such as Freire and Horton) cannot bring themselves to justify or openly authorize any form of coercion. So, in vain, they strive for a practice that is free of imposition. In their humanist quest to be nice, they coerce people but use more palatable euphemism to justify their actions. Or they employ weak forms of coercion that are unable to stop the perpetrators of violence. But as educators, we do encounter enemies--people who knowingly and willfully hurt and harm others. To prevent such people from continuing their pillage, we must effectively coerce them (Baptiste, 2000a). To do otherwise is to abnegate "a major professional obligation" (Counts, 1932, p. 9). Educational niceness, I have tried to show, is not a humanizing imperative. Rather, it is a deluding phantom--a salacious seduction which might make educators popular with students, and leave them feeling good about themselves, but, which, in the end, might turn out to be the unwitting handmaiden of oppressive hegemony. Until educators rid themselves of their yearning to be nice, until they embrace wholeheartedly their obligation to impose, their educational impact--especially in addressing social inequalities--will be severely curtailed.

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