

# ✿ A TOUCHY SUBJECT ✿

*workbook by plot twist*

## Introduction

This workbook consolidates some of the questions, tools, and resources which we have found useful to think through as facilitators and educators during the pandemic. (How) can we use screen-based technologies to remedy the effects of isolation? What possibilities does the realm of cyberspace offer for alternative modes of learning, sociality, and togetherness? Of course, there aren't any straightforward, universal, or "correct" answers to these questions, but we have found that implementing small adjustments can make a meaningful difference. We hope this workbook helps you address and think through some of the challenges you face on your own terms.

The workbook is divided into two core parts. After a brief definitional outline of the work of Paulo Freire, it begins with a breakdown of the three themes we discussed during the workshop (Language & Meaning, Alienation, and Difference). Within these are a handful of questions for you to reflect on alone, with your colleagues, or with your students. Not all of them will be relevant to you, neither will they cover the full breadth of your individual/collective experience, but we hope you can use them as a starting point. It ends with a handful of links to useful tools and resources, and some tips for handling screen fatigue.

## Problem-posing

For the November workshop and this workbook we drew from the work of Brazilian educator, philosopher, and pioneer of critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire, who coined and developed the 'problem-posing approach' to education. The intended outcome of this approach is that it facilitates and prompts listening, dialogue, and action, over passivity.

### *Banking method*

This is a mechanical approach to education wherein the teacher holds knowledge and 'deposits' it in students, who are viewed as empty of knowledge. This creates a clear hierarchy between the teacher (who holds total power and authority) and the student. It leaves little, if any, room for change and creativity outside of existing structures and normality.






### *Problem-posing*

In contrast to the 'banking model', this method understands knowledge and learning to take place through dialogue and exchange. The responsibility of the teacher becomes less about imposing existing knowledge, and more about developing critical engagement and agency among students. Existing knowledge is not ignored but reconstructed through three phases: listening (or investigating the issues/generative themes of the community/classroom); dialogue (discussion/critical thinking); and action (strategising the changes we envision).

[More info about this approach here.](#)

# LANGUAGE & MEANING

Language and its meaning has a strong capacity to ‘touch’ people, but it can also be used to oppress, bully or silence others. We want to consider how it is being used and misused. Here we are writing in English, which, to many, is the language of the *oppressor*, or a second (or third, fourth) language, which can tip the balance to favour those more confident in speaking the English. We often have personal and emotional relationships with language which can cause misunderstanding, tension, or confusion. Then there are the differences in how we express ourselves; how we choose or have learned to communicate. This can be particularly perpetuated in digital contexts, often absent of body language and context, often glitchy or of poor quality. It means we need a new way to read each other’s words and voices, while simultaneously finding more effective ways to express our own.








-  How can you use digital tools, words, and language to create common/shared codes of understanding together?
-  What words and expressions does the classroom feel comfortable or uncomfortable using? Can you make a list together?
-  How comfortable is your classroom with silence? What happens when you name it?
-  How is failure understood and related to within your class? If it is understood as negative and shameful, then in what ways can you embrace it and to see it as creative and full of potential?
-  Are there ways to listen and respond to feelings that are present in the classroom but not being expressed? How can you foster willingness to be vulnerable and a sense of trust amongst students?

for notes

# ALIENATION

This is the condition of being detached, separated or isolated. It can be experienced as physical, social, and psychological. It's the experience of being away from the familiar classroom, thrown into new and unfamiliar technology, distant from our social support networks, unable to continue long-standing habits and routines, and a seemingly endless series of other precarious attachments and detachments.






To recognise this as a shared condition is important as it makes us realise that our sense of connection and community has to be recreated and reinforced. This is particularly interesting in the context of critical pedagogy, which already understands a lot of educational and neoliberal practices to be alienating and dehumanising; they lack humanity and social participation. In this moment of shift and alienation we need teaching formats to focus on community, togetherness, and intimacy. Returning to Friere -- who says, to be human in any meaningful sense is to be a subject, a conscious social actor who has the ability, the desire, and the opportunity to participate in social and political life. However, a subject is not just a citizen who performs their perfunctory tasks in a formal democracy. Rather, a full subject is an intellectual who continuously "reads the world" as they simultaneously read the word. The preconditions for individual engagement, democracy, and social freedom are therefore "educational."

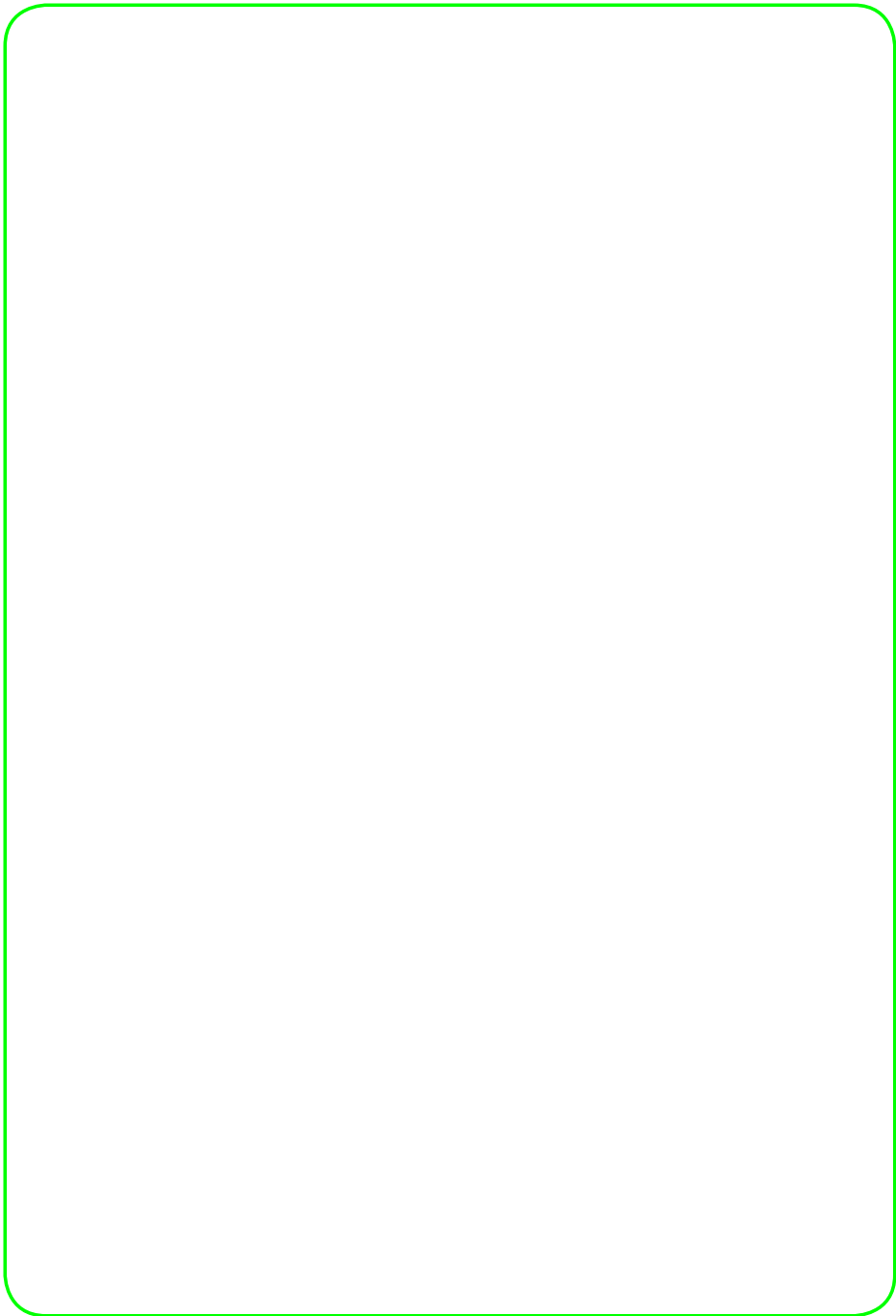
-  In what ways can you rethink how you use interfaces?
-  Why should meetings be 'face-to-face'? How else can you check in with each other?
-  How can you break from the routine of a zoom call, an email, or a lecture?
-  How can you encourage students to self-organise/self-motivate outside of the classroom (study groups, social events, support circles, etc)?
-  Think back to how your classes functioned before the pandemic: chances are these didn't operate perfectly either. What elements do you want to bring forward and what do you want to leave behind?
-  Are there ways of using our bodies in the learning process? E.g, movement exercises at the beginning of the week or implementing walks while listening to a reading or talk?
-  Encourage critical feedback (from students and teachers both) as a means of folding our current context into the classroom and help navigate a way that works for your class.

more space on page 5

# DIFFERENCE

For this part we want to think about ways to accommodate and facilitate unity across differences (in values, priorities, identities, personalities, abilities, etc.). This is really about identifying and working with the many power and group dynamics found within and outside of your class. By dynamics, we are referring to a system of behaviours and psychological processes that lay the groundwork for decision making, creativity, and the organisation of tasks and responsibilities; the structure of your classroom. Together with your class you can interrogate how the space of the (digital) classroom is being taken up by individuals and where the power of decisions -- past and present -- is being held.

-  As an educator and facilitator, what are the core identifiers that give your role authority? What would happen if you reassessed the relevance of these identifiers, and let go of (some of) them?
-  How have you organised your course? What are its aims, topics, deadlines, workload, grading systems: can you reflect on any of these as a class? Try to identify points of tension or spaces to expand and explore. Can grading be in dialogue with students, if not eliminated entirely?
-  How does the architecture of the video conferencing softwares you use privilege certain users? What can you do to challenge this?
-  Are you able to rethink your syllabus to include the direct/adjacent needs of your students, or find ways to fold in or around our current context?
-  Can you establish (new) shared expectations within the classroom and among students?



# TOOLS

## *Alternative video conferencing & editing*

### [BigBlueButton](#)

An open source, web conferencing system for online learning. It has a range of tools and customisable/personalised rooms built to suit your needs, i.e live whiteboards, collaborative editing, audio recordings, and options to give users shared/equal powers. It is run on a decentralised server.

### [Jitsi](#)

Free, privacy friendly, and open-source video conferencing software. The connection can at times be weak, but it is always improving.

### [Whereby](#)

Paid, privacy friendly service which runs in your internet browser, no apps/installations required.

### [Etherpad](#)

Open source collaborative writing/editing software. Good alternative to google docs.

See more programmes/software on Dan Taeyoung's [Experimental Chat Tools are.na page](#)

## *Messaging and community*

### [Discord](#)

An instant messaging and digital distribution platform designed for creating communities. Users communicate with voice calls, video calls, text messaging, media and files in private chats or as part of communities called "servers."

### [Telegram](#)

Freeware, cross-platform, cloud-based instant messaging software and application service. (good alternative to Whatsapp)

### [Signal](#)

Cross-platform centralised encrypted messaging service. (good alternative to Whatsapp)

### [Scuttlebutt](#)

A peer-to-peer, decentralised social network.

### [Are.na](#)

A social network, community, and research platform for building/storing your own collections across mediums/formats (can type/upload/link). It can be a wormhole but it's a much nicer (and perhaps more generative) wormhole than Twitter and Instagram!

## TEXTS & RESOURCES

### [The Tyranny of Structurelessness](#) - Jo Freeman

Essay highlighting the importance of (having some degree of) democratic structuring within communities - primarily about community organising but it is applicable to many different groups. Does away with the pretense that 'non-hierarchical' structures are something worth striving for. Ends with a list of principles and practices to follow.

### [Enabling Humanity on Zoom](#) - Rosi Greenberg

### [Conversation is a Cybernetic Technology](#) - Dan Taeyoung

"Some collective recipes for speaking together and learning from each other"

### [Digital Pedagogy in the Humanities](#)

A curated, downloadable collection of pedagogical artifacts.

### [Pedagogy of Care, Covid-19 Edition](#)

See more on:











<https://www.are.na/georgie-sinclair/pedagogy-alternative-learning>

<https://www.are.na/georgie-sinclair/being-online>

## GROUP EXERCISES

Group exercises can be useful for team-building and grounding. The more exercises are practiced, the more automatic and habitual they become. Breathing and grounding exercises are good when dealing with high levels of stress, anxiety or dissociation. Other exercises such as word or strategy games can help build team relationships and understanding. Exercises are also a great way of breaking the ice and encouraging engagement. This doesn't have to be complicated, it can be as simple as having introductions where each person shares how they are feeling, a recent activity, or an object/image.

# TIPS FOR SCREEN FATIGUE

-  Adjust light settings on your computer/laptop (or use flux.app, Dark Mode, and Night Light features).
-  Try to schedule your screen time at the most optimal time for you. If you are more fatigued at the end of the day, schedule time in the morning or early afternoon to study and complete assignments.
-  Take breaks to give your eyes and mind a chance to rest, recover, and process the information you have been going over. Be sure to step away and set a time to start again.
-  Dictation software allows you to speak your sentences aloud while the computer types them. Similarly, Read-Aloud software reads the screen aloud to you. Both allow you to work while reducing eye-strain.
-  Experiment with audio only calls, or using video calls with the video turned off and asking everyone to look away from their screens. Find non-screen-based activities or distractions; take walks, go into nature, use your hands for crafts, cook, clean and nap!
-  Make sure your set-up is comfortable; your seat is at the right height, your wrists are supported, your screen is eye level etc - if this isn't possible try and move around, find a space to stand and work, and remember to stretch.
-  If you do notice any eye strains or change in vision, make an appointment to see an optician.
-  Try and decrease your screen time before sleep. Turning your phone off, leaving it outside the room, or on a surface not reachable from your bed.
-  Exercise. Walking around the block or park, a home yoga video, dancing around your room to some music - this one doesn't need to be strenuous or difficult.
-  Try and check your air quality or open your window to refresh the room every so often.