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### Education, Power and Personal Biography: An Interview with Carlos Alberto Torres

### Educación, poder y biografía: Entrevista a Carlos Alberto Torres

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#### Abstract

This conversation touches on crucial aspects of the work and research technique of one of Latin America's most outstanding authors in the field of the political sociology of education. During this interview Professor Torres points out some of the principal themes of his research agenda, as well as what he considers Latin America's most important contributions to the discussion of educational problems. Prof. Torres also gives a detailed account of the way he became interested in studying Paulo Freire's work, which he has helped to disseminate in the USA. He explains the way in which he deals with theoretical and methodological problems in his research, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of being a Latin American studying international education while living and working in the United States. Finally, he makes some suggestions for those who are beginning their research on the educational problems of Mexico and Latin America.

*Key words:* Political sociology, Latin American educational thought, Paulo Freire, methodology.

## Resumen

En esta conversación se tocan aspectos cruciales de la obra y del modo de hacer investigación de uno de los autores latinoamericanos más destacados en el terreno de la sociología política de la educación. Durante la entrevista, el profesor Torres señala los principales temas de su agenda de investigación, así como sus consideraciones sobre cuáles han sido las mayores aportaciones latinoamericanas a la discusión de los problemas educativos. Asimismo, el entrevistado detalla la forma en que se inició su interés por el estudio de la obra de Paulo Freire, la que ha ayudado a divulgar en los Estados Unidos. Explica la forma en que enfrenta los problemas teóricos y metodológicos de sus investigaciones, al igual que las ventajas y desventajas de ser un latinoamericano que estudia la educación internacional desde los Estados Unidos. Por último, da algunas sugerencias para quienes se inician en el estudio de los problemas educativos de México y de América Latina.

*Palabras clave:* Sociología política, pensamiento educativo latinoamericano, Paulo Freire, metodología.

Author of more than 38 books, Dr. Carlos Alberto Torres is Professor of Social Sciences and Comparative Education at the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, and Director of the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). He is currently chairman of the International Sociological Association's Research Committee on Sociology of Education.

**Armando Alcántara-Santuario (A.A.S.):** First I would like to ask what, in recent years, have been the main themes occupying your attention. Your academic career began with your appointment as an assistant professor of political philosophy at Del Salvador University in Argentina in 1975, just after you had finished your BA in sociology. The next year you finished your first book on Paulo Freire; it was published in Mexico in 1978. So the beginning of the century marked your twenty-fifth anniversary as a teacher and academic researcher.

**Carlos Alberto Torres (C.T.):** Twenty-five years of professional work in any area of human life represent an invitation to reflect on the past, not so much for nostalgic reasons, but more than anything else, as an effort to learn and relearn what, as an intellectual committed to social change and liberation education, one has achieved as a teacher and researcher. In that spirit, and deeply appreciative of the invitation to have this conversation, let me say that I am convinced that it is not possible to design a research agenda by simply following the academic guidelines and regulations. Nor can it be done by following a plan previously and calmly mapped out behind a desk, responding to the demands of social movements and political parties, or responding to the actual dynamics of public policy.

A research agenda is born out of a complex process involving all of the above. In this process, also, there is a convergence of intellectual and political preferences; challenges and struggles of everyday life; and opportunities to learn more, both in

theoretical and empirical terms, and which one cannot pass up, and to take part in some educational process or problem of education.

Also a research agenda that brings together theoretical, conceptual, empirical and normative efforts, like mine, can hardly be carried out individually in the privacy of my own thoughts and meditations or through the systematic application of scientific methods in solitary field work.

This research agenda and teaching practice, in my case, was often carried out in collaboration with colleagues of enormous human and intellectual excellence, who are invariably my friends, and some of whom were, at the time, students I had the opportunity to serve as a teacher. I should mention—*noblesse oblige*—and referring only to books published in collaboration, some of my coauthors. A preferred place must go to the work done with Raymond Morrow; this work already covers a spectrum of fifteen years of joint and supportive collaboration, and has reached the point that on the subject of social theory it is difficult to tell which of us has written some of some of our books and numerous research papers. Together with my experience working with Raymond, one of Canada's most distinguished representatives of the critical theory of society, I should also mention my collaboration with other renowned colleagues and with whom I have written books. Among these are Jose Angel Pescador, Daniel Schugurensky, Adriana Puiggros, O'Cadiz Pilar, Pia Wong, Robert Arnove, Ted Mitchell, Daniel A. Morales Gómez, Nick Burbules, Martin Carnoy, Henry Levin, Marcela Mollis, Jerry Kachur, Seewha Cho, Aurora Loyo, Julie Thompson, Moacir Gadotti, Karen McClafferty, Guillermo Gonzalez Rivera and, of course, you yourself, and Ricardo Pozas Horcasitas.

Without a doubt, a turning point in my academic career was signing my contract in March, 1990, as a professor at the Graduate School of Education of the University of California Los Angeles. Here I have had the opportunity to continue my research, under the general rubric of Latin American education, to complete some projects begun in the seventies and eighties, and to pursue new conceptual paths and empirical research. UCLA has been an intellectual and affective space, as well as an absolutely remarkable one, politically, for both the material and practical support I have constantly received. This has allowed me to create the affective conditions for moving ahead with a struggle and a labor that sometimes creates contradictions and meets with enormous difficulties.

It may be useful to synthesize the overall theme of my research on the connection between education, power and politics. This has been the guideline of my work over these twenty years. This generic line of research settled into three major sub-themes on which I have produced several books and research articles, and have made countless presentations at international meetings.

First, there is the need to understand through a political sociology of education, the reason for initiating a specific educational policy; how this is created, planned, built, and implemented; who are the most relevant actors in their formulation and operationalization; and what are the systemic, symbolic, historical, structural and

organizational processes involved, both in its origins and in the implementation and evaluation of its policy.

A second topic occupied my labor during these last twenty years during the that in the sixties and up to the eighties. During that time there existed what were known as the characteristics of the dependent capitalist state in Latin America, specifically in relation to the formulation of education policy. Even more specifically, my concern in this regard was to understand the nature and needs of legitimation of the Latin American capitalist state, and how its dependent character conditioned the nature of educational policy formulation, especially in the areas of non-formal education.

This second area that basically marks my work in Mexico during the latter part of the seventies, and my return to Mexico after getting my Ph.D. at Stanford in the early eighties, left a strong imprint on my study of adult education. In this area I tried to create what I call a political sociology of informal education, and which basically covered the eighties. It ended a bit abruptly because of my disillusionment with the lack of political commitment by the Latin American states, which have used adult education policy as one of the mechanisms for legitimizing the State without any real educational purpose. This disappointment is due to the indisputable fact that Latin American states have manipulated adult education and, of course, the disenchantment is added to the fact, empirically discernible, that the Latin American states have stopped investing in adult education. Then there is a whole tradition of struggle and educational investment that has come to affect the areas of public administration, and that has been diminishing in the last ten or fifteen years with the rise of neoliberalism.

A third theme which sums up much of the research conducted in these last two-and-a-half decades were the alternatives developed in Latin America, from different perspectives or alternatives to the state models using state educational policy as compensatory legitimation—to use a term that emerged from Habermas' theoretical current. From the perspective of critical theory that I used once I understood more clearly the links between neo-Marxism—especially the *Gramscian* wedge—and the contributions of critical theory, especially the offerings of Herbert Marcuse and Paulo Freire. These notions of compensatory legitimacy are vital for understanding certain state practices. But in the search for alternatives, Paulo Freire's influence on these issues has been tremendous. I tried to carry out a systematic analysis of one of the most original and creative thinkers Latin America—especially Brazil—has produced. Freire, as an intellectual and political philosopher of education, offered, in the region and internationally, countless contributions that invite one to think about the critical alternatives in education, in a way that few intellectuals have allowed us to understand. His work, which apparently reached its apex in an early text that truly excited educational thinkers, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is one of the most important contributions to emancipatory education. In combination with another text on pedagogical ethics, *Pedagogy of Autonomy*—small, incisive and greatly sensitive—it forms his final legacy.

I could not be otherwise, having studied how pedagogy impelled practices that could contribute alternatively to oppression or liberation, and ended by proposing to us a form of pedagogy and politics that would lead to an autonomy of the pedagogical subject, free and full in the context of public school autonomy. This legacy of Paulo Freire, as a legacy of struggle, is also the legacy of popular education in Latin America, a legacy that was identified with the contributions of Paulo Freire, although it has had a distinguished tradition in the region since the early twentieth century,

The theory of the State applied to education, has given me room to begin a systematic exploration of the themes that appear in one of my latest books, called *Education, Democracy and Multiculturalism: Dilemmas of Citizenship in a Global World*, which at this time is being translated for publication in Spanish and in other languages by Siglo XXI Publishers. In this new line of research, which I think will take another decade to complete, I try to take from the theory of the state and from an analysis of the theory of globalization, those aspects which have to do with the theory of citizenship, the theory of theories of democracy and of multiculturalism, ultimately trying to offer a series of reflections on how to establish a multicultural democratic citizenship. This has been, somewhat, the concern of my work over the last five years.

Parallel to this, given my role as a teacher specializing in Latin American education at UCLA, I have continued my more generic research on educational policy incorporating work on the links between teachers' unions and state politics in six countries: Argentina, Mexico, Canada, the US, Japan and Korea. Clearly, a work of this size, with fieldwork in six countries supported financially by the Soka Foundation of Japan and the Pacific Rim Center of the University of California, is impossible to carry out without the collaboration of so distinguished and talented a group of researchers as those who accompany me on this intellectual adventure. Working in the field of comparative education, they include Julie Thompson, Aurora Loyo, Marcela Mollis, Seehwa Cho, Jerry Kachur, Daniel Schugurensky and Akio Nagao. Together, we are currently finishing a book on education, politics and state in the Pacific Basin; the book has already cost us four years of work.

**A.A.S:** Now for my second question: Carlos, in your opinion, what have been Latin America's greatest contributions to the discussion of educational issues at an international level?

**C.T:** Answering that question would almost necessarily be unfair, since contributions are of such quality and so varied that one risks failing to mention some of them. On the one hand we have all the aspects that have to do with social theory applied to the various areas of the culture, the symbolic aspects, and of course, education. In Latin America we have had the development, especially in the last 30-35 years, of the philosophy of liberation, and of course of popular education and Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed. At a certain level, I will risk saying that there is a contribution not only to education but to the social sciences in general, that has branded with fire the development of Latin American

and global social sciences, from problems as contributions to decolonization theories, to aspects having to do with questions of discussion about the role of race. Recently the work of Nestor Garcia Canclini on hybrid cultures; Roberto Da Matta in Brazil on matters of everyday life; well, a series of experts on cultural problems gives me an idea that in Latin America there is a theoretical wealth which has profoundly impacted intellectual work all over the world. On the other hand, at a political level, the struggle against dictatorships and for human rights, especially, has carried the discussion on human rights to a level of responsibility and global importance, that perhaps, without the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, or the anti-Pinochet fight—to mention only two well-known and important cases—would not have been projected into the international arena as they have been, continuing a distinguished tradition of struggle for human rights and peace in the region, involving Nobel Prize winners so illustrious as Perez Esquivel, Rigoberta Menchu, Oscar Arias, etc.

On a specifically educational plane, I think a second element is the impetus that Paulo Freire provides, during the second half of this century, as the most important thinker, after Dewey, concerning the philosophy of education, especially the political philosophy of education. I risk saying that Paulo Freire is also a nerve center of two other issues—part of the Latin American academic work logic—that are relatively different from those existing elsewhere in the world. On the one hand, this the epistemological concern. There is no doubt that in Latin America we consider education from an epistemological perspective, in a far richer manner than anywhere else. And then—although not in the strictly technical sense of the term—I think that in Latin America there is a certain spirit of comparative analysis in the sense of the predominance of structural historical analyses, which by their nature, compares historical processes over time at a synchronic-diachronic level. This, of course, generates an extraordinarily rich training in our intellectuals' reality-thinking capacity; because of this, in Latin America we have an expression that is difficult to find in other intellectual spaces, which is the notion of thinkers. Paulo Freire was a thinker. If you want to use a more contemporary terminology, we are talking about public intellectuals. Certainly there are many public intellectuals who make such analyses...In the United States Noam Chomsky immediately came to mind...but my impression is that this notion of public intellectuals and education (comparative aspects), which has predominated both in Latin America (and practically every county has one or two public intellectuals of enormous magnitude), has given to the academic/political discussion a tone and a level of intellectual hierarchy which is not as easily discovered in environments where there predominates a more positivist, empirical thought mechanism, and eventually in those environments where there is a certain apoliticalness expressed in the presence of a logic of instrumental reason in no way modified by the presence of a political logic.

To be brief, there would be so many elements...It seems clear to me that Latin America—and this is the part that perhaps satisfies me least—has been one of the great laboratories for the establishment of privatization policies, and I am not talking specifically about vouchers, but about privatization in the sense of what are

called user fees and other aspects linked with the notion of decentralization, as part of a hegemonic agenda. So there has been a laboratory based on the mechanisms and structural adjustment models whose impact would have to make a more outstanding evaluation, over a more extended length of time. But Latin America, perhaps much more than Africa, and certainly more than Asia and the Middle East, has been a territory where models of this type have been implemented in a manner quite radical, and with extremely brutal structural adjustments, even as tools.

And finally, why not call attention to something fundamental, which is the idea of *normality*—an element that has grown in Latin America as an extraordinary ideology driving the training of the teacher and giving it a certain mission, even a kind of missionary zeal. With all the weaknesses this type of model has, still it has been a central element in establishing the mechanisms for training and educating teachers. It has been central not only to the constitution of the academic work force's training, but also for the idea of legitimate knowledge and for the adoption of curriculum models. And I will risk saying that in the twentieth century, the notion of *normality* would be closely linked to the notion of construction of education in Latin America. I think there could be made another type of argument much more advanced, but one of the elements, without a doubt, that synthesizes all these discussions, also has to do with the figure of the State, the liberal and democratic State which has driven the formation of citizenship through education.

**A.A.S:** Carlos, from what you have said in your previous answers and what we know of your work, you are a connoisseur, critic and promoter of the work of Paulo Freire, and we know you even had a close relationship with him. What was it that got you interested in the topic of liberation education?

**C.T:** Well, anybody who knew Paulo Freire automatically discovered that he was an extraordinary man: humane, of enormous dignity, of profound charismatic force, prophetic at times, and an individual who truly exemplifies the best of certain aspects of Latin American oral culture, in the sense of trying to understand reality based on stimuli given to it through its capacity for observation—and Paulo Freire's capacity for observation was absolutely brilliant—but also his ability to produce, his constant reference to the epistemology of curiosity. All these elements would attract Paulo Freire to anyone who met him; as well as his personality, his ethics, his impressive honesty and honor, and what I would dare to call his enormous effort to achieve greater and greater levels of technical competency and intellectual precision in what he did and what he expected those who were with him to do.

Now, I got to know Paulo Freire the same way others of my generation of intellectuals did: from reading his books, *Education as a Practice of Freedom*, and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, distributed by his first publisher, Tierra Nueva, around 1973. I wrote my first book on Paulo Freire in 1976 at the request of Julio Barreiro, who was Paulo Freire's editor at the time, and was a remarkably lucid man, a Uruguayan professor extraordinarily well trained in philosophy. He had lived in

Argentina, because of the difficult circumstances that the Uruguayan democracy had gone through with the coming of the dictatorship.

Having access to Paulo's written materials, I wrote to him in Geneva, and he answered me. Freire is a premodern man in certain technological ways—he always wrote everything by hand. He thanked me profusely for the material I had sent, especially for an article which had been one of the first things I wrote about his work; it was published in 1976 in Portuguese, in the journal *Síntesis*. I got the impression that the fact that it was published in Portuguese had to have made a strong impression on Freire. In the article I analyzed his major philosophical lines. And he responded in a very gentle way—he was always very gentle—that he loved the article because it seemed an excellent interpretation of his work. That was the beginning of a relationship—first letters, and then when I visited him in the early eighties, in 1980, in Brazil. The relationship continued over the years, and we became very good friends. Then there was, I would say, an emotional affinity of enormous respect on my part, of course, for the man who has undoubtedly been a great teacher for generations of Latin American educators. But I also had a curiosity to know Freire's living thought, from conversations with him—and I have had conversations with Paulo for twenty years, both personal and epistolary. The year his first wife, Elza, died, he invites me to dinner one night and says, "I'm going to introduce you to one of my best friends, and I know that he will be a good friend of yours too". That night I met my friend Moacir Gadotti. Later, in 1991, with Moacir, Freire, and a group of Paulo Freire's friends—Walter Garcia, Francisco Gutierrez and Jose Eustaquio Romão—we created the Paulo Freire Institute in Sao Paulo. I have the honor of being one of the founding directors; that is also the current home of the work group of CLACSO (Latin American Council of Social Sciences) on education and society, which I am honored to coordinate. The meeting with Moacir more than fifteen years ago allowed me to come to know a man of exceptional intellectual clarity and humanity, and together with him and in company with Paulo Freire and the Paulo Freire Institute team, much of what we have learned about the intricacies, tensions, labyrinths, dilemmas, contradictions and challenges of Latin American education.

Let me say this: I think for anyone who has had the privilege of knowing Paulo Freire, and who has a vocation as a researcher—as I think I have—it was natural to come as close to him as possible so as to understand his thinking. Although Paulo was not a reserved sort of person in that sense, he was indeed a very private person—and not everyone might know him, despite his ability and sensuality in public. He was a very private person who kept to himself certain aspects of his thoughts which I find important for understanding the more generic aspect of his work. It also seemed important to me, in addition to the philosophical studies we have been making during these years about him and his biography, to try to focus on recent years, on what was the political impact of his work, especially at the level of making policy decisions. And so I worked very hard with him when I was his consultant in the municipality of Sao Paulo when he was Secretary of Education. And that resulted in a book written with two colleagues, who in their turn wrote dissertations: Pilar O'Cediz and Pia Wong. Pilar O'Cediz wrote his

thesis with me at UCLA, and Pia Wong wrote hers at Stanford, with Martin Carnoy as her advisor. Then the three of us put our notes together and wrote a book called *Democracy and education: Paulo Freire, social movements and educational reform in Sao Paulo*, published in English. It is undoubtedly one of the few empirical investigations of Paulo Freire's experience as Sao Paulo's Secretary of Education. This text is not yet translated into Spanish, although it is being translated into Portuguese in Lisbon.

**A.A.S:** Moving on to the more specific area of your academic work, Carlos, how do you handle the theoretical and methodological problems of the research you do?

**C.T:** Every investigation presents a different challenge, but certainly the kind of work I try to do has a strong theoretical imprint. Then I like to think that I analyze problems from theoretical aspects. At the same time, there is undoubtedly a whole vocation of political analysis, which is part of the socialization I have received, certainly in Mexico, also in Argentina and in my wanderings through Latin America. You cannot think of education without thinking about politics. So I would say that I start out from a theoretical framework, which is always a sort of combination of the sociology and the political economy of education, with a strong emphasis on the theory of the State that helps me a little in defining certain orientations for thinking about the problem we have in hand. Then, even though I have enormous respect for the positivist methodologies and especially the more quantitative aspects of certain logics and research techniques, I prefer to use highly qualitative analysis, with a strong historical emphasis, even ethnographic, in order to be aware of the problems that concern us.

It is very difficult to answer a question like this in the abstract, because every investigation has its own peculiarities. For example, I did a multinational study, working with highly-distinguished Latin American researchers; among those in Latin America, including in Mexico, were Carlos Muñoz Izquierdo and Silvia Schmelkes. The study was a comparison of adult education in Tanzania, Canada and Mexico, which provoked a series of discussions. We had the advisory assistance of Paul Latapi and other fine people. Paul had to make many decisions—for example, the language in which the interviews would be conducted, plus all the aspects having to do with the selection of a sample that would be interesting from an analytical point of view, without necessarily having to be representative, since there is great difference there is between these countries anyway. There were several methodological issues that had to do with culture; they had to do with data collection techniques, and that was a big challenge. It is already hard to coordinate a group of highly-talented people, but when they come from different traditions, with different languages, and with different research experiences, it is even harder. And it is an enormous challenge to generate a research model that takes into account all the wealth brought by a group so interesting as that. The problem is very clear: it is very difficult to do comparative research; it is much more difficult if you have no resources, and is extraordinarily difficult if you do it in different languages, different cultures and trying to

understand, as in this case, matters which are closely linked to the popular culture of each country.

Now I am finishing my second project, also massive: a survey of six countries, which is even more complex than the previous one, because here we not only have different languages and different cultures, but also we have tremendously different cultural traditions. Here we have the meeting of East and West; we have the presence of Asia; we have the presence of models, where it is very clear that there are countries which are the two top nations of the world, the U.S. and Japan; including also a country that is among the planet's seven most powerful: Canada. And then, of course, countries like Korea and Mexico that carry enormous weight in the global economy; and Argentina, a country that has a little less weight and certainly not the same economic level. This implies that the historical dynamics, that the kind of political discussion by country, that the type of State, including the educational models we are analyzing, are really different. But as we focus on the practices and the politics that propel the teachers' unions, from that nerve point the image of what in all these countries—and in other countries of the world—has been the establishment of certain neoliberal policies, and gives us a common core, a kind of lowest common denominator, from which to make a comparison I feel—as I said a minute ago—is extraordinarily difficult to establish. It is very difficult to answer this question, since I would risk saying, almost phenomenologically, that every research project has its own demons, its own phantoms and its own possibilities of resolution.

**A.A.S:** Carlos, although you keep in frequent contact with colleagues in Mexico and the rest of Latin America, you are an academic who studies education from the United States. What advantages and disadvantages do you see in this situation?

**C.T:** This is a very interesting question that would perhaps require a whole detailed discussion; of course I will try once more to be brief. There is no doubt that my background, the fact that I speak English with an accent, the type of analysis I do, the theoretical model linked to a critical theory of society that has an obvious German stamp linked to the Frankfurt School—which is not prevalent in the United States—all this makes me a scholar of American academia, but does not clearly reflect its more generalized type. There are advantages and disadvantages based on this element of difference. On the one hand, such a simple advantage seems almost like a joke; but for example, although I am very well socialized in the models of North American academia—since English is my second language—my colleagues are much more tolerant with me than they are with each other; this can be seen in a committee meeting or faculty meeting. I can maybe talk longer than most of them can, because of the rule, implicit and practical, that you must speak clearly, and above all, briefly. When you go to a French restaurant, and the chef comes and speaks English with a French accent, many people feel that food is much more flavorful, that there is a process of legitimacy and authenticity of the product. When I give my course, which deals with education in Latin America, of course the fact that my accent is Latino also allows more room for different types of conversation. It is rather funny, but deep down I think you have to take what may

seem a weakness—you have to take it as an advantage. Clearly, another thing to consider is the international aspect. As I am an academic working on international issues, this is very interesting for a group of academics, not the majority, the most numerous, in a university like UCLA. There is no doubt that many of my international interests, the interests I have on education in Latin America, my studies about the Pacific Basin, do not matter much to those of my colleagues who are concerned with problems of race relations in Los Angeles schools, or that are linked with the problem of trying to improve third-grade math teaching. Therefore, one who is in the background, almost as an optional extra, becomes a sort of prophet in the wilderness. However, since the idea of diversity is much celebrated in American academia, it is important to them that there be people like me, who remind them of the existence of a world outside the confines of UCLA, outside Los Angeles, that there is a whole strong tension between education and politics, that there are certain categorical imperatives such as social justice, such as individual responsibility, such as what in English is called “caring”, the ability to love and give—that these things do not have to be subsumed and disappear under the aegis of technical mechanisms or a positivist logic.

I would say my academic life in America has been very satisfactory, I cannot complain at all. I feel very comfortable at UCLA: I, a teacher who comes from a vocational school, am director of a Center for Latin American Studies, which is quite unusual, given the predominance of teachers who come from departments of social science disciplines, history, political science, sociology, which are actually those with the hegemony in Latin American studies in the United States. A professor at the School of Education is really unusual—even more so since I am not American. I feel very comfortable, I have had a lot of support—lots of support—and certainly we Latin Americans work very hard and commit ourselves strongly to the type of research we do.

I would add one more element, perhaps very personal, but certainly I think you one would have to consider academic careers based on your situation. I consider myself an immigrant. As such I have certain advantages and disadvantages and there is no doubt that the University is “very demanding mistress” —and even more that way for an immigrant. The lack of certain everyday affective ties around the family that is so far away—with the exception of your immediate family, and the perennial situation of loving your family very much but being unable to interact with them on a daily basis—, the fact you do not have a long history of friendship in the city where you live, all that makes you concentrate a lot of work around what I have defined above, following my dear friend Dr. Humberto Muñoz’s very lucid hypothesis, as a “very demanding mistress”.

Then, in part, I have worked very hard. I think that is reflected in my productivity, and, I imagine, in the respect I have received in the United States, as president of the Professional Association in which I participate. But I believe there are some very limiting aspects of this image of being an immigrant. On the one hand, there is a certain feeling of impermanence in what you do and what you are; on the other hand, paradoxically, although you fight in the place you are given to fight in,

there is some misunderstanding of the plot and the core depths of specific political struggle, the politics of parties, so to speak in the United States, for after all, although you want to contribute to discussions within that country, you never really know if you are going back to Argentina or to Mexico, or if you live as a political intellectual in two or three worlds, in different conceptual, political, historical spaces...And finally, the fact that I am an observer of Latin American politics, makes me have my attention reflected more in the Latin American part of the continent than on the American side. This also produces its advantages and disadvantages

**A.A.S:** Finally, Carlos—and I do appreciate your time and your most interesting concepts—what advice would you give to young people, and to those not so young, who are starting out in the analysis of Mexican and Latin American educational problems of Mexico and Latin America?

**C.T:** I would risk saying this. First, do not enter this profession if you expect that life is going to be easy, because the analysis of educational problems and the socio-political problems of education, creates a whole series of very intimate personal contradictions that one must recognize and accept and be able to overcome. It is not a profession that allows you to imagine automatically the glamour of other professions; nor does it have the social visibility of other occupations. So I would say that to be an educational researcher you must have a vocation of service, and this would seem to me the minimum underlying precept of educational research.

Second, I would say that you must recognize that there is an intimate connection between education and politics; you cannot enter this profession trying to have a strictly objective vision of reality, as if reality were beyond yourself, and you could study, manipulate and understand it, or even imagine that you can be neutral toward the phenomena you study and toward the type of demands that educational reality is going to present you with. Therefore, you go into research—or rather you are already in it—as an active participant in the process, to try to transform it and change it in explicit value directions, which you have already accepted and assumed, unless you are unable to respond to the demands with which you will be confronted.

Third, I would say this is a discipline of disciplines. Basically, education synthesizes much of the entire development of the social sciences, and requires the development of social sciences in each of the disciplines. This discipline of disciplines or multidiscipline, requires firmness, immense firmness, and great seriousness. In Latin America, I fear that we have abused, although perhaps less than anywhere else in the world, the educational essay. I think a model I would like to promote would be that of training people to master the essay as a type, whether political, literary or simply educational with the strictest empirical research. He or she who can wander over these two paths will make a great contribution to pedagogy and education in general and, of course, to the great Latin American researchers. I will cite just one incomparable example, Dr. Paul Latapi, who has

had extensive training in the area of literature, and is an extraordinary writer and rigorous researcher on educational problems, doing something that could be termed science journalism. We must learn from the logic of action of those who have been pioneers in their specific areas of struggle, because the roads in the beginning are usually those that remain open so that we may all contribute to the search for better opportunities for coexistence and justice in democracies which still have to continue maturing their utopian sense.

Translator: Lessie Evona York-Weatherman

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