The death of Paulo Freire interrupted the development of a new educational focus in Latin America that would bring together understandings emerging from new scientific paradigms, the humanities, and a growing commitment to reestablish a more visceral connection with the Earth. Freire, Francisco Gutierrez, and Moacir Gadotti were founding directors of the Paulo Freire Institute in Brazil and collaborators in this endeavor. Freire’s last book, *Pedagogy of the Heart* (1997) was originally entitled *In the Shadow of the Mango Tree*. That tree is in the garden of Francisco’s small cottage in Costa Rica, where he and Paulo outlined the major ideas of a new pedagogical focus for the future. Those conversations would become the foundation for eco-pedagogy and for a new and innovative doctoral program that applies these ideas to educational practice.

Francisco Gutierrez, who passed away in 2016, developed those ideas in his book with Cruz Prado (1999) entitled *Eco-Pedagogy and Planetary Citizenship*, and in the creation of an innovative doctoral program at LaSalle University. His ideas on pedagogical mediation became the foundation for an innovative approach to instruction that embodied a more holistic paradigm of education. Pedagogical mediation focuses not only on the relationship between teacher and student but also among the learners themselves, both reflexively and interactively. With this decidedly holistic perspective and using the Freirean notion of “circles of culture,” a unique and forward-thinking doctoral program that has a growing influence in Latin America was developed. The program demonstrates how important new ideas with a holistic perspective can be applied in academic settings. Moreover, it points the way toward future possibilities and new understandings of wholeness and integration. This chapter describes this program.

The Need for a New Educational Scenario

The doctoral program at LaSalle University embraces a holistic perspective that is common among other holistic educators. It recognizes that the mechanistic paradigm that characterized a classical scientific view of the world is no longer an adequate epistemology for our time. The Cartesian/Newtonian separation of the world into isolated and unrelated parts is no longer relevant as a curriculum or pedagogy.

Let us imagine that a teacher and a doctor who died at the end of the past century should come back today, and each was to practice their profession as they did 100 years ago. The doctor enters the
operating theatre and with astonishment contemplates an absolutely unimaginable scene. He looks around him, at his colleagues and at the sophisticated instruments, and without much hesitation decides to withdraw from the operating theatre.

The teacher, on the other hand, walks into the classroom and feels completely comfortable. The changes are minimal and insignificant. She can easily begin her class with the well-known phrase, “As we were saying yesterday” . . . In other words, while the medical profession over the years has transitioned into increasingly sophisticated means and processes of surgery, the education profession largely remains unchanged and still mired in early twentieth century concepts and practices.

A new educational vision and scenario is both necessary and possible if we pay attention to the extraordinary advances in the new understandings in the sciences and humanities. These are characterized by the emergence of a new scientific vision that resists being inserted within the exclusively mechanistic, Newtonian scheme. In some sense, we have passed from a “clockwork paradigm” wherein everything was mechanically predetermined, rigid, and linear, to a much more open, flexible, holistic, and ecological one that requires a fundamental transformation of our thoughts, our perceptions, and our values. This emerging paradigm brings with it a change in mentality and, consequently, a profound modification of most of our social relationships, as well as of our organizations.

The profound global changes make clear that humanity has entered a stage without precedent and with unpredictable repercussions for the societies of the twenty-first century. There is a great need for an education that addresses these historical challenges.

Towards the Education that We Need

The education that we need is so much broader than the narrow view of education that we have, which is centered on the logic of competition and accumulation and the incessant production of wealth without consideration of the limits of nature and the true requirements of human beings. We cannot continue to deny our most essential human nature, the understanding and meaning of life.

To rethink education is to propose a paradigmatic reform that obliges us to change profoundly our vision of the world while inviting us to see and analyze reality from new categories of interpretation. Within the doctoral program at Universidad De La Salle in Costa Rica, this rethinking includes an emphasis on the decolonial. The decolonial perspective is an academic trend in Latin America that continues to be developed. While Latin America has managed to decolonize itself politically, it has not freed itself from a colonial culture that continues to pervade individuals thinking and belief systems, particularly in academia. Part of the La Salle experience is to explore these issues and in the process begin to identify and define a uniquely Latin American epistemology and aesthetic. This cultural and educational project is situated within an emerging worldview that contains a more holistic and ecological vision.

The La Salle University Doctorate in Education Using Pedagogic Mediation

In mid-2000, a trans-disciplinary group began to think about education from a new perspective. Their frame of reference was the basis, assumptions, principles, and values of the new scientific paradigm. Two years later, the group self-organized as a doctoral program within the Universidad de La Salle in Costa Rica.

The doctoral program in education at Universidad De La Salle in Costa Rica is nurtured by the transformational processes our societies are currently experiencing, due to technological, social, economic, ethical, political, and ecological changes, as well as changes in health and lifestyles. These include new forms of reflection and new ways to self-organize and exchange knowledge, while fomenting self-realization as well as a dynamic social construction. Francisco Gutierrez called this pedagogical mediation.
In pedagogical mediation there is a “horizontalizing” of the teacher–student relationship, as well as the student–student responsibilities. Self-organization and conviviality in the group leads to a group-defined process of working together, with freedom to select the spaces, places, schedule, and modus operandi. Assuming responsibility for their own learning, group members are accompanied by their teachers, who advise the process and assist in creating the culture of a unique learning community.

Staffed by professors, both in person and virtually, devoid of traditional evaluations, with self-organized and interrelated study groups, there is a complex methodology of readings and dialogues. The learning community comprises 4–10 persons. The groups are linked together within a larger group of 30–40 persons interacting virtually or in person on a bi-monthly basis. A team of three teachers facilitates continuous learning over the year.

Importantly, the doctoral program at the Universidad de la Salle in Costa Rica is founded on the principles of self-organization, interconnectivity, and complexity, based on quantum physics and chaos theory, as well as on a search for a universal ethos which can illuminate new fields of action offered by the digital world, the biosciences, humanistic economics, the arts, and emerging cultural dimensions. Early in the development of the program, the International Earth Charter provided a cogent articulation for many of these values.

These programmatic elements are organized into three thematic cycles woven into the curriculum: Cycle 1 emphasizes new epistemological foundations; Cycle 2 explores emerging pedagogical theory and curricula; Cycle 3 delves into trans-disciplinary implications and meanings.

The program also has a strong focus on research, reflection, production, and exchange. These are contained throughout the doctoral experience. There are four foundational keys that are woven holistically throughout the program. Each is reflected in the concept of pedagogical mediation:
(a) Feeling as the basis for educational process; (b) The human being as the subject for the educational process; (c) Pedagogical relationship as the essence of the pedagogical process; and (d) Creative expression as an appropriate environment for the learning process.

Feeling as the Basis for the Educational Process

From the beginning of the 1990s, together with Daniel Prieto, we promoted “Pedagogic Mediation”, defining pedagogy as promoting learning through deep feeling. Subjective experience is grounded in felt meaning. This is not transferable, nor is it taught; feeling is constructed, it is made and remade within a process. Meaning is not in study plans, nor in objectives, nor in the transfer of content. Felt meaning is interwoven through immediate relationships, through each being, through successive contexts in which we live, and through significant relationships.

If meaning is made and remade in daily activity, it is clear that meaning, within educational practice, has to be pedagogic because it requires a method and, consequently, pedagogical strategies and procedures. Either we promote learning with meaning, or we impose learning without meaning. Learning with meaning creates protagonists, beings for whom every concept means something in their own lives.

The Human Being as the Subject of the Educational Process

The subject of the process, as underscored by Paulo Freire, is the human being. The human subject always learns as long as he/she is in a learning mode, constantly searching and receptive to the vast amount of information that saturates today’s world. To achieve this attitude, the learner must feel hope, interest, and love. In other words, the learner must be in a state of well-being that leads to learning. This attitude of searching, of openness; this questioning the reality of every day, is to live a very rich educational process. For this reason, our essential objective should lead us to develop a learning aimed at:
Sensing, intuiting, vibrating emotionally.
-
Imagining, inventing, creating new scenarios.
-
Knowing how to move from one horizon of comprehension to another.
-
Relating to and capturing interconnections between phenomena.
-
Expressing oneself, communicating.
-
Locating, processing and utilizing the immense information in today’s world.
-
Seeking causes and foreseeing consequences.
-
Critiquing, evaluating and making decisions.
-
Thinking holistically.

What does developing one’s own capabilities imply? It implies breaking stereotypical and unproductive molds and opening an educational process directed towards horizons that seek to develop the human being, not just filling one’s head with a lot of information, however current and important it may be. It implies that the educator, without relinquishing being a teacher—and a good teacher—has to be concerned above all with promoting a learning centered on developing the human being, not so much on completing a study plan.

**Pedagogic Relationships as the Essence of the Educational Process**

Pedagogical relationships constitute one of the keys to understanding whether teachers continue to cling to the old school or whether they are open to the new school. In these relationships, the teacher may be authoritarian and coercive, or on the contrary, may promote:

- Dialogue.
- Interlocution.
- Empathic relationships.

A frank, sincere, and real dialogue implies the transformation of teaching into a process of:

- Exchange.
- Interaction.
- Communication.

In a process thus conceived as emitter–receiver, the educator is—or should be—sending and receiving messages, just as the student sends and receives them as perceiver–emitter. This means that educator and student develop and promote processes of communication that affirm co-participation, co-production, co-understanding, and communion. Improving the quality of education presupposes the creation of open dialogue, through a wealth of intersubjective, rich, dynamic, and significant relationships.

In pedagogical mediation, developed by Francisco Gutierrez (Gutierrez & Prieto, 1996), we affirm that a pedagogic discourse centered on the experience of the participants becomes much richer than one centered only on concepts. This is why one of the central bases of all educational processes is dialogical. Gutierrez used the term *interlocution*. For him, without interlocution, there is no educational act. The word interlocution is akin to an ongoing intimate conversation or discourse, whereby evolving meanings and purposes transform both the conversation and the participants. It signifies an authentic coming together within horizontal dialogue, always having the other present because we lead from their experiences, expectations, beliefs, dreams, wishes, and, thus, implies respect, tolerance, and recognition of the ideas and contributions of the other; it implies interaction and communication.
So that interlocution can take place in the educational process, teachers must be very careful with their language, their style, and their presence. Kind, familiar, fluid, transparent, simple, and clear conversation is the key to achieving this interlocution. The student should not feel invaded, forced, violated. Violence can occur not only in what is said, but in the way it is said: one’s voice, gestures, and look should all invite peace, harmony, and agreement. For this reason, simple, clear, friendly, and humble forms of expression are all important and obligatory ingredients for interlocution.

To achieve interlocution, empathy plays an essential role. It requires the capacity to reach the other and to open and promote paths of expression. Interlocution provides a space for the joy of working together with the aim of creating relationship and facilitating learning.

Creative Expression as an Appropriate Environment for the Learning Process

Education begins when the student becomes the owner of his or her own expression. The student who is unable to achieve expression remains repressed. Giving and finding meaning are not only a matter of comprehension; they are also, above all, a matter of expression.

The capacity to express means that s/he who studies masters not only the topic studied, but also its different languages and modes of expression. It means that s/he has mastered the clarity, coherence, security, richness, and beauty of managing the forms of the different epistemological languages. The new educational scenario for our time is unthinkable if it does not generate the appropriate climate for this type of experiential expression, which brings with it a great liberation from extremely coercive norms and controls.

Frequent exercise of expression and communication permits the development of positive attitudes in students such as commitment, initiative, personal choice, and self-confidence. Creative expression permits a playful environment that provides security and helps develop creative talent and respect for others. In summary, we could say that creative expression permits the student to move from information receptor to creator, thus breaking the dichotomy of mere spectator to re-creator of the world.

Innovative Features

The La Salle University program looks and feels different to conventional doctoral programs in education. The first difference with other doctoral programs is that of group production of knowledge; the second, conditioned on the first, is that the individual production of knowledge is based on a chifladura or personal passion, in other words, on desire, passion, emotion, feeling, because without feeling we cannot seek meaning. Essentially, this involves understanding and feeling life as a permanent and holistic search for meaning; in our family and professional relationships; in what we do and in what we do not do; in who we are and in who we wish to be.

Significantly, the group itself is the privileged arena for learning. The key is precisely in the dynamism and the richness supplied by the confrontation of ideas and opinions that put into play previous experiences and the constructive tension between achieving consensus and dissonance within a process of expression and reflection. The forms of expression require, without a doubt, training processes which lead to the knowledge and practice of different expressive resources that make possible both personal and group expression. Every act of knowledge requires forms of expression. This program places emphasis on textual forms and dialogue.

Among the innovative aspects of the doctorate, aside from the articulation of different topics, personal and collective questioning, and its rhizomatic topology, is the process of written production. Perhaps the best way to describe this experience is through the ecology of writing. This emerges from a person’s ideas, memories, arguments, purposes, and dreams, interacting in a complex way with their social, cultural, familiar, academic, and natural environment. The rational, emotional, intuitive, and aesthetic merge organically as each topic is addressed.
This experience is neither linear nor summative, but, rather, non-linear and associative. This process is focused around the changing of perceptions and views that occur continuously throughout the program. The individual and group products continually refine and re-define new ways of looking at and being in the world. It gives permission for textual production to be subject to advances, setbacks, apparent dead-ends, errors, randomness, and uncertainty.

This means that the textual production is a privileged cognitive strategy, yet is also the basis for communicating ideas among the doctoral participants. This ultimately leads to two final products. The first is a group thesis that encapsulates the unique perspectives and dialogues of the group. The second is an individual thesis constructed around one’s personal *chifladura*. There is a natural praxis that envelops one’s research and how one combines this with the expression of new modes of thinking, being, and doing in the world.

Bearing in mind that the essence of the doctoral program is the group production of knowledge, we have defined the program as a pedagogical adventure that takes place in self-organized groups by means of:

- Exchange of selves.
- Exchange of knowledge.
- Exchange of powers.
- Exchange of pleasures.

The La Salle doctorate is conceived as a living organism that evolves in order to maintain its sustainability. This entails a network structure of self-organized nodes that enable horizontal interaction and coordination. Such a way of operating, in turn, fosters a culture that should sustain an ongoing change with a focus on the future.

Ultimately, finding meaning is a permanent process that should never be interrupted. Meaning is neither transferred nor taught; meaning is lived, is constructed, is made and remade by living this doctoral process fully and consciously. The doctorate in education at Universidad de La Salle in Costa Rica has extended its influence to programs in Panama, Spain, Colombia, Italy, Guatemala, Brazil, Honduras, Venezuela, Mexico, and Argentina. The holistic perspective contained in Pedagogical Mediation is contributing to a culture of hope and possibility for a new kind of education in Latin America.

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**References**