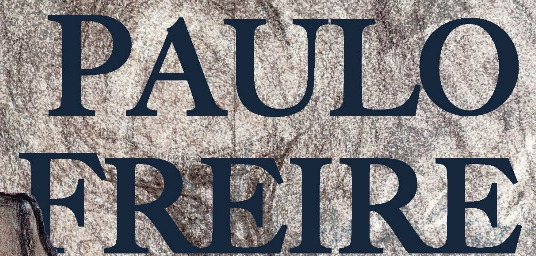
CONCEPT

The Journal of Contemporary Community Education Practice Theory

Volume 9, No, 3, Winter 2018



PAULO FREIRE

Pedagogy of the Oppressed

50th Anniversary Special Issue

Edited by Mel Aitken and Mae Shaw

CONCEPT
THE JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITY EDUCATION PRACTICE THEORY

Vol. 9 No. 3, Winter, 2018

Special Anniversary Issue: Pedagogy of the Oppressed

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Editorial

When we began the process of planning and editing this volume, neither of us had read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* for a very long time. On reacquainting ourselves with its content, we have been both comforted by how familiar it is, and discomfited by how mainstream much of it has become. Reading it 50 years on, we are also struck by the profound relevance it retains for the contemporary world, and how much it still has to teach practitioners and activists alike. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was first published in 1968 (in English, in 1972), and was set in the context of agrarian Brazil. It is dedicated 'to the oppressed and to those who suffer with them and fight at their side'. Freire goes on 'This tentative work is for radicals …. It cannot be carried out by sectarians'. We are left to wonder, therefore, how he would feel about the ways in which some of his key ideas have been deftly appropriated by organisations such as the World Bank, and management leadership training, to legitimise unequal power relations; how his methodology is considered to be of great value across the political spectrum. Perhaps, as many of the articles here suggest, it is time to reclaim 'radicalism' as a creative pedagogical value.

In the educational sphere, the potential for reducing Freire's core message to one of personal development or educational process, applicable in any context for any purpose, suggests the very 'domestication' he warned against. As Jim Crowther and Ian Martin in this volume ask 'can "liberation" be "facilitated"?'. They suggest that the paradigm shift in policy over the last decade from 'education' to 'learning' raises important questions about purpose and practice: 'politics is … diminished to the making of market choices, facilitated by lifelong learning'. They stress instead what they call 'the politics of methodology': for Freire, 'how we do educational work cannot be separated from why we do it and what for'. This is a simple point which is lost in the attempt to 'sever process from purpose' and to 'reduce methodology to mere technique'.

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The tendency towards 'fragmenting of Freire' is also taken up by Margaret Ledwith in her piece on 'Paulo Freire in neoliberal times'. For her, Freirean critical pedagogy must be understood as a 'complete process' starting with 'simply questioning the taken-for-grantedness of everyday life [which] removes blinkers from the eyes to reveal the contradictions we live by … [generating] critical consciousness'. She seeks to reassert the relevance of Freire for 'reading' and 'acting on' the contemporary world, identifying what she sees as key integrated strands for practising 'radical community development'.

Louise Sheridan recognises, from her own experience, the dangers of 'reducing Freire's ideas to a simple method', a realisation which 'helped to shape the lecturer I have become'. Freirean ideas have encouraged her to think about the learning experiences she creates: to 'pay attention to physical environment, take notice of student responses and pursue mutual learning'. Freire's conception of 'armed love … as an emancipatory and revolutionary principle' has become, in her view, 'vital for students learning about community development'.

Pedagogy of the Oppressed demands close reading, however difficult or obscure the ideas might seem. This is the message of the CAMINA group whose 'practising freedom' reading groups 'grapple collectively with some of the more complex ideas like the oppressor-contradiction, alienation, the colonised mentality of oppression and conscientisation'. In their piece 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed and the power of big words', they argue against the 'treachery of low expectations' and show how struggling with the language can itself create a dialogical space within which people can learn to 'read the world' anew. Antonia Darder's recent book (2018) *The Student Guide to Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, reviewed here by Bill Johnston, provides a perfect companion for the struggle.

Freire's eclectic combination of Marxism, Christianity and humanism extends existing theoretical frameworks and lends itself to a rich variety of complementary interpretations. Keith Popple argues, for example, that Gramsci offers a framework for understanding the work of Freire. In his view, a synthesis of the Gramscian notion of 'hegemonic struggle' and the Freireian concept of 'conscientisation' can provide a solid

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basis for engaging critically with the politics of community work in the contemporary world. In his piece on the 'Pedagogy of courage' Joel Lazarus emphasises the relational and emotional dimensions of Freire's work. Drawing upon his own intellectual journey and personal experience, he argues that 'critical pedagogy must ground itself in a spiritual materialism that enables the collective wounds of our past to reveal the non-violent ways of knowing and being that naturally generate the practical solutions to the material problems we face'. To his mind, Freire's 'dualist interpretation of conscientisation' is extended by a more dialectical understanding of 'humanisation' as a process of 'reunification, of healing'.

Whilst key ideas of Freire have been extended or developed, some have also been consistently critiqued. The seemingly unselfconscious assertion of the masculine actor throughout *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* reads strangely to a twenty-first century audience more alive to the realities of gendered oppression. This is regarded by some scholars as a critical blind spot in Freire's work. Lyn Tett's response to the question 'What *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* means to me' reflects on the absence of women, as she sees it, in the text. Drawing on bell hooks' critique of Freire, she finds his analysis of oppression 'less convincing' in its concentration on class relations alone, arguing for a more intersectional approach. At the same time, the notion of a 'problematising' approach to 'enable groups to reflect critically on their reality in a way that might enable them to transform their understanding of the world and their relation to it' has been of seminal importance to her practice. Addressing the same question, Christina McMellon raises similar concerns about the absence of gender, and credits bell hooks with helping to make Freire knowable to a wider audience. Both, in her view, 'challenge their readers to think critically about their world and to contribute to a conversation about how to transform that world'.

The perception that 'this conversation is ever-evolving' would be shared by Colin and Gerri Kirkwood, amongst the earliest proponents of Freirean praxis in Scotland. They assess the impact of Paulo Freire's work in Britain, from the context of post-World War 2 social democracy, to industrial struggles, Thatcherite 'reforms' and onwards, through the prism of their own work in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. For them, Freire's work embodies, then and now, 'fundamental values of friendship, relationship, community

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and personal agency, and the just distribution of resources, roles and responsibilities' – values sometimes at odds with dominant frames of reference. Ending on a positive note, they argue that 'The Freirean road, not yet taken in Britain, remains open and full of hope'.

Stan Reeves, Gerri Kirkwood's erstwhile colleague in the renowned Adult Learning Project (ALP) in Gorgie Dalry Edinburgh, introduces us to the pleasures of dancing in 'Freire at the ceilidh! Community dance as a training for dialogue'. Arguing that 'dancing together is part of being fully human', the article shows how communal engagement with culture can also 'consolidate and sustain' voluntary organisations and political movements such as 'the demand for, and creation of, a Scottish Parliament' in the 1990s. Quoting Freire, he reminds us in a very tangible way that 'cultural action, as historical action, is an instrument for superseding the dominant alienated and alienating culture.'

From the local to the global, Freire has had, and continues to have, a profound resonance few other educators can claim. In this volume, Budd Hall from British Columbia, a contemporary of Paulo Freire, recounts his experience of collaborating with him in many places over many years. In particular, he describes discovering *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* whilst working in adult education in Tanzania: 'the thoughts, words, dreams that poured out of those pages were simply electrifying'. Emilio Lucio-Villegas describes the activities which emerged from instituting The Paulo Freire Chair at the University of Seville, '[using] symbolic spaces inside the university … to give voice to the people … [enabling] people to reflect on and critique their own traditional knowledge'. Viviana Cruz McDougall, from the liaison organisation of the Popular Education Council of Latin America and the Caribbean (in Puerto Rico), founded by Paulo Freire, reflects on the challenges and choices for popular education in that region. Finally, Astrid von Kotze from Cape Town describes how *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, a banned book under the Apartheid government, nevertheless 'went [secretively] on a long journey through metal workers factories, along with Brecht poems, Gorky, Biko, Fanon'. Nearly 50 years later, she argues, 'the ideas in the book are still 'dangerous'', and more necessary than ever: In the quest to 're-explore who we are and assert both

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the right and urgent responsibility to become more fully human … we turn back to Freire for guidance…. *A luta continua*'.

Finally, we would like to thank the authors who have contributed their work to this special issue, and to Robin Sukatorn for his artistry in creating the cover. We regard the Special Issue as a fitting tribute from a range of distinctive voices to perhaps one of the most distinctive, compelling and (still) contemporary voices in popular education. We hope you will agree!

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CONCEPT
THE JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITY EDUCATION PRACTICE THEORY

Vol. 9 No. 3, Winter, 2018

Why Freire still matters

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Introduction

Paulo Freire remains an iconic, if increasingly enigmatic, figure to those who still identify with a particular tradition of radical adult education. Moreover - and significantly, no doubt, in the era of neoliberal globalisation - this tradition is stronger and more resistant in the poor south than the rich north (eg see Kane 2001). Why does Freire's eclectic and idiosyncratic brand of Marxism, Christianity and humanism seem to retain its peculiar appeal among those who struggle to survive on the underside of globalisation? Why is it important to revive and reclaim his ideas about educational purpose at a time when they are often reduced to mere process?

The fundamental claim in all of Freire's work is that education is political. In a sense, there is nothing new or remarkable about this. It is something we all know - when we choose to think about it. For Freire, however, the political nature of education is always explicit and purposefully acknowledged. The choice is stark: education is either for 'liberation' or 'domestication' (Freire 1972). Indeed, he goes on to assert that there can be no neutral position in these matters: to sit on the fence is to take the side of the *status quo*.

One question which arises in the context of lifelong learning is whether *learning* can be conceived of as *political* in the same way as *education*. What, in particular, is not clear in the learning paradigm is what happens to the agency of the educator: the choices that are made, the causes espoused and the sides taken. Can 'liberation' be 'facilitated'? In similar vein, the notion of an 'andragogy of the oppressed' seems, somehow, absurd. Perhaps the point is that there can be no political intention where there is no pedagogical intervention.

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Our argument is that in the era of lifelong learning those who see their work in terms of what Raymond Williams called 'politics by other means' need urgently to reconnect with Freire's notion of a 'pedagogy of the oppressed'. We pose five key questions about the context in which we work and comment on these in a way that is informed by the kind of ideas and arguments we associate with Freire's distinctive commitment to a 'pedagogy of the oppressed'.

Question 1: How do we understand the politics of educational work in the new welfare order?

The idea of social welfare as a public good is increasingly being replaced by that of individual choice, and lifelong learning has a crucial role to play in preparing citizens for participation in the new welfare order. In this sense, the deconstruction of the welfare state, as a political and ideological objective, is predicated upon the reconstruction of citizenship. Increasingly, citizens must learn to take responsibility for the self-management of their own education, health and welfare. Implicit in this is a retreat from the public sphere as the arena in which citizens argue about the nature and purpose of politics, and the public business of citizenship is reduced to individual choice and consumption. In this way citizenship is, in effect, privatised.

The shift in policy from providing education to facilitating learning is an integral part of more fundamental changes taking place in the nature and form of the state. The transition from the nation state to the market state involves the introduction of privatisation and 'carrot and stick' policies to encourage people to look after themselves (see Bobbitt 2002). In this process, the idea of a single polity which coheres around a set of shared values is no longer a prime objective of state policy. Ideologically, what it seeks to construct instead is the sense of a 'level playing field' where the appearance of meritocracy holds sway. In reality, of course, what is created is not a level playing field at all but rather what Ainley (2004) characterises as 'opportunities to be unequal'. The key elision is the reduction of democracy as a political process to the market as an economic process. Politics is thus diminished to the making of market choices, facilitated by lifelong learning.

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What is actually required to give most people real choices is precisely the kind of critical and reflexive education Freire insisted on as the right of all citizens, and a pedagogy which liberates them to understand the nature of their oppression and act upon their existential reality in order to transform it.

Question 2: Does the notion of 'the oppressed' still make sense?

> …the oppressed are not marginals … living 'outside' society. They have always been inside - inside the structure which made them 'beings for others'. The solution is not to 'integrate' them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become 'beings for themselves'. (Freire 1972)

This quotation reminds us that oppression is not something incidental or accidental in society but is integral to its structure. Inequality is a relational phenomenon that produces benefits for dominant groups through the systematic exploitation of others. The poor are always with us only because the rich are too. As RH Tawney tellingly put it, 'What rich people call the problem of poverty, poor people, with equal justice, call the problem of riches'. Similarly, gender inequality exists because it sustains male privileges. And so on.

Of course, rather than recognise this relationship, a common response in social policy is to 'blame the victim' – the poor, unemployed, single parents, refugees, asylum seekers, gypsies or whatever group happens to provide a convenient scapegoat. In this context, the solution to the predicament of marginalised and exploited groups – 'beings for others' – is not to ensure their further adaptation but rather to seek to transform the structures which prevent them from becoming 'beings for themselves'.

In capitalist societies one of the major causes of oppression – although clearly not the only one – is social class division and exploitation. However, contemporary educational discourse is curiously silent about class, i.e. as a relation of power as distinct from a category of identity or status. Freire reminds us that class analysis is about people's relative positions within structures of power and privilege. Class in this sense cannot be reduced to sanitised notions like 'disadvantaged groups', 'vulnerable

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learners' or 'social exclusion'. Indeed, Freire warns us to be wary of the kind of 'false generosity' that takes into account people's needs without understanding how these needs are caused, constructed and distributed.

The new capitalism is also having detrimental social and psychological consequences. The concentration on short-term market priorities is changing the meaning of work and the quality of relations between people. Bonds of trust and mutual support ('social capital', if you will) require nurturing through long-term commitments and relationships that are increasingly difficult to sustain in the era of flexibility, precarity and risk. The 'political economy of uncertainty', as Bourdieu characterises it, is a new mode of domination 'based on the creation of a generalised and permanent state of insecurity aimed at forcing workers into submission, into the acceptance of exploitation' (Bourdieu 1998).

Despite growing class inequalities and relations of oppression, it seems that these are frequently ignored in educational discourse. For Freire, of course, the opposite is the case: what we now choose to disregard actually constitutes the bedrock of his educational work. The title of his most famous book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is a sharp reminder to us about the politics of our work. Education for liberation means making particular kinds of choices, and choosing to take the side of subordinated and marginalised groups. Political solidarity replaces the false detachment of professional neutrality. Moreover, this political stance must translate into a combination of educational dialogue and social action, or *praxis*, with the oppressed in order to understand and act upon the causes of their oppression.

Question 3: Whose knowledge counts?

For Freire, if knowledge is to be liberating, it needs to be systematised through study and grounded in ways that make sense of people's experience and enable them to play a full and active part in its construction. The idea that knowledge is simply a transfer or deposit is dismissed as merely 'banking education', ie the reduction of teaching to a one-way and top-down, as distinct from reciprocal and dialogical, process. Knowledge

has to be constructed and produced in dialogue; it cannot simply be bestowed or consumed.

The position advocated by Freire is in direct contradiction to the commodity status of knowledge that is predominant today. In commodity production social relations between people are transformed into relations between things – what Marx termed 'commodity fetishism'. The educational equivalent of this process is that teachers produce knowledge that learners consume, thereby reinforcing the distinction and difference between the two. Moreover, people buy knowledge to enhance their marketability and status and therefore add new attributes to themselves as commodities – primarily in terms of their relative advantage in the labour market, but also in terms of adding to their status in relation to others.

In contrast to this, Freirean epistemology echoes the distinction between 'useful knowledge' and 'really useful knowledge' made in the radical tradition of British adult education. The latter referred to critical knowledges which were defined by those who needed them in order to pursue their own collective interests and aspirations. What was central to the distinction was the question of who defined what was 'useful' for whom.

Question 4: Why does the politics of methodology matter?

For Freire, methodology (how we do educational work) cannot be separated from philosophy and ideology (why we do it and what for). This is a fundamental claim in all Freire's work which has, nevertheless, been widely disregarded or misunderstood. Indeed, it helps to explain why bastardised versions of Freirean methodology can, ironically, be found right across the political spectrum. This sanitisation and domestication of Freire's pedagogy derives precisely from the attempt to sever process from purpose, and thus to reduce methodology to mere technique.

In the era of lifelong learning there is enormous interest in helping, encouraging and enabling people to learn. On the other hand, what we seem to have lost sight of is our own sense of agency and purpose as educators. Freire argues consistently that educators must be in solidarity with learners, and that such solidarity is essentially a

form of political identification and affiliation. Participatory techniques are no substitute for ideological solidarity.

The key point is that dialogue cannot be 'lifted' out as something separate and separable from the rest of Freire's politics of education:

> If there is any aspect of the Freirean approach that can be equated with methodology it must be dialogue. However …. dialogue is a transformed type of communication and is therefore not a technique that can be used in isolation from an acceptance of and commitment to …. the totality of Freire's philosophy. (Allman 1987)

Question 5: Why is it important to reassert human agency?

The fundamental concern in all of Freire's work is to reassert the possibility of human agency. The educator does this by challenging the passivity and fatalism of the 'oppressed', intervening purposefully in their lives and enabling them to lever themselves out of 'immersion' in the 'culture of silence'. Our contention is that lifelong learning in its current guise carries within it the danger of a new and beguiling variant of the 'culture of silence'. This is, unsurprisingly, entirely consistent with the individualising and instrumentalising thrust of policy.

Katherine Ecclestone describes the ways in which learning can be reduced to therapy, and education 'demoralised' into a set of mere coping strategies:

> …. a therapeutic ethos obviously emerges through an extension of psychoanalysis or counselling into new areas of private and public life. However, its more significant impact is to provide a culture with a set of symbols and codes that determine the boundaries of moral life. (Ecclestone 2004)

One effect of this is to assert structure over agency because it suggests that agency can only be expressed by adapting to and managing the circumstances in which we find

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ourselves - as distinct from challenging and changing them. Both the problem and the solution are individualised and personalised. Whilst this kind of 'false generosity' may signal some empathy and concern, it does nothing to address context or cause.

Conclusion: reclaiming Freire

One of Freire's last books, published in 1996, one year before his death, was called *Pedgogy of Hope.* This book started off as a new preface to the original *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. We still need both arguments - and we cannot have one without the other.

(This is an edited version of article entitled 'Do we still need a "pedagogy of the oppressed" in the era of lifelong learning?', published in *Adults Learning* 17(2) 2005, pp7-9.)

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CONCEPT
THE JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITY EDUCATION PRACTICE THEORY

Vol. 9 No. 3, Winter, 2018

Reclaiming the radical agenda: Paulo Freire in neoliberal times

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> This man of the people was as much at home in the favelas as he was in the mango groves, a maestro who would cobble together the word and the world from the debris of everyday life, from its fury of dislocation, from the hoary senselessness of its cruelty, from its beautiful and frozen emptiness and wrathfulness of its violence. And in the midst of all this he was able to fashion revolutionary hope from the tatters of humanity's fallen grace. This was Paulo Freire (McLaren, 2015:33).

Encountering Paulo Freire changed my reading of the word and the world. Just as bell hooks found that he was able to speak to her across culture and identity, handing her the tools to make sense of her lived experience as a Black, North American woman (hooks, 1993), so he spoke to me, a white, English woman in Scotland in 1982, seeking a critical analysis of everyday life. I remember thinking how simple it was to see power in action once my eyes had been prised open, wondering why it takes someone like Freire to act as a catalyst in the process. When *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was first published in English and became widely available from 1972 onwards, its influence was huge. It provided practitioners and activists with a theory of liberation based on analyses of power, *conscientisation* and social action. This triggered community development's radical agenda, and still forms the bedrock of its knowledge base and practice.

In this short article, I will argue that Paulo Freire is relevant to community development praxis in the current context as much as ever, and that his critical praxis offers the potential for a radical agenda for community development at this major conjuncture in time, a point at which social, political, economic and ideological contradictions are

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condensed into a historical moment created by the crumbling of neoliberalism and its politics of disposability. Before his death in 2014, Stuart Hall, the UK's leading cultural theorist and probably the most influential Gramscian thinker of our times, a political commentator par excellence, alerted us to this historical moment as an opportunity for change: if we do nothing, we will get more of the same; reformism could bring something similar but different; or if we act together, there is potential for a transformation (Stuart Hall in Davison, 2011). I want to engage with Freire's insistence that we need to work at developing his critical praxis for our current context by introducing some exciting new ideas that I see as complementing our Freirean toolkit. We need to get to the roots of the neoliberal political ideology that has disconnected humanity and the earth in the interests of privileging a global super-rich *and* we need a compelling counternarrative that puts community and connection in its place.

The extraordinary man from Recife!

So what was it about Paulo Freire's critical praxis that inspired community development's radical agenda?

Freire's capacity to connect is astonishing. Here is a man from Latin America speaking as relevantly and coherently across 'race', class and gender to influence critical educators across the world as much as his own culture. Antonia Darder (2015:41), for example, as with bell hooks (1993), places particular emphasis on the way that Freire is able to connect across culture and identity to inspire 'in activists and educators of color a political clarity and commitment'. Yet, he was the first to acknowledge that what he offers is from his own experience; it is not a blueprint for a liberating praxis to be superimposed on every identity, culture, time and context. It is an evolving praxis that needs to embrace new ideas and experiences if it is to remain critical. This level of humility seems to me to be the essence of what is required to dismantle the arrogance of a single truth, a dominant way of seeing the world that excludes other ways of knowing. It was a realisation that he discovered early on through failure: 'I said many beautiful things, but made no impact. This was because I used my frame of reference, not theirs' (Freire, quoted in Mackie, 1980, pp 3-4). Listening was the answer, listening respectfully with the heart, not the ears, to the stories people told him.

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The route to critical consciousness

Freire's long exile in Chile after the military coup in Brazil in 1964 gave him the opportunity to experience his critical pedagogy from a different cultural, ideological and political perspective. The concept of *conscientização* (conscientisation) gave fresh insight into the political nature of popular education as a tool for liberation. It was during the first six years of his long period of exile that his most celebrated work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, was written and brought him acclaim as a seminal thinker of his time (Mayo, 2004). Freire returned to Brazil in 1980, following the amnesty of 1979. He began 'relearning Brazil' by reading Gramsci and also 'listening to the *popular Gramsci* in the *favelas*' (Torres, 1993, p 135). He spent at least two afternoons a week with people in their communities, listening to their experience and analysis and, in this way, developing a *critical praxis* out of lived experience. It was an act of humility, a recognition that we have to suspend our own truth in order to hear other truths, knowledge that has been marginalised and excluded by a dominant ideology.

By sharing the lives of the people, he came to recognise and name concepts that expose political domination in everyday lives. A *culture of silence*, the way in which political, social and economic domination lead to passive acceptance in those who are marginalised, in turn, gave me a deep understanding of the impact of dehumanisation. Rather than being mystified by the absence of people in public spaces in the early communities of my practice, I understood that anger has an energy to fight back but apathy lacks the energy for action. I began to see that the values that frame Freirean praxis – dignity, respect, mutuality, reciprocity – offer a frame for the quality of every interaction in practice, that my openness to engage with dignity and respect began a process of healing the psychological wounds of political violence, a necessary precursor of problem-posing dialogue and the route to critical consciousness (Ledwith, 2018).

Freire's Liberating Education

Education can be liberating or domesticating. Freire's liberating education is based on praxis as a fusion of experience, on a past-present-future continuum, involving reflection, dialogue and social action. In this way, theory informs practice and practice

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informs theory, never separating knowledge from action and action from knowledge. It is a critical lens for reading the word and reading the world. By these means we question lived experience, expose the contradictions we live by and evolve a critical consciousness capable of transforming the unacceptable present for a future based on a common good. Framed by values of human dignity, spaces are created for people to come together to question the conditions of their everyday lives. This may be triggered by a crisis, such as a suicide or street violence or a fire (as we witnessed with Grenfell Tower in London), issues that draw people together in solidarity and caring. Or it may be a slower process that builds over time, linking people together in a social group. The process involves codifications (photographs, poetry, drama, etc) that capture the essence of an issue relevant to local life, one that people readily relate to: Where's this? What's going on? When did it happen? Who is involved? How are they affected? The critical educator uses these prompts to encourage questioning, but never dictates the answers.

Freirean praxis is all about mutual discovery, rather than traditional forms of education that pour ideas into unquestioning minds, what Freire calls *banking education*. In my practice, people who had been bruised by formal education became autonomous learners and confident activists. Simply questioning the taken-for-grantedness of everyday life removes blinkers from the eyes to reveal the contradictions we live by; outrageous contradictions that have become normalized by the dominant ideology. This generates critical consciousness, making theory in action and action from theory that leads to the collective potential for social movements.

In the process of understanding the world, we deepen our consciousness precisely through our actions in and on the world that enable us not only to grasp our positionality in the world but also to transform the totality of social relations that constitute the contradictory character of our existence (McLaren 2015:24).

Fragmenting Freire!

Paula Allman argued long and hard in her lifetime that Freirean critical pedagogy be understood as a complete process: 'it is an indivisible totality based on assumptions and principles which are inter-related and coherent … we cannot take hints from Freire or use bits of Freire; we must embrace the philosophy as an integral whole and attempt to

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apply it accordingly' (Allman and Wallis, 1997:113). Attempting to use Freire partially will achieve partial success! Freire offers a distinct process, and to fragment it leaves it incomplete, falling short of its potential.

It is often Freire's revolutionary critique of capitalism and the linking of education to the class struggle that have been under-emphasised to leave a diluted, incomplete version of his critical praxis (Darder, 2015:39). Darder's argument is that Freire is one of the few theorists who understood 'racism as inextricably tied to the imperatives of social class formation and material exclusion' (2015:40). In other words, understanding the ways in which social class and poverty intersect with racism to systematically destroy communities, societies and nations by domination, exploitation, colonialism and empire is contained within the racialized culture of class to erode belonging, identity and language 'from poor working-class communities of color, while stripping us of our history, cultural knowledge and language' (2015:41). Darder says, 'the struggle was not foremeost about "celebrating diversity" or cultural identity or even the acknowledgment of our cultural legitimacy, but rather a struggle for our humanity and our survival (2015:40). The engagement with Freire, she emphasises, was as much about a personal process of decolonising our hearts, bodies and minds as about the political decolonization of our communities. This applies to gender and other forms of discrimination, and also links with the work of Budd Hall and Rajesh Tandon on the need for knowledge justice, the wisdom of marginalised peoples, to sit alongside social justice and environmental justice as diversity/biodiversity for healing people and planet.

Radical Community Development

There are four key, integrated strands to practising radical community development:

Community Development is a Political Activity

Community development is committed to social change for a more fair, just and sustainable world, and this inevitably makes it a radical and transformative practice. Central to this end, it is about developing an understanding of the way that power reaches from top down into the lives of local people to serve the interests of the privileged. In order to reverse this process, change has to come from the bottom up as a collective force!

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Community Development is an Educational Activity

Community development is about encouraging people to ask thought-provoking questions about their everyday lives and 'to question answers rather than merely to answer questions' (Ira Shor, 1993:26). It involves teaching people to question the everyday contradictions we live by rather than passively taking them for granted. This is the beginning of critical consciousness, a way of seeing local experiences as part of the bigger political picture rather than as disconnected, random acts.

Community Development is a Theoretical Activity

Community development is about thought and action, thinking and doing as a unity, an integrated praxis. If we fail to find the space to think critically, our practice becomes thoughtless, and we do not have the tools to work for change! Community development has an eclectic theory base which builds on its strong foundations in the revolutionary praxis of Paulo Freire (and Antonio Gramsci) to incorporate new ideas that give added insight into what is going on in current times.

Community Development is about collective action for change

Without collective action there is no change. But, action for action's sake will not bring about sustainable change. If you want to change the world, you have to know how it works! So, community development is a process that incorporates all four of these key dimensions:

- beginning by identifying public spaces for creating critical dissent dialogue,
- spaces in which people can question and become more critically conscious,
- where they can explore how structures of power discriminate,
- freeing the imagination to create inspiring counternarratives of human and planetary flourishing,
- to release the confidence to organise for change from individual to group, from group to community, to national networks and global movements for change for a better world.

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Paulo Freire kick-started community development's radical agenda with the publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in English from 1972 onwards. In current times, more people than ever read *Pedaogy of the Oppressed* and Freire Institutes are popping up in many countries, linking critical educators across a disillusioned world in the struggle for social justice against the alienation of capitalism and its antagonisms - racism, sexism, homophobia, zenophobia, ableism and any other ism that deviates from white western patriarchy.

Freire For Current Times: Some New Ideas

We are at a conjuncture in world history. It is a time of alienation; neoliberal ideology has disconnected people from each other and from the natural world in its project to privilege the privileged, resulting in major crises of social justice and environmental justice. If we are true to our principles, this awareness must be at the heart of practice. The actions we take or do not take will shape our history. For these reasons, this needs to be a time of reconnection. By that, I mean that we need to make connections between power and whose knowledge is dominant in order to develop ideas that challenge and change the power systems that continue to marginalize, those based on capitalism, imperialism and patriarchy. These decisions sound immense, but they really do start quite simply in everyday stories.

'Those who tell the stories run the world' (Monbiot, 2017:1)

We live by stories, they help us to make sense of our world and they create our reality. If we do not vigilantly question what is happening, we are open to manipulation, often acting in the interests of privilege against a common good. When we question everything, and think critically, we can begin to plant the seeds of change. This is why Paulo Freire (1972) emphasised that social change begins in the stories of the people. These stories of everyday life contain the living contradictions of discrimination, they are the source of grassroots theory. The stories we tell can then become the basis of counternarratives that challenge the contradictions we live by, those that persuade us to make sense of nonsense, acting against our own best interests.

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In changing the story, we change the course of history

Creating a counter-story, a counternarrative of diversity and biodiversity, of human flourishing and a happy planet, releases the energy to join together collectively for change. And if we make this counternarrative convincing, compelling and confident, repeating it in every conversation in every public space, we create a new story as a possibility for a new reality. A counternarrative has to be clear and concise, but needs to identify what is wrong in order to change it for the better. For instance, the neoliberal story has weakened our connections with community and contributed to a sense of disconnection, isolation and loneliness. This then becomes the basis for making changes that connect people, and by connecting people they not only become happier and healthier, but they become confident that they can work together to change things for the better. The beginning of macro change will come from grassroots communities demanding that change and demonstrating the first steps. In order to do this, we need to keep community development thinking in line with current ideas.

Budd Hall and Rajesh Tandon (2017) have played a central role in developing the concept of knowledge democracy, helping us to go deeper into understanding that it is not just the fair sharing of resources that matters; deepening democracy calls for us to address the issue of whose knowledge counts and whose knowledge is creating the world that we live in. This is a really important understanding in relation to the dominant ideology. In other words, what is the relationship between knowledge and privilege? Ordinary people generate knowledge and if we work together to co-create knowledge for a common good, this simple realisation could change the world for the better. Hall and Tandon (2017) introduce De Sousa Santos's comment, 'Global social injustice is therefore intimately linked to global cognitive injustice. The struggle for global social justice will, therefore, be a struggle for cognitive justice as well' (2007: 45-89).

George Monbiot (2017) gives a very clear analysis of what is going on, and offers some practical ideas for a move towards what he sees as a politics of belonging. It is interesting that he draws on evidence that human beings have an innate capacity for caring for each other, which rejects the neoliberal emphasis on individualism, selfishness and competition: '…we find it hard to imagine our way out of the reaction

and helplessness to which we have succumbed…To escape from this trap, we first need to perceive it. We need to name the power that has exacerbated our isolation and our collective loss of agency. Our failure to tell a new story with which to replace it has allowed this power to persist and grow. By confronting the politics of alienation with a politics of belonging, we rekindle our imagination and discover our power to act' (Monbiot, 2017:182-183). His thinking in relation to counternarratives of change for a politics of belonging changes the story and offers some insight into how, at this pivotal time, we can make moves towards changing the course of history!

In this respect, Imogen Tyler proposes that we need a much better understanding of stigma as a form of social control if we are going to get to grips with the way that neoliberalism has created escalating inequalities of income, health, education and citizenship (Tyler, 2015). A politics of disgust which labels some lives as less important than others was started by Margaret Thatcher's 'welfare scrounger' in the 1980s. It is a divide and rule politics that turns vulnerable groups against each other to smokescreen the ways in which dominant power is acting in the interests of the privileged: 'As governments have come to govern for the market they have also come to govern *against* the people' (Tyler, 2013:6). At the same time, dissent has been undermined, and political protests that forged change in the 1970s and 1980s have been weakened and even criminalised as an acceptable even necessary force in deepening democracy (Tyler, 2013). Tyler's thesis is that neoliberalism is a class project that uses stigmatisation as a form of legitimising escalating inequalities and injustices by directly targeting groups of people 'laid to waste' by neoliberal economic, political and social polices (including asylum seekers and other unwanted irregular migrants, politically and economically disenfranchised young people, Gypsies and Travellers, people with disabilities).

My point is that critique of the current system is vital, but critique of what is happening cannot dismantle the power of the neoliberal story without a captivating counternarrative, a tale of other ways of being inspired by values that are at the heart of the future we would like to see. George Monbiot talks about the need to go beyond 'an unintelligible cacophony' of fragmented parts to tell 'a coherent and stabilising narrative' (Monbiot, 2017:6), one that is embedded in the values we would aspire to live by. 'You cannot take away someone's story without giving them a new one' (Monbiot,

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2017:1), this 'political failure is, in essence, a failure of imagination' (ibid:6). So there is our challenge!

Reclaiming the radical agenda begins with insights into the way that neoliberalism has weakened our ties with each other and the living planet by choosing to adopt an economic system that 'puts a price on everything and a value on nothing' (ibid 19). This becomes the basis of working together to change the story, and therefore change history!

(This article is based on ideas developed in the upcoming 3rd edition of Margaret Ledwith's *Community Development: A Critical Approach*, Bristol: Policy Press)

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CONCEPT
THE JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITY EDUCATION PRACTICE THEORY
Vol. 9 No. 3, Winter, 2018

A Northeastern Brazilian: Memories of Paulo Freire

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Fifty years since the publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed?* That time period corresponds nearly perfectly with the length of time that I have been working in the field of adult education. In August of 1970, I took up a job as a research fellow in the Institute of Adult Education at the University of Dar es Salaam. I had finished my course work in education and African Studies at the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA) and was fortunate enough to be offered a job by Nicholas Kuhanga, the Deputy Director of the Institute who was touring the USA at the time. 1970 had been named the "Adult Education Year" by the Government of Tanzania. The then President, Julius K Nyerere, a deep believer in the power of the education of adults as a foundation for social and political transformation, called for the creation of a national infrastructure of district adult education officers and preparation for an adult literacy campaign.

I threw myself into learning all I could about the history of adult education in Tanzania and into whatever theoretical work that I could find on the field. The library in our Institute had quite a bit of material written in the USA, some from the UK and some from Sweden. Almost nothing on Tanzania itself and nothing at all from other parts of the global South. Nyerere had written some on adult education but more on his vision of education for self-reliance. I found myself in a theoretical vacuum trying to make intellectual sense of the expectations that were in the air. I still remember one day in 1970, Dr. Marjorie Mbillinyi, a young lecturer in the College of Education telling me about an incredible book that she had just heard of, a book written by a Brazilian intellectual about literacy work in Brazil. I can't remember how I got my first copy of *Pedagogy*, but the thoughts, words, dreams that poured out of those pages were simply electrifying. Here was someone working in a similar context as ourselves. His vision was a revolutionary one, the same as that of our President Nyerere. His intellectual foundations were a combination of Marxism and humanistic psychology. He created a

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discourse, a set of words and concepts which fit our world so well. 'Banking education', 'conscientization', 'problem-based education', 'thematic investigation', 'codifications' were only some of the tools that excited us. His belief in the knowledge of people to transform their own lives through dialogue and collective action was very similar to those of Nyerere. I was privileged to introduce Freire to the Tanzanian adult education community through a book review of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in our national adult education journal.

The Ministry of Education was launching an adult literacy campaign in the early 1970s. Freire was invited to come for a month to Tanzania for a visit that the Institute of Adult Education was to host, to see if some of his thinking might be of use in the official campaign. I was assigned the duty of coordinating his visit, in May or June of 1972 as I recall. I was in my late 20s, Paulo was 50. My first sight of him was in the Senate chambers of the University of Dar es Salaam at a reception for him. He was dressed in a nice brown suit and tie. I was actually a bit taken aback seeing him dressed like this. Suits and ties were uncommon in Tanzania and had been abandoned as colonial symbols replaced by the Nyerere suit, a collarless suit without shirts and ties. But the political subtleties of dress in socialist Tanzania were little known anywhere else and he told me that he wore a suit out of respect for the University and all those working there.

We organized so many visits and talks. We organized a public talk in the assembly hall of the Institute of Adult Education in downtown Tanzania. The hall held about 800 people. Freire was an intellectual, not a politician, nor a footballer, nor a musician. By the evening of the event, the hall was packed. And as close to the front as possible were members of the Independence movements of Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, all of whom had training bases in Tanzania and benefited from the political support of the Nyerere government. And Freire, whose English at that time was not at all polished, drew energy from the room and spoke for hours on the common struggles facing oppressed peoples in Brazil, Latin America and Africa. I remember still the faces of three women from the ANC in South Africa sitting in the front row, dressed in stunning dresses and complex wrapped head scarves. Their eyes were glued to Paulo. They asked him questions and he spoke with them as though no one else was in the room. It

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was a private conversation between four people who were able to connect at a deep emotional level in spite of never having met before.

Upon leaving Tanzania, I began working with the International Council for Adult Education, first as a Research Officer, then eventually as Secretary-General. From that platform, we created the International Participatory Research Network, a network that drew on the ideas of Nyerere, Freire, Fals Borda and others in the global South to challenge the dominant social science research methods of the day. Freire was still living in exile at the time, in Geneva, working as Education Secretary for the World Council of Churches. Our network kept in close contact with Paulo as he was travelling around the world. His support of our work was important to gain visibility. When he was finally able to return to Brazil, I had the great pleasure of visiting him at his home in Sao Paulo as he was beginning his work as the Education Secretary for the Worker's Party government in the state of Sao Paulo. We asked him to consider becoming the Honorary President of the International Council for Adult Education. He accepted. I was privileged to work with Paulo in many places over the years; in preparation for the 1985 World Assembly of Adult Education in Buenos Aires, at the Global Summit for the Environment in 1992, at his 70th birthday conference in New York City and other gatherings. Writing now in 2018, I can say that his ideas, his warmth and his love remain powerfully in my life. These past 50 years have been so much better having known this beautiful man. Let me close with this poem that I wrote on the first anniversary of his passing.

Surf On Paulino

I mean picture this
600 street-wise American and Canadian activists
Assembled in the conference hall of the New School of Social
Research in New York City
Where in 1932 the first North American meeting of the Workers
Education Association was held

A birthday conference for Paulo Freire, the most influential
Educational thinker of the 20th century
Academics jammed in next to homeless organizers who are

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Jammed in next to Lady Garment Workers who are
Jammed in next to the Puerto Rican Independence underground who are
Jammed in next to kindergarten teachers who are
Jammed in next to high school students who are
Waiting to hear from Paulo Freire

And Paulo, 70 years old, who has come to town to help us all
Celebrate ourselves through him, stands up behind a table on the
Stage

"I'd like to tell you",
Paulo says in his quiet gentle voice,
"About the best gift that I have had for my birthday.
I received it from a young boy in Recife, in Northeast Brazil where
I was born.
He gave me the gift of a picture which he had drawn himself
A picture of the crashing Atlantic coastal waves
And in the picture was a man riding on what I think is called a
Surf board.
And on top of the board, riding the waves, was an old man with a
white beard and glasses.
That old man was me. It was a picture of me.
And my young friend had written words beneath this picture in his
own handwriting.
He told me 'Surf On Paulino'
Surf on little Paulo
And", Paulo said with a smile that reached out to the entire hall,
"I intend to do just that".

For Paulo was a transcendent rider of the waves
Waves of respect for the oppressed people of this planet
Waves of intellectual curiosity; lover of words
Waves of exile and loneliness in Chile, Geneva and Africa
Waves of love for his children, his dear Elsa who died before him
Waves of love for the final love of his life, his widow Nita.
And waves of love for his friends in such places as Guinea-Bissau,
Cuba, India, Fiji, France and, yes, for us in Canada.

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For if he was a teacher
For if he was an activist
For if he was a writer
For if he was a teller of stories
He was above all a person in the great and ancient tradition of
Brazilian mystics
More than a teacher
More than an activist
More than a writer
More than the teller of stories

He carried with him a warm breeze of historic possibility
He carried with him the memories of many struggles
He carried with him vulnerability and need
He carried with him opportunities for friendship
He carried with him the new eyes of the young
He carried with him revolutionary agency
He carried with him his hand for ours
He carried with him the electric atmosphere of a Northeastern
Brazilian Storm

Paulo often apologized for his ways of speaking languages other
Than his beloved Portuguese
And yet he held audiences at hushed attention when he spoke in
English, French or Spanish in every corner of the world
He found ways through his distinct ways of speaking English and
French and other languages to draw us in to his speech
To draw us into himself
So much did he seem to need us, his audience, that we hung on his
Every word and we helped him to reach out to ourselves

So that in the end
we were his text
We were his words
He was our text
He was our words
Paulino
Surf on

CONCEPT
The Journal of Contemporary Community Education Practice Theory
Vol. 9 No. 3, Winter, 2018

The road not taken: The road still open

Colin Kirkwood

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Gerri Kirkwood

Reporter to Children's Panels, ALP Worker, Assistant Principal Wester Hailes Community High School, TEFL Teacher

In this piece Colin and Gerri consider the reception of Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed in Britain in the 1970s and since.

Sitting down to ponder again the impact of Paulo Freire's work in Britain in the more than forty years since we first encountered it raises a storm of memories and emotions.

To begin with, it would be churlish to deny that the allied victory over Fascism in the second world war, alongside Labour's triumph at the polls in 1945, opened the door to a certain kind of golden age in British society which lasted until the middle 1970s. We remember with gratitude ration books, slum clearance, council housing, the NHS, full employment, nationalization and the direction of industry, family allowances, social work, and the expansion and reorientation of some aspects of education, including student grants. In short, we remember the welfare state.

Equally significant changes were happening in one part of the wider environment, until very recently called the British Empire, then rapidly being repackaged as Our British Commonwealth of Nations.

With hindsight, it is clear to anyone who has ears to hear and eyes to see that there was a lot more to be done. The phrase "half way there" was used by Brian Simon and Caroline Benn to characterize the situation in education. Conflicting cultural trends were much in evidence. The atmosphere of the late 1950s and early 1960s was a mixture of authoritarian echoes from the past, and libertarian noises-off disguised as prophecy.

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Pop music was bidding to replace religion as the national wallpaper (astonishingly, 50 years later, some versions of social science continue to punt this proposition).

From an existential and more reflective point of view, much was uncertain, and much that had previously been unspoken was more loudly silent than ever. In Britain as a whole, think of Samuel Beckett's plays, novels and tapes. Of Martin Buber's *I and Thou*. Of John Macmurray's *The Self as Agent* and *Persons in Relation*. Of Ronnie Laing's *The Divided Self.* Of Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Of Erich Fromm's *The Fear of Freedom*. Of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. Of Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*.

That reading list from those days is offered as a kind of intellectual backcloth to the arrival of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in English in 1972. The existential backcloth is poverty, above all in the 'Third World', as experienced directly by Paulo and his family in North-east Brazil, but more widely and variously throughout the world as a whole, in the aftermath of not one but two insane world wars, followed immediately by an equally crazy cold war. And accompanied by the gradual reawakening of the capitalist dragon.

I first began to read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* around 1975, when the British Labour Government was secretly preparing to apply for a massive bail-out, from the International Monetary Fund. Up until that point Labour's social contract with the British people meant in practice rising prices combined with an annual programme of strikes aimed at keeping wages and salaries ahead of price inflation. This economistic version of class struggle was led by the trade union movement, organized nationally by the TUC, the Union HQs and conferences, and locally by the shop stewards' movement.

In public, in Britain, radical politics still took the form of Leninist, Trotskyist, Stalinist - and then also Maoist - sects, ever multiplying in number, ever shriller in sloganeering. Half-hidden behind all this, there was what I considered a decent left, active in the Westminster Parliament in the voices of "good left" Labour MPs, in parts of the Trade Union movement, and in the best parts of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) which were to be found mainly in the minefields and, above all, in Glasgow.

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What was new in Britain was community action, and there were new trends also in religion, in Catholicism associated with the name of Pope John 23rd (Christianity and Social Progress), in Latin America with Personalism and Liberation Theology, in France with Personalism and Worker Priests, in Scotland with the Iona Community and the Gorbals Group, and in Northern Ireland with the Corrymeela Community.

Gerri and I and many others had been active in community action and adult education in Staveley in north-east Derbyshire, and then in the Barrowfield and Castlemilk housing schemes in Glasgow, and it was while we were living in Castlemilk that we first came across Freire's work.

We should identify also at this point a significant feature of British intellectual, political and cultural life. A great split had developed between the sciences on the one hand and the arts, religion and some versions of philosophy on the other. This is not an attempt to explain why, or explain it away, simply to insert this reality into the conversation. One result was that some British science and social science had become intellectually impoverished. Careful examination of fundamental assumptions, purposes and values had become suspect in certain quarters. In my view, thinking that is not ethically, imaginatively and personally grounded is itself suspect. The research bandwagon was beginning to roll, which as time has gone on has led to some University-based academics becoming mere tools of government and private sector funding. Another feature of the split was the overvaluation of crude (pleasure/pain) utilitarianism. These features fused with a much older tendency of the British elites to perceive the general population as rude mechanicals, to be dismissed as "these people" or disparaged as the great unwashed.

The overarching resultant was that British socialism became something that was done to the population, however benignly, by powerful centralised elites. The people were not involved significantly as human beings, as persons with human relationships, with intelligent perspectives, values, opinions and creative contributions to offer. These trends had disastrous effects in housing, other aspects of building, planning, the media and in society as a whole. Their wider effect was to undergird the centralism of British

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political, institutional and cultural life, and intensify the "success of the few" dynamic. They prevented genuine decentralization and stopped the emergence of a genuinely popular politics. Fortunately, Paulo Freire did not share these prejudices.

Freire was born in 1921 into a middle-class family in Recife in north-east Brazil. In the great world economic crash of 1929, his family's precarious stability collapsed. He experienced hunger, and fell behind at school. His father died. For a time he shared the plight of the poor. These experiences underpinned the development of many of his concepts such as "the culture of silence" and "submergence", his decision to work in the field of adult education, and his understanding that educational failure is not a technical problem capable of technological solutions, but derives from the whole situation of economic, social and political domination, and from paternalism (Richard Shaull, in the Foreword to Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Penguin, 1972).

When you read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* for yourself, as I urge you to do, it will take you by surprise. You may even be astonished. It is not British at all. It is not about heaping up huge mounds of data, labelling it "research" and spending 300 pages analyzing it statistically, with diagrams, and proving that technique X rather than technique Y has been demonstrated to produce more rapid advance to outcome Z by more 5 year olds who have all consumed exactly the same amount of Weetabix.

Instead, Freire starts by asserting that the central problem of human beings has always been the problem of humanization. He makes this assertion from what he calls an axiological point of view, which, he goes on to explain, involves ethical, aesthetic and religious concerns. He moves on immediately to consider the recognition of dehumanization, "not only as an ontological possibility but as a historical reality".

Guess what? Paulo Freire is a real philosopher of education, something which is very rare nowadays. He thinks, here and now, in front of your eyes, in *your* mind. And he makes *you* think. His own approach is to think in terms of the assumptions with which he confronts education and living in society as it actually is. That in turn challenges you, his reader, to examine your own fundamental assumptions. You will get used to this. Either you will stop reading Freire very quickly, like Harold Wilson did with Marx

(Wilson claimed that he stopped reading Marx at the end of the first footnote). Or, if you keep going, it will keep you awake. It will keep you thinking. It will keep you problematizing.

I don't want to diminish the happiness and the challenges you will experience if you read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. It is quite short: only 153 pages long. It has four chapters, which range – as many such thinking-from-first-principles books do – from basic assumptions to approaches to practice. By the end, if you keep going, you will understand what Paulo Freire means by oppression, oppressors and oppressed, and liberation as a mutual process; by the conflicting banking and problem-posing concepts of education; by the teacher-student contradiction and how it can be overcome; by seeing persons as consciously incomplete beings who are attempting to become more fully human; by the word, by dialogue and its two dimensions of reflection and action; and you will understand his affirmation that to speak a true word is to transform the world. You will meet and struggle to understand the idea of generative themes, of creating the programme content of education, and the idea of critical consciousness. And finally you will come to grips with the theory of anti-dialogical action, which he summarises as conquest, divide and rule, manipulation and cultural invasion. And his counter-theory of dialogical action: cooperation, unity, organization and cultural synthesis.

By now, you may have got hold of the idea that Paulo Freire is a kind of personalist, a Christian socialist, a Christian Marxist, a Christian communist, but not one who subordinates means to ends. I think that view of Freire is substantially correct. He sees human beings as subjects who know and act, not objects which are known and acted upon. He identifies the dialogical educator with the revolutionary leader, though he makes it plain that he has never been a revolutionary leader. Does this mean that he is naïve? Well, on more than one occasion, he says that he has been, and is, naïve. But that does not mean that he takes a negatively critical view of his own naivete. I don't think he does, but you will have to decide for yourself what to make of this question.

One of the most striking and original insights in Freire's work, which I think grows out of the particular processes involved in the historical dynamics of human culture in Latin

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America, as a result of the invasion of that continent by "Christian" imperialism in the form of Portuguese and Spanish conquistadors with the sword in one hand and the bible in the other, is his understanding of human consciousness or consciousness-language, with its phases of *magical*, *naïve*, with possible backward deflection to *fanatical* and possible forward development to *critical* consciousness. This closely connects with his understanding of the process he calls *conscientisation*, a key ground of encounter and dialogue between Freirean and feminist thinking from the 1970s onwards.

Paulo Freire is not the only thinker to have devoted attention to these understandings, which grow out of this distinctively Latin American inheritance. His work has significant connections with the innovative work of Enrique Pichon-Riviere and that of our contemporary Juan Tubert-Oklander, both group analysts and psychoanalysts. And I emphasise, as I have always done, that this inheritance is for the whole world and not for the third world only. As Paulo Freire said to an Australian religious, Sister Margaret Costigan: "You have the third world inside you". And as he remarked on another occasion: "the Paulo Freire method is not a third world extravaganza".

We turn now to the most difficult and in some respects disheartening part of this paper: how has Freire's work been received in Britain? When his early books arrived (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, *Cultural Action for Freedom*, *Education: The Practice of Freedom*), they were welcomed with enthusiasm by significant numbers of people. In the 1970s, Gerri and I met and communicated and in some cases worked with radical Christians from Scotland, England and Chile. We also knew and collaborated with working class activists within the broad labour and trade union movement, in the Communist Party (CP), the Labour Party, the Scottish National Party and many with no political affiliation. We both came from Christian backgrounds, one catholic, the other protestant, but had at that time turned away from the institutional churches and their rigid dogmas and practices. While many working class CP activists – themselves sometimes from religious backgrounds – were admirable figures, almost like early Christians in their sincerity and altruism, it was clear that their Party would never gain popular political support, because of its perceived hostility to religion and its loyalty to the Soviet Union and the other countries of the Eastern Bloc.

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Yet society was crying out for a new way, and Freire's ideas and practices, for us, held out great hope. After the deaths of Bevan and Gaitskell, Labour seemed to lose the radicalism of its vision and turn away from ordinary people towards large-scale technocratic solutions embodied in the development of what were perceived as "good policies". The Labour Party became what Harold Wilson labelled "a machine for electing Labour MPs". Locally, their slogan was "leave it to us". John P Mackintosh's book *The Devolution of Power* actually proposes decisive moves away from local democracy towards large-scale regional frameworks. Direct popular democracy was held to be irrelevant; the majority of Labour MPs were known to be hostile to it.

As the 1970s advanced, the priority of balancing the books rose. Failing industries were to be allowed to go to the wall (Thank God for Jimmy Reid, Jimmy Airlie, Sammy Barr and their fellow workers in the Upper Clyde Shipyards!). Free school milk was withdrawn. On the left, hardline centralist thinking was growing in strength, at the very time when popular deference to the old ruling class was in decline. People were turning away from Labour, as Labour was turning away from people, and in 1979, exasperated with the endless strikes yet habituated to economistic solutions, the British people as a whole voted for Thatcherism for the first time. Greed and jingoism became popular themes. The decent left lost ground to anti-democratic thuggery. There was a swing to Trotskyism in the form of Militant, and when that was headed off, a kind of centre-right version of Thatcherite social democracy within which Labour proclaimed itself intensely relaxed about people becoming extremely rich. Greed and self-interest had become the new good. The Soviet Union and the Berlin Wall collapsed, and the cause of the good society was lost for a generation. In a sense it still is lost.

As I argued in *Vulgar Eloquence* in 1990, the new wine had voluntarily poured itself into the old bottles of Leninism, Trotskyism, Stalinism and Maoism, and the New Right revelled in its freedom to do whatever it liked. A utilitarian conception of socialism as state-provided, centralized and bureaucratized had shunted aside the original visions of Jesus of Nazareth, Francis of Assisi, the Levellers and the Diggers, William Blake, Robert Burns, William Morris and millions of women throughout human history. As John McDonnell, Labour's current Shadow Chancellor, has recently acknowledged, Labour had become far too statist and far too centralist. You cannot create the good

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society without the direct engagement of the people, and without a movement based on fundamental values of friendship, relationship, community and personal agency, and the just distribution of resources, roles and responsibilities; without vision, fundamental democratization, and good strong leadership at local, regional and national levels. That is what Paulo Freire's thinking and his approach to adult education embodied when we first encountered it. It still does.

In the autumn of 1976, I began to work for the WEA in South-east Scotland, and immediately began a house reading group on *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. We went on to run a weekly course entitled Community Action and the Pedagogy of the Oppressed, attended by Community Educators, Area Officers of the Community Education Service, Social Workers and Community Development Workers. After initial close reading work, focused on understanding Freire's key concepts and how they might translate from Portuguese into English, and from Latin America and Africa into Scotland, England and Ireland, I invited course members to prepare and present proposals to adapt these ideas and methods in a Scottish context. Among others, two course members, Fraser Patrick and Douglas Shannon, did so. Their proposal was further developed and submitted by Lothian Regional Council to the Scottish Office for funding: Labour was still in power in Westminster at this point. Their proposal was accepted and the Adult Learning Project (ALP) was launched as an Urban Aid Project in the Gorgie Dalry area of Edinburgh. It was launched in the autumn of 1979, ironically at the same time as the first Thatcherite Conservative Government came to power. It ran and flourished until 2016 when the City of Edinburgh Council finally discontinued its financial support.

This is not the place to tell the story of ALP, nor to critique it. The reader is referred to *Living Adult Education: Freire in Scotland* (1st edition, Open University Press, 1989), by Gerri and Colin Kirkwood. The Paulo Freire Institute in Spain arranged for it to be translated into Castilian and Valencian, and published it in 2005, with a new Introduction by Jim Crowther and Ian Martin, and a new chapter by Vernon Galloway, Stan Reeves and Nancy Somerville entitled "ALP since 1990: A Flowering of Cultural Action". This version was published in English as the ALP book's second edition by Sense Publishers (now Brill/Sense) in 2011.

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The ideas and methods of Freire were taught widely by myself and others, throughout Scotland, during the late 1970s, the 1980s and early 1990s. Gerri addressed national conferences on the work of ALP in Nottingham and Dublin, and together we ran a workshop on Freire's method of codification and decoding at the International Conference held in New York in 1991 in honour of his 70th birthday. Paulo's ideas also significantly influenced the lifelong work of Tom Lovett in Liverpool, Derry and Belfast. Lalage Bown, Emeritus Professor of Adult Education at the University of Glasgow, has been a supporter of Freire's work throughout the world and throughout her career, and a consistent friend of ALP.

It is nevertheless sad to have to say that very few prominent University-based academics in the field of Adult Education in Britain have shown much interest in Freire's thought. The two exceptions known to us are Paula Allman and Peter Jarvis, both of whom have treated his work seriously. I particularly admire Jarvis's chapter, entitled "Paulo Freire", in his edited book *Twentieth Century Thinkers in Adult Education* (Croom Helm, 1987). Sadder still is the reality that some academic adult educators have bodyswerved both Freire and ALP altogether, failing to reference either in their published work.

But the final note is a positive one. Freire's work is prophetic and will be of lasting importance throughout the world. The Freirean road, not yet taken in Britain, remains open and full of hope. It indicates a way of moving forward educationally, socially, culturally and politically, it shows that good, strong leadership can ally itself with ordinary people treated as subjects who know and act, not objects which are known and acted upon, and move together effectively towards fundamental democratization and social justice.

The main reason I have spent my life in the fields of adult and community education, counselling and psychotherapy is that I wanted to challenge and help to change the "success of the few" culture, which more than ever dominates British society, into a "learning, brilliance and contributions of the many" culture. Not success, but the flourishing of all.

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CONCEPT
THE JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITY EDUCATION PRACTICE THEORY
Vol. 9 No. 3, Winter, 2018

What Freire Means to Me

Lynn Tett, Louise Sheridan and Christina McMellon respond to this question.

Lyn Tett
Professor Emeritus, University of Edinburgh

I first tried to read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in the mid 1980s when I was working as the literacies organiser for Argyll and Bute, in the West of Scotland. A colleague from the Scottish Community Education Council (SCEC) had recommended it to me when I'd asked her for books that might help me to find a better way of working with tutors and students. I wanted a pedagogy that would help the tutors to build on students' interests and knowledge rather than treating them as if they knew nothing. I have to admit that I found the book really difficult to understand because of the abstract language, opaque style and masculine pronouns. I was also disappointed because it didn't give me the practical help and guidance about pedagogy I was looking for. My understanding of the word 'pedagogy' was that it was solely about how approaches to teaching influence learning so I hadn't thought about how learning is affected by the impact of the culture and socio-economic environment in which people live. What I was really looking for was a quick fix guide to developing an approach to the curriculum that would enable tutors to be more positive about the resources that their students had to offer. I hadn't focused on 'the oppressed' part of the title, and of course, it is the two terms in combination that make this book important.

I later came to understand that Freire's concept of 'praxis' means using a range of pedagogical tools, practices and processes in order to create a world in which people are no longer oppressed by the exercise of power over them by unjust impositions and restraints. My interest at the time, however, was solely on creating a better learning environment without much understanding of the underpinning philosophy of his critical pedagogy. This also meant that I was thinking about students' experience in a way that didn't acknowledge that it wasn't neutral but rather was embedded in the politics of power, agency, and history.

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I was really only able to appreciate the full message of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* after I'd read Gerri and Colin Kirkwood's book *Living Adult Education - Freire in Scotland*, published in 1989. This book, based on their work in the Adult Learning Project (ALP) in Gorgie-Dalry, Edinburgh, helped me not only to grasp the philosophy behind Freire's work but also, through their illustrations of how they had used investigations that built learning programmes and supported action outcomes, enabled me to see how his ideas could be used practically. Yet, using Freire's pedagogical approach in the rural areas of Argyll where students were not only widely dispersed but also often saw their literacy difficulties as something to be ashamed of, was very difficult. Using a problem-posing dialogue to identify common issues when there may only be one or two students to engage with was challenging, whereas depositing knowledge into students seemed to be much easier. The best solution I could find at the time was to do some work with tutors that focused on Freire's idea of 'education as a practice of freedom' where tutor and student could teach and learn from each other, leading to the co-construction of knowledge. One key lesson we all learned from that was that most students had spent a long time internalising what they saw as their personal failure to learn and certainly did not see themselves as having anything much to offer. This was a good reminder that dialogue involves genuine collaboration and is never an end in itself. Rather it requires 'recognizing the social and not merely the individualist character of the process of knowing' (Freire & Macedo, 1995: 95).

When I moved to a post at Moray House Institute of Education, Edinburgh in 1992 I had the opportunity to get to grips with the ideas in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* through both my teaching and my research. I was lucky enough to work with colleagues and students that were wiling to engage in dialogical learning and teaching and this was particularly helpful in avoiding what Freire denounced as silence and fatalism in the face of oppression. In particular, his emphasis on people developing their powers to see the world as capable of transformation through problem-posing education offers an optimistic vision that confronts the pessimistic view that the existing reality is almost impossible to change. This vision of education as offering hope for radical change through a pedagogy that both challenged and built on people's existing knowledges seemed to me to be a particularly effective way of working in community education.

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One example of this approach was a family literacy project (reported on in Tett, 2010) that I was involved in evaluating. Here, the project tutors emphasised the wealth of the knowledge that parents contributed to the educational development of their children and the positive ways in which they already successfully educated their children, through different ways of knowing the world. The curriculum was negotiated, but tutors remained responsible for organising the pedagogical context through using their critical, interpretative role and specialised skills to enable the participants to collectively realise their best potential. From this perspective, education was seen as a co-operative activity involving respect and trust. So the teaching was based on a group process, where the tutor and students learnt together, beginning with the concrete experience of the participants, leading to reflection on that experience in order to affect positive change. As a result, the participants were able to reflect on their experience and add new and different knowledge. It meant that they became the subjects of learning rather than the objects of educational interventions that were supposed to be good for them. Learning then became a shared endeavour between tutors and students; a two-way, rather than a one-way, process.

I also found Freire's ideas helpful in another project I was involved in - 'Health Issues in the Community'. This project used his pedagogical tool of 'co-investigation' to identify the health problems people faced in their communities and then find possible solutions. The investigation involved the participants gathering information from the local community, analysing these data, presenting the findings to both the community and local decision-makers and then taking informed action. This project started with a learning resource for tutors - *Health Issues in the Community* - published by Health Scotland in 2000 and written by Jane Jones, that drew on the ideas in her earlier book (Jones, 1999). The resource has been developed and modified since and has been a good example of how Freirian praxis can create useful resources for giving people back control over their lives. This is because it builds the capacity and expertise of the people that are on the front-line of the problem, and the investigations undertaken by groups throughout Scotland have resulted in better bus services, improved children's play parks, more local chiropody and maternity services to name just a few. Although these changes have been relatively small, they have enabled local communities to take action about the things that matter to them and this in turn has inspired them to be more

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proactive about contesting solutions that are imposed on them. It has involved seeing education as a co-operative activity involving respect and trust.

One aspect of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that I found less convincing was Freire's analysis of oppression. The book implied that people were either oppressed or oppressors whereas I considered that, because we occupy multiple structural and subject positions, I can be oppressed in one context but an oppressor in another. His analysis seems to me to focus too much on class alone, rather than showing how other factors such as race, gender, culture, language, and ethnicity intersect with class to frame both oppressors and the oppressed in specific ways (see Taylor, 1993). Although Freire addressed these issues more explicitly in his later books I found that bell hooks' analysis, especially in her book *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), resonated with me more. Freire was the inspiration for her own book, especially his concept of critical consciousness, but she added a black feminist consciousness to her analysis that also draws attention to the importance of emotion and feeling. She argues that we should 'teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students ... if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin' (hooks 1994: 13) and sees education as 'enabling' and as 'enhancing our capacity to be free' (ibid, p.4) from the perspective of both students and teachers.

Another reason I found hooks so helpful was that I had been involved in a number of research projects (for example, Tett et al, 2012) that had asked literacy students about the impact of their programmes. Most students foregrounded the changes they had experienced in relation to their feelings of self efficacy that in turn led to their motivation to bring about change. Students also identified the importance of feeling that their tutors and peers cared about them and suggested that this supportive learning environment had enabled them to practise and fail whilst still having their capabilities recognised. These changes became possible because of the focus in programmes on co-creating the curriculum whereby students became agents of change, and so they were able to facilitate the types of learning they were interested in and this then became the trigger for their achievement. I think that these empirical findings exemplify bell hooks' argument that:

> The classroom with all its limitations remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labour for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom (hooks 1994: 207).

Writing this piece has made me think carefully about what *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has meant to me. It has clearly had a strong impact on my thinking throughout the last 30 years. It first made me think about what 'pedagogy' means so that, instead of simply interpreting it as a 'teaching' method, I had to see that it was, in Freire's hands, a radical social theory. The book also showed me how using a 'problematising' approach could enable groups to reflect critically on their reality in a way that might enable them to transform their understanding of the world and their relation to it. Yet, looking back on the book now I think that it presents a too simplistic and optimistic view of the actual possibilities of socio-political transformation. The projects I have mentioned have all made small differences in the lives of participants but they have certainly not been revolutionary. Whilst using Freirian approaches can enable people to become more aware of how their personal experiences are connected to larger societal problems and historical and global processes, it is a big step to think that any form of education can, by itself, change society.

I have already suggested that his tendency to dichotomise oppressors/oppressed is flawed. As Kathleen Weiler (1994) argues 'the assumption of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is that in struggling against oppression the oppressed will move toward true humanity'. However, different groups experience different forms of oppression and there are often struggles and conflicts among oppressed groups themselves. bell hooks has been particularly helpful to me in thinking about ways to challenge Freire's assumption that class is the only form of domination, as well as providing insights about the importance of emotion and feeling in bringing about change.

These are valid criticisms and reflect the changes in socio-political understandings over time. That said, I think that the book has made a huge impact on my thinking because it has provided both a vision of what education might achieve and a pedagogy of how it might be undertaken. Those early struggles at understanding *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* were definitely worth it!

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Over the last twenty-four years, I have grown to understand and embrace Freire's theories and principles. For this piece, I focus on three areas in which I have most been influenced by his work. The first is the way in which I undertake my role as a Lecturer at the University of Glasgow. The second is in the content of my teaching on various community development, curriculum development and youth studies' courses. The third area is in my research into youth participation practice in Scotland. I begin by describing my 'journey' with Paulo Freire.

I first encountered *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (POTO) in 1994 as an undergraduate student studying Community Education. The book is a staple for any community-related programme, as I grew to learn. My understanding of Freire's ideas, at that time, was basic. I learned that 'banking education' is not a helpful approach; people are not empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge. I also summarised his approach to education as a five-step process (Sheridan, 2018). I paid little attention to the political nature of education, but I had grasped the concept of praxis. The next encounter, during my post-graduate studies, was a lacklustre session on chapter one of POTO. I remember an unenthusiastic description of Freire's (2005a, p.79) reference to 'consciousness as consciousness intent upon the world'. This was a significant concept that was worthy of greater attention and so I set out to read as much as I could about Freire's ideas. My Masters' Dissertation considered the possibility of a Freirean approach to education for Scottish Women Prisoners. I came to realise that I had reduced Freire's ideas to a simple method (Macedo, 1994) from my early encounter with POTO, which helped to shape the lecturer I have become.

Freire (1996) described seven principles for educational practice in one of his final works, *Letters to Cristina: Reflections on My Life and Work*, with the first emphasising the importance of creating a pedagogical space. To enable a positive learning environment, Freire noted that 'care for the space is necessary to connect with the frame of mind needed for the exercise of curiosity' (1996, p.123). His ideas prompt me to think about the physical environment - the way the room is arranged; to notice the students - who is quiet, or not, for example; and, finally, to encourage students to question answers and critically examine the world around them. A related principle, which is that students and teachers are both subjects within the learning process, has shaped the learning experiences that I create. I ensure that students understand the importance of mutual learning that takes place, and that we all grow together in the experience (Freire, 1978). This does not negate the duty of care that I have for students, which reflects Freire's view that students and teachers are not necessarily equal (Freire, 1996).

Freire always features in the content of my teaching, to a greater or lesser degree. I began teaching at the University of Strathclyde in 1998, on a sessional basis, and I

gladly shared my 'Freirean Five-Steps' with students. Short clips from *The Full Monty* helped to demonstrate this; it seemed like a good idea at the time! As mentioned earlier, an important element was missing then: the political imperative within education. Back then, I had not fully grasped Freire's (1996) view that education is never neutral, which is the fifth principle. A key feature of my teaching reflects his point that 'education never was, is not, and never can be neutral or indifferent in regard to the reproduction of the dominant ideology or the interrogation of it' (Freire, 1998, p.91). When I teach about Freire's conceptions of dialogue, praxis, or his process of decodification (Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 2011), political awareness and action are emphasised. I always mention Freire's reference to 'armed' love (1998, p.74), highlighting that he saw love as 'an emancipatory and revolutionary principle' (Darder, 2009). I now see this as vital for students learning about community development.

Freire's emphasis on love within transformational education has influenced me the most. In 2008, I began the long journey of undertaking my doctorate. My study looked at Youth Participation Practice in North Ayrshire, Scotland using Freire's theories and principles as the lens. My findings suggest that a Freirean approach to youth participation practice is possible and beneficial. Nearly twenty years ago, Blackburn (2000) questioned if Freire's ideas were still relevant or applicable in contexts beyond Brazil. Shor and Freire (1987) had already suggested that it was possible to apply a Freirean approach as long as it was adapted to fit the context. With this in mind, I developed Freire's (1998) notion of armed love to fit the context of youth participation. The concept of Alfirmo 'is the act of caring for, nourishing and supporting young people, while asserting belief in their ability as agents of change' (Sheridan, 2018, p.36). To embody Alfirmo in the context of youth participation is to convey a sense of being there if needed. Alfirmo is underpinned by the notion that everything is political. Freire referred to his 'most naïve moment' (Shor and Freire, 1987:61) in earlier times in his life, when he failed to recognise the importance of politics. In POTO*,* he described that education 'had an *aspect* of politics', which was a '*less* naïve moment' (Shor and Freire, 1987:61). He later went on to say that 'all instances of education become political acts' (1985:188). Here, Freire exemplifies that he himself was an unfinished being, gaining a deeper understanding of the world through his own praxis.

For Freire, education should enable people to be 'conscious of themselves as unfinished beings' (2004:100). For me, this is the greatest message of all. There are many possibilities in life. Positive change is achievable through education, through collective consciousness and through love. To conclude, in the words of Freire's (1996) fourth principle, education should aim for a dream.

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CONCEPT
THE JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITY EDUCATION PRACTICE THEORY

Vol. 9 No. 3, Winter, 2018

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> If the structure does not permit dialogue the structure must be changed. (Freire, 1968)

> To be changed by ideas was pure pleasure. But to learn ideas that ran counter to values and beliefs learned at home was to place oneself at risk, to enter the danger zone (hooks,1994).

I was a feminist before I was a community educator. I remember my amazement, quickly followed by anger, when – as an undergraduate philosophy student in the mid-1990s – I realised that the world in which I lived systematically treated women differently from men. Then came the excitement that there were other (mostly) women in the world who were writing and thinking and acting and getting angry about this stuff. I felt part of a movement that was based on my lived experience and it felt good. And then, reading bell hooks' book *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* as a white feminist felt uncomfortable.

To read that the movement about which I felt so excited and in which I felt so included did not validate all women's experiences was an upsetting experience. I struggled with the tension between my personal experiences and my emerging political beliefs, and I adapted my understanding of feminism.

Fast forward two years and I was studying Community Education. I chose to study Community Education because I wanted to find a way to drag my beloved feminist theory down to earth and into action. I would suggest that it is impossible to study Community Education without being influenced by Freire, and yet, reading *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as a feminist, I felt uncomfortable. In this book, that was being held up as the seminal Community Education text, the only oppression explicitly discussed is 'class', and the process of conscientization is the (implicitly male) class struggle. I identified strongly with the content, but simultaneously felt that my gendered experiences were not validated by Freire's arguments, despite his emphasis upon lived

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experience. I was angry at Freire's gendered language and challenged to wrangle with how class fitted in to my vision of the world.

Yet neither hooks not Freire write to make their readers feel comfortable.

In a wonderful audio recording (see below) hooks describes meeting Freire when he spoke at her university, and how other participants became anxious about the questions that she wanted to ask. They 'didn't want feminist issues to intrude upon this great educator'. Freire, of course, responded to these attempts to silence hooks by reminding his audience that learning happens when we ask the difficult questions and, by implication, wrangle with the difficult answers.

For Freire, education is not about accumulating ('banking') knowledge but, rather, about engaging in a critical dialogue, through which participants challenge and are challenged in order to become more conscious of their context. To transform themselves and their world. At the core of both hooks' and Freire's work is the focus upon the political nature of education and the responsibility of the educator to promote education for critical awareness, rather than education to impose truth.

When I re-read sections of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* now I am still deeply uncomfortable by the language used, but enormously grateful for the impact that this single book has had on the way that I think about thinking, and upon the way that I approach my work.

Neither Freire nor hooks write to share an immovable truth with the world. Rather they challenge their readers to think critically about their world and to contribute to a conversation about how to transform that world. This conversation is ever-evolving. I would like to think, although I could be wrong, that if Freire were writing now he would use more inclusive language and consider multiple forms of oppression in his work. This feminist community educator interprets the key message of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to be that, when we start to think that we have got something 'right', then we stop asking the difficult questions, and experience the opposite of liberation – oppression. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RNm38AdciTc)

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CONCEPT
THE JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITY EDUCATION PRACTICE THEORY
Vol. 9 No. 3, Winter, 2018

Pedagogy of the Oppressed and the power of big words

Nicky Bolland and John Player
Members of the CAMINA Collective

CAMINA is an initiative started by a small group of people with experience of critical education who want to support and connect critical education practice and practitioners. CAMINA believes curiosity, reflection and 'trying things out' should be encouraged in experiences of learning, and that critical education is central to transforming the relationships, dynamics, activities and structures we experience today. CAMINA members are particularly influenced by the work of Paulo Freire.

The 'Practising Freedom' reading groups

To mark 50 years since *Pedagogy of the Oppressed (POTO)* was first published, CAMINA wanted to reconnect more directly with the book that has influenced much of what we aim to do as a group of critical educators. In the basic act of bringing people together to discuss Freire's ideas, we wanted to return to the radical simplicity of some of these ideas such as the role of love and freedom in learning for transformation, and to grapple collectively with some of the more complex ideas like the oppressor-oppressed contradiction, alienation, the colonized mentality of oppression and conscientisation. And grapple we did!

The 'Practising Freedom' reading groups were held in three different Scottish cities – Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow – and included participants from a wide range of backgrounds. In each of the sessions we found cause for hope and new ways of understanding our experience of education; however, although our discussions fostered a consensus that this book says important things, as readers we were conflicted about the ways in which these things are said. In each reading group CAMINA hosted, the issue of language came up again and again, with critiques ranging from mild-frustration at the density of the text to the assertion that the language is *inherently* oppressive in the way it excludes and disempowers.

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Say what Freire?

So, does the use of language that some find difficult represent a contradiction in Freire's work by reinforcing subjugated feelings of shame rather than invoking a thirst for emancipation? Or is there an argument for Freire's use of complex language? Before we can unpack this question, we need to clarify the specific issues raised in relation to Freire's language. From our conversations we have drawn out the following categorisations of 'language' in relation to *POTO* and our relationship with it.

The words

Many of the people who attended the reading groups expressed the feeling that the words themselves represented a barrier to their understanding of the text. For one, the text is full of unfamiliar words with ('far too') many syllables which hardly roll off the tongue; for example, 'conscientisation' was a word that many of us struggled to say, let alone to understand. Other words, such as 'axiological' which appears in the first sentence of Chapter 1, was one of many which required a Google search to find their definition.

The ideas

Stan Reeves, a participant in the Edinburgh groups, contested the idea that the vocabulary in *POTO* should be a barrier:

> I have 'O' Level English and there are very few words that I didn't know before I came to the text, 'pedagogy' and 'praxis' being the only two that come to mind... I think it is that the ideas are new and complex and require a lot of thinking about to grasp! But as Freire, said "Learning…is not a weekend on a tropical beach", it is hard but enjoyable work

Whilst not everyone agreed with the first part of Stan's comment, many agreed with the second part: *too abstract", "confusing" and "too theoretical*" were a few of the critiques levelled at Freire's ideas and the ways in which he articulates them. For example, Freire's conception of the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity (1970; 50) was one that left many baffled. Taylor (1993: 02) captures eloquently the

frustrations expressed by many attendees of the groups regarding Freire's ideas: '…critics point to the contorted manner of his writing; his lack of human experience; his circular logic and the confusing repetitiveness. He is obscurantist, too mystifying, too abstract, too psychological, too utopian.'

The theological

The text of *POTO* is suffused with the language of 'liberation theology', which Freire was unapologetic about, and which Darder (2018: 122) describes as playing an important role in the ideas he is articulating:

> Freire's theological influences provide him with a language of humanisation from which to articulate what he considers to be the horizontal nature of genuine dialogue – namely love, humility, faith, and trust.

However, many people in the reading groups expressed contestation over the theological nature of the language and foundations that Freire draws upon, and references were made to the "*opium of the people*" and the "*sigh of the oppressed"*, particularly amongst the Scottish Marxist Protestants present. And for secular Scottish educators and activists, engaging with the profound (not to mention emotional) nature of notions like 'love' in relation to education was uncomfortable territory.

The discourse

Running through the above language challenges is what Gee terms 'Discourse' (Gee 1999); the way in which language is associated with particular communities and contexts. Much of Freire's writing seems to sit within an academic discourse and, for non-academic readers, this can make challenging reading: this was the case for many in our reading groups. Words like 'pedagogy', 'epistemology', and 'axiological' are commonly found in academic writing but are not used in everyday language, in this country at least. Freire's ideas are similarly abstract and theoretical, and more at home in an academic context. In relation to the spiritual nature of the language of *POTO*, Freire draws from a slightly different discourse but one that is no less uncomfortable for some in a contemporary Scottish context.

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The power to exclude

Whilst the above critiques have potential relevance for all readers of *POTO*, they have particular implications for those the book is most concerned with: the oppressed. It was clear from the reading groups that the instances where language was experienced as most challenging intersected directly with people's experiences of structural oppression: those from working class backgrounds and who had least experience of higher education had the most trouble with the language of *POTO*.

That academic language can be experienced as more challenging for those with experience of poverty is not because of any kind of innate difference but because of structural and cultural differences in experience driven by power. Differing access to opportunities plays a part: UCAS statistics over recent years show a growing gap between those from working class backgrounds being offered places at Universities, and those from middle- and upper-class backgrounds. This gap in access to academic spaces mirrors the gaps in people's access to, and thus familiarity with, academic language and literacy (Player, 2013). However, the difference begins much sooner than university, or even school. James Gee's work on the links between poverty and academic reading ability highlight that young readers from poorer backgrounds face barriers, both in their access to 'academic prototypes' (2015: 16) in the home and the community, and in the ways in which schools further deepen these barriers by undermining the language prototypes young people from poorer (and non-white) backgrounds do experience outside school. Gee states:

> ...the fact of the matter is that racism and power are just as much cognitive issues as they are political ones. Children will not identify with—they will even disidentify with—teachers and schools that they perceive as hostile, alien, or oppressive to their home-based identities (Gee, 2015: 33).

For Gee, learning is all about identity and identification (ibid). This point is illustrated by Darren McGarvey's experience of reading in a working-class community in Glasgow:

> My struggle to find meaning – or rather, to find the meaning ascribed by the curriculum, in order that I pass a test – led me to take an increasingly hostile attitude towards poetry and poets, which matched my now belligerent attitude towards reading and readers. However, beneath my disruptive behaviour lay an aggrieved sense of rejection and exclusion, and a crushing feeling of personal failure.

Gee's research, and McGarvey's experience, echo what many theorists, from Foucault to Bernstein to Fairclough have highlighted, and what Freire himself reminds us: 'Language is never neutral'. The notion of the centrality of language was essential to Freire as a critical literacy pedagogue concerned with decoding and unveiling how language reinforces the inequities of power distribution, especially in relation to social class. Giroux's question is pertinent: *'what happens when the language of the educator is not the same as that of the oppressed?'* (1992, 19).

Language has the power to maintain power dynamics - to exclude some and include others. And this is certainly true of academic language which has a long history of excluding. In this context we believe there are definite ways in which *the book* serves to replicate experiences of power – specifically oppression: participants in the reading groups experienced this. Nevertheless, should we hold the author responsible for the ways in which structural oppression manifest through language today, given that he was writing some 50 years ago in an altogether different context? And were there good reasons Freire used the words he used?

The power to name

As McGarvey navigated school he was keen to blame the poets, but he later notes the irony in this, for he later became a rapper and writer. For McGarvey, as challenging as the experience may be, navigating across language communities (or discourses) can be an empowering experience:

> In Pollok I was singled out for using 'fancy words' like 'beautiful'. In the West End enclaves such eloquence is nullified by what is perceived – by some in the educated, professional class – as roguish and vulgar rage. In

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> effect, it means no matter how much common sense you may (or may not) talk...people can simply dismiss it instinctively if it doesn't conform to the behavioural or linguistic norms common to their own narrow experience. In crossing these divides we learn more than we could ever hope to by simply talking amongst ourselves and this is why I push through the excruciating discomfort. (McGarvey 2015)

As much as language can maintain power relations, it can also be a source of power for those on the other side of oppression. Words can open doors to opportunities, they can help us to connect in ways which are more meaningful and more insightful, and they can help us challenge structures of oppression (*understanding* the language those in power use is central to challenging it and to challenging their actions). A cogent example of where words have been a tool for reclaiming power for and by the oppressed is hip-hop music. Hip-hop harnesses power by both legitimising and celebrating the language used in communities which has traditionally been presented as inferior (Gee, 2015:14), and by claiming other language territories for its own. In hip-hop there is no shortage of big words (take the Wu-Tang Clan lyric: "*I bomb atomically, Socrates' philosophies, And hypotheses can't define how I be droppin' these Mockeries*"): a recent study found that a number of hip-hop artists demonstrate a wider vocabulary than Shakespeare did. The ability to harness language is the ultimate source of power in hip-hop – both in relation to an individual opponent but also in relation to structural opponents – and border-crossing of language territories is most definitely encouraged in the quest for the 'right' language. This is true to such an extent that hip-hop is now being employed as an educational tool in the sciences (Edmin, 2010).

If hip hop artists aren't afraid to use big words, then why should we be? Freire used the language he did because he was writing a text which sought to articulate complex theoretical ideas about education and its relationship to power. *POTO* was not intended as a practical 'how to' guide, though it certainly relates to the practical. As Martin and Shaw (1999) highlight: *'The relationship between theory and practice is a dialectical one: theory posing problems for practice, practice providing the experience to interrogate theoretical analysis'* As practitioners, we have an increasing tendency to demand practical instructions at the expense of theory. In Freire's later publications he

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would do more to weave lived experience and practice into his writing, but in *POTO* he was primarily concerned with outlining his theory.

Le Guin (2016) argues that:

> One of the functions of art is to give people the words to know their own experience. There are always areas of vast silence in any culture, and part of an artist's job is to go into those areas and come back from the silence with something to say.

This is true of theory as well as art and Freire used both: part of the ongoing power of *POTO* lies in Freire's ability to go into that area of silence – specifically mainstream 'education' – and return with something to say which made us say: *"yeah, that's it. That's how I feel.*" Freire's metaphor of 'banking education' was one that quickly captured the minds of many, not least in our reading groups. But there are also many more complex metaphors, ideas, words which give us a new lens through which to understand our complex experiences of education, of power, of humanisation, as well as the experiences we might have; for Freire was concerned with writing about what might be – with 'untested feasibility' (1978; 102), a territory which sometimes requires new language to navigate.

The power of Freire's theology-infused poetics – for his call to love, to humility, to faith – were challenging to those in the reading groups, but they were ultimately some of the most powerful ideas which participants would take away. One participant reflecting on his reading group experience in Edinburgh said that he arrived to hear utter frustration initially about the text but left hearing a dialogue around love! Such language is uncomfortable for many of us precisely because it is revolutionary: because it challenges hetero-patriarchal capitalist assumptions about how we should relate to one another. To regain a language which is counter to this – which is humanising in that it connects our emotional, our spiritual and our intellectual selves – is fundamental (Gerassi & Guevara, 1969).

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The treachery of low expectations

Whilst critiques of Freire's language are important in our reading of his work, when such critiques stray into an active unwillingness to engage with challenging language on our own part, we risk missing the chance to connect with important and potentially transformative ideas. However, when our expectations *of others* are lowered we enter more treacherous and potentially 'oppressive' territory. As discussed above, there are structural reasons why particular kinds of language can be off-putting when first encountered, but we must not doubt people's capacity to learn. There must be a distinction between our expectations of where people are at as a result of facing structural oppression, and where they can be: the alternative is that we reinforce the status quo and allow the language which we agree holds so much power to remain the territory of the powerful.

The importance of dialogical spaces

Freire reminds us that *'...knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry beings pursue with the world and with others' (1970; 53).* With this in mind, we believe the importance of creating contexts in which everyone feels safe enough and included enough to pursue inquiry is fundamental. Reflecting on his early adversarial experiences with reading, Darren McGarvey talks about how he came to harness language as a tool through which he became one of the most powerful, critical and creative voices speaking and writing in Scotland today:

> I came to depend on listening to other people discuss and debate as a way of grasping what I might otherwise have learned from books... By talking and listening to what others had to say – and paying attention to how they said it – I developed an ability to communicate with different types of people on a broad range of subjects, which might even have suggested I was an avid reader. (Darren McGarvey, Oct 2017)

What McGarvey advocates is not that we discard big words, but instead, that we provide a range of ways of meeting language, of interrogating it, being interrogated by it, and learning how to make it our own. Just as the accessibility of spaces depends as much

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on how we find and enter them as to how they feel when we inhabit them, the same is true of language. We approached the reading groups with the aim of creating a small but important space in which to meet Freire's language and to become a little more at ease with it; to rant about the absurd length of his *"high-falutin"* words but also to conquer their syllables and meanings; to mispronounce them but also to announce them and to claim their power for our own.

To achieve this aim, we encouraged people to meet the text where they were at: we began the groups by inviting everyone to take a random page from *POTO* and to respond to it using any tool/material they liked, from pens to images foraged from the pages of *National Geographic*. Our hope was that this would allow everyone to bring something into the room, be it a response to the entire chapter or a response to a single sentence or section they had (or had not) connected with in that moment. We also tried to create a sense of supported enquiry in our reading groups and to reinforce the idea that we are reading and learning together: in Aberdeen, we took this beyond the intangible to the tangible with participants sitting back-to-back to read a page from the book to represent the emotional and intellectual connection we wanted participants to experience. We also purposefully encouraged people to input both what they loved about the book ("Say it again, Freire!") and what they didn't ("Say what, Freire?"), which made it easier to capture the nuanced and diverse reading experiences of the participants! We're not certain these techniques worked for everyone, but we hope that we went someway to making *POTO* more accessible to the participants of the reading groups.

Conclusion

It is our view that whilst we are alert to the power language gives and withholds, there is value in 'big words', as long as we can harness their power for ourselves instead of abdicating it. We believe that sometimes big words (and even poetic words like 'love') are the best words to describe the world we live in – and particularly the ways in which power, oppression and culture operate – in ways that capture the complexity and nuance of these experiences. The same is true of complex ideas.

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For CAMINA, there is a lot at stake in the commemoration of Paulo Freire's *POTO*. This seminal text has profoundly influenced and informed the work that we do as critical educators and it is our task to support that same profound experience for others. In order to do this, it is our assertion that we must create inclusive spaces which support dialogical and participatory ways of engaging and of building relationships with each other, with language, with ideas and with the world around us. Only then can we hope to transform with a well-thumbed copy of *POTO* in hand.

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CONCEPT
THE JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITY EDUCATION PRACTICE THEORY

Vol. 9 No. 3, Winter, 2018

Pedagogy of Courage: For a spiritual materialist praxis of humanisation in critical pedagogy

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Introduction

Like countless others, my personal journey in critical pedagogy began in earnest back in 2011 after reading Paulo Freire's (2005) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In this article, I reflect on this journey, first critiquing my earlier dualistic interpretation of Freire's concept of 'conscientisation' and then outlining my shift to a non-dualistic embrace and reimagination of his concept of 'humanisation'. By 'dualism' I refer to any ontology of separation in contrast to a *non*-dualist ontology that recognises the ultimate unity of all life. Whereas a dualist critical pedagogy separates head from body and heart, a non-dualist critical pedagogy is founded on an holistic concept and practice of knowledge that reunites head (mind) with body and heart and, indeed, gives primacy to emotional and spiritual knowledge. From this non-dualist ontological perspective, I define 'dehumanisation' as processes of (self-, natural, social) alienation and, conversely, 'humanisation' as an overarching term for the multifaceted process of reunification and healing.

In articulating a *non*-dualist critical pedagogy, I propose what I call a 'spiritual materialist' approach. Such an approach would, as ever, work with communities to understand and address the pressing, *material* challenges they face (e.g. housing, energy, poverty) and would emphasise that our capacity to imagine and implement genuinely transformational solutions to these problems necessitates a transformation in social *relations.* Consequently, a spiritual materialist practice would begin with a *spiritual* reconnection achieved through empathic and emergent practices of deep listening, storytelling, and meditation. Such spiritual practices enable the generation of community and of healing as foundations for subsequent transformation of material injustices. Similarly, I argue that, whilst the process of conscientisation entails coming

to understand the historical nature of the barriers to our humanisation, 'conscientisation' defined merely as the development of an 'analytical awareness' of these barriers is insufficient since these barriers exist, first and foremost, in our very bodies and souls as the trauma of current and intergenerational violence (Ledwith, 2011: 122). Consequently, from a spiritual materialist perspective, conscientisation processes must transcend the level of logos to become a 'politics of embodied spirituality' (Anzaldua, 2015: 152).

In conclusion, I argue that critical pedagogy must ground itself in a *spiritual* materialism that allows the collective wounds of our past to reveal the non-violent ways of knowing and being that naturally generate the practical solutions to the material problems we face. Finally, since the degree of personal and collective disorientation and deconstruction that such a process of humanisation necessitates demands great courage, I recognise courage as 'the principal emotion' of critical pedagogy (Amsler, 2015: 114).

A dualist interpretation of 'conscientisation'

Perhaps the first actual conscious, free, life-defining decision I ever took in my life occurred in 2003 when, aged 27, I left my well-paid job in the City of London to pursue postgraduate study in International Development at the School of Oriental and African Studies. (Miserable, alienating) security rejected for (uncertain, precarious, relative) freedom. A two-year MPhil in Development Studies at Oxford followed. Then came a PhD, also at Oxford, on the Post-Soviet politics of Georgia. The question motivating this journey, or so I thought, was something like: 'Why is there so much injustice and inequality in our world?'

The power of critical social theory lies in its ability to give one the glasses to see as yet invisible social structures and a language to understand and communicate fundamental, experienced truths. The moments of revelation it can produce can provoke a dangerous proselytising urge that can make us see people as objects to make free; a dualist separation that underpins a dehumanising politics of violence. I was fortunate, then, so soon after Marx's critical political economy had revealed much of the water I swam in, to read Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. As Marx himself most famously pointed

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out, the obvious follow-up question to why the world is the way it is, to paraphrase: 'how the hell do we change it?' Paulo Freire gave me radical democratic answers to this question. He showed me that the question of change was a *pedagogical* question - change entails *learning* to change.

So, that, I thought, was that: Marx had helped me understand the 'why' and Freire had taught me the 'how'. It was, according to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, to facilitate an intellectual process of personal and collective 'conscientisation'; to activate the innate but suppressed intellectuality within 'the oppressed' - a critical awareness of the historical conditions shaping one's life and the capacities to alter them. Intellectual answers to intellectual questions. The method, as I understood it, went something like this: In a community development setting, the Freireian teacher begins by working with their group to uncover the group's 'generative themes' - the issues that participants speak about with strong emotions (Freire, 2005: 97). This is based on the pedagogically and ontologically sound assertion that only by beginning with people's emotions can we hope to inspire them to commit to a process of transformation: 'emotions lead to motivation'. The next step is for the teacher to produce a 'code', through any potential medium, to reflect the themes captured from group dialogue back to the group (ibid: 105). If the code resonates – if the group recognises the social reality presented to them – the next step is to begin a critical process of understanding by exploring the political, social, cultural causes of these problems that participants are facing. 'What?' deepens into 'why?' A sufficient amount of critical analysis then leads us towards collective action: 'What can we do about it?' We enter into an ongoing praxis of action and reflection/learning, a praxis that drives a process of conscientisation – the hegemonic '*doxa'* is superseded by the collective *logos*.

Early dualistic experiments in community education

My first attempt to apply this kind of methodological approach was as a co-founding member of something called 'PPE' (People's Political Economy) in 2012. I and four friends launched PPE in Oxford, where we then studied and taught, as a project to establish learning groups in community organisations aimed at learning about and responding to the politics of austerity. We trained postgraduate students in basic Freireian pedagogy and helped them to run learning groups in a youth project, a school,

a homeless centre, and a mental health charity. I personally ran a weekly learning group with people with learning disabilities for over two years. I have written about the strengths and especially the limitations of PPE elsewhere (Lazarus 2017).

When my friends and I were designing our PPE intervention, we put together an outline of a programme and even a proposed syllabus. I look back at this approach most uneasily now. I feel it reflected my social detachment from the violent realities and low literacy levels of most PPE participants. It reflects, above all, for me now, and I speak only for myself here, a fundamentally dualistic, and therefore ultimately non-radical, understanding of the pedagogical question of transformation. Though I understood that the gateway to transformation occurred through the heart – 'emotions as motivations' – I remained entrenched in one-dimensional conceptualisation of knowledge and, thus, of transformation itself as driven by intellectual processes of conscientisation. Consciousness, for me, was ultimately rational.

After PPE, I continued to work with various community groups on a voluntary basis. I confess that, even with groups with participants with more stable lives, it proved very hard, longer-term, to sustain levels of participation, energy, and focus. In 2017, I hit a wall, withdrew entirely from community education, and spent a prolonged period of time uncertain, demoralised, and somewhat disillusioned. My situation demanded a profound moment of reflection and re-imagination on my part. Of course, I was quite willing to reflect openly on my own practical and strategic limitations and errors, but I had to consider the possibility that there might be something more fundamental here to explore with Freireian pedagogy as I had interpreted it.

In no way do I wish to demean Freire's philosophy or Freireian methods. I found huge philosophical and practical wisdom in Freire's work and also Ann Hope and Sally Timmel's (1999) Freireian four-volume series *Training for Transformation*, derived from the authors' own extensive community education practices in Africa. I worked hard to apply their 'Psycho-Social Method' to our setting. I seek to emphasise that my own personal interpretation of Freire's philosophy expressed a flawed reductionism at this time that omitted fundamental elements of his thinking.

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CONCEPT
The Journal of Contemporary Community Education Practice Theory
Vol. 9 No. 3, Winter, 2018

Reflections, awakenings, reimaginings

The heart has reasons that reason does not understand. (Pascal, 1958: 200)

I read, I reflected, I meditated. A new engagement with feminist and decolonial scholars combined with what I can only describe as a spiritual awakening to enable a possibility to radically rethink my own ontology and praxis.

Through spiritual practice and learning, I have come to embrace a non-dualist understanding of the nature of reality. What this means, above all, is a revised, holistic understanding and practice of *knowing* that reunites head with body and heart. Indeed, it is an understanding and practice that recognises, as Pascal's quote asserts, the deeper unifying knowing of the body and heart. By way of example, it was only when I began to quieten my mind and listen to my heart that I came to realise that my own journey itself had not been motivated initially by intellectual inquiry into injustice at all, but, instead, by an emotional and spiritual response, the *feeling of pain*, to the violence of that injustice.

The second outcome of this ontological evolution was that I came to embrace epistemological positions and practices that embodied and promoted a non-dualist ontology. In particular, I find deep satisfaction in learning from feminist and decolonial writers how transcending patriarchy and colonialism are not just ethically important objectives, but are intrinsic to the the reunification of our world – the overcoming of alienation and the healing of humanity, i.e. to any personal or collective process of humanisation.

Third, this shift to non-dualism made me rethink my interpretation of Freireian pedagogy with its emphasis on conscientisation and move towards a new focus on Freire's term 'humanisation'. When I revisited *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* with my new ontological spectacles on, I was intrigued to recall that it was 'humanisation' rather than 'conscientisation' that featured in the book's very first sentence. More intriguingly, Freire (2005: 1) defines 'humanisation' here most ambiguously only through its antithesis, dehumanisation - 'the distortion of the process of becoming more human'. Equally revealing was to find 'conscientisation' defined by Freire as 'the deepening of

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the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence'. Such a definition opened a space for me to reinterpret Freire's critical pedagogy spiritually. I was emboldened in this reinterpretation by Freire's later, more categorical, statements. For example…

> Consciousness of, an intentionality of consciousness, does not end with rationality...This consciousness is a totality — reason, feelings, emotions, desires; my body, conscious of the world and myself, seizes the world toward which it has an intention. (Freire, 2000: 95).

And yet, I still felt a lacuna here – a need not just to define humanisation in far more explicitly non-dualist terms, but to explore the nature of a pedagogy based on this definition.

Beyond the logos: conscientisation as embodied knowing, humanisation as healing

As someone with a passion for political economy and social theory more broadly, I remain entirely convinced that, as Margaret Ledwith (2011: 122) has put it, 'the key to understanding injustice lies in everyday life – and it is the analytical awareness of this injustice that is the process of conscientisation'. And yet, through the journey I have undertaken, I know that 'analytical awareness' at the level of logos is insufficient.

Conscientisation must entail an evolution of consciousness founded on deeper ways of knowing. Ultimately, the history we must confront resides in the deep, 'dark lake' of collective, intergenerational trauma present in our bodies, our DNA, our souls. It is a history of violence perpetrated above all on those individuals and groups, most notably 'indigenous women and women of colour', who continue to be 'subject to ontological and epistemological invisibilisation' (Motta, 2017: 185). There is a dialectical necessity, then, for 'the wretched of the earth' to 'articulate a voice from the margins which speaks the unspeakable', and, in doing so, to 'enact a decolonising praxis' that provide us with a revolutionary 'emancipatory politics of knowledge' (Fanon, 2001; Motta, 2017: 185). Why? For one, because the subterranean ways of knowing that they instantiate can bring healing to all. Only such ways of knowing, ways that 'exceed the onto-epistemological logics of coloniality', can truly heal us, because the trauma of the

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violence of all forms of domination that coloniality encapsulates lies fathoms beyond mind, beyond logos (Motta, 2017: 190).

These spiritual ways of knowing belong to no one; nor is any one person or group solely victim or perpetrator - 'We are all wounded' (Anzaldua, 2015: 62). All our bodies and souls, fragmented and torn, carry the legacy of personal and intergenerational violence. What is to be healed, above all, is the collective. The individual is healed in this great process.

Spiritual materialism

A materialist critique of this spiritual approach would, I imagine, emphasise a perceived detachment from the urgency required to address the immediate physical suffering caused by hunger, homelessness, illness, and cold. I would assert that critical pedagogues have always sought, through processes of conscientisation, to help communities shift away from hegemonic rationalisations of such suffering as being caused by material lacks, technical faults, or personal deficiencies with their emphases on immediate interventions towards identifying the deep-rooted, structural, *relational* factors at work. It follows, then, that, while not ignoring the need for action, critical pedagogues must commit to building spaces for reimagining and transforming our relations. The 'materialism' in 'spiritual materialism' articulates a fundamental premise that human beings are embodied, that we have physical needs, and that we make and remake ourselves through making and remaking our world. Through systemic analysis, it also critiques a dangerous spirituality that insists that one's physical suffering derives merely from an unevolved level of consciousness. The 'spiritual' element, however, takes the materialist emphasis on production further to assert that we are not objects of creation (of a transcendent god), but are ourselves creators (god is immanent within us) and that the solutions to our material problems will automatically follow when we transcend doxa and logos to channel the infinitely greater creative energy of our spirits. This is what Otto Scharmer (2013: 1) calls 'presencing'. If there were a pithy, practical maxim for a spiritual materialist critical pedagogy, it might be: 'Get the relations right; the solutions will naturally follow'. However, for the reasons stated and for many more, 'getting the relations right' requires great courage – from pedagogue and participants alike. What we need, above all, then, is a pedagogy of courage.

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Courage – critical pedagogy's 'principal emotion'

The 'principal emotion' of critical pedagogy and, thus, of radical democracy is courage(Amsler, 2015: 114). We need the courage to confront what Gloria Anzaldua (2015: 50) called our '*desconocimient*o' – what bell hooks (1994: 28) calls the 'addiction to lying and denial' that a 'culture of domination necessarily promotes' – and to pursue instead the path of '*conocimiento*' towards 'awakening, insights, understandings, realizations, courage, and the motivation to engage in concrete ways with the potential to bring us into compassionate interactions' (Anzaldua, 2015: 60). This cannot be achieved through a praxis of conscientisation that remains at the level of logos.

Paulo Freire (2005: 49) once wrote that: 'Liberation is...a childbirth and thus a painful one'. The path of humanisation is unavoidably painful. It demands nothing less than the deconstruction of our very selves: 'To be healed we must be dismembered, pulled apart. The healing occurs in disintegration, in the demotion of the ego as the self's only authority' (Anzaldua, 2015: 74). It requires a pedagogy of profound discomfort. But, it is in the very immersion into our wounds that the healing occurs. 'In shadow work, the problem is part of the cure – you don't heal the wound; the wound heals you' (Anzaldua, 2015: 148). This work – what Anzaldua (2015: 206) calls the 'politics of embodied spiritualities' – is the healing work that cannot ultimately be done alone. It is a collective work, a work that demands authentic dialogue and generates community, hope, and courage.

Conclusion

In the opening lines of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Paulo Freire defined humanisation by its antithesis 'dehumanisation'. I see dehumanisation as alienation. Alienation in all its forms is the product of violence in all its forms. All drivers and legitimations of violence, in turn, derive from a dualist ontology that conceives of life as made up of separate, discrete living entities. In contrast, a non-dualist ontology of a unified reality makes violence irrational and faith in the possibility of a non-violent world historically rational. A radical, non-violent critical pedagogy must be built on non-dualist ontological foundations. In this context, I feel that, whilst the dualist interpretation of

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conscientisation that I initially developed from reading *Pedgogy of the Oppressed* – the rendering separate and superior of mind, of logos – is addressed in Freire's later works, it is not satisfactorily overcome. If dehumanisation is alienation, then humanisation involves a process of reunification, of healing. Intriguingly, the literal meaning of the word 'yoga' is 'union'. Just as yogic practice is a unified practice of mind, body, heart, soul, humanisation as process entails the same.

We, as critical pedagogues, must learn to become not just social scientists, but individuals able to hold spaces of compassion, courage, and hope strong enough to heal the wounds of our past and to reorder the social material of our present. Such a process requires great personal and collective courage. We must courageously 'refuse to accept spirituality as a devalued form of knowledge and instead elevate it to the same level occupied by science and rationality' (Anzaldua, 2015: 192). We need the courage to ground critical pedagogy within a spiritual materialism. Personally, I feel en*couraged* enough to reengage with communities once more, confident in the presence of a deeper knowing that the answers to our problems are always and already there within us – in the dialogue, but, above all, in the silence.

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CONCEPT
THE JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITY EDUCATION PRACTICE THEORY

Vol. 9 No. 3, Winter, 2018

Freire at the Ceilidh! Community Dance as a Training for Dialogue

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The Adult Learning Project (ALP) was established in 1979 in the Gorgie/Dalry area of Edinburgh, a working class area of 19th century tenements. Started by local women activists following a course exploring the methods of Paulo Freire, ALP was supported by the City Community Education department with government funding for 3/4 workers. Freire's concept of praxis was built in. Local investigations developed a programme of education addressing social issues, and community action groups arose out of this programme. The ALP association of learners raised the funds to develop the action, and steered the project. For 39 years ALP has taken initiatives in Women's issues, Social history, Arts, Language, Migration and Political issues. The City of Edinburgh Council discontinued financial support in 2016. This article is based upon work that was undertaken in the late 1980s/early 1990s.

In 1988/9 in Dalry, an old working-class district in west Edinburgh, the Adult Learning Project (ALP) invited all the participants, and other local people to come together in a series of dialogues to create new programmes and actions through discussing *Scotland and its people –What's happening to us?* ALP's experiment in implementing Freirian adult education and community development thus moved, with the people, into a new phase of development in the 1990s, engaging with the national debate about the constitutional and cultural future of Scotland, and culminating in the establishment of a Scottish Parliament on the 1st of July 1999.

Programmes and actions of Women's Studies, Scots and Gaelic language studies, Writers' workshops, Land issues, local and social history and a National photographic survey were rolled out. As part of this process of decoding Scottish culture, we examined indigenous means of cultural artistic expression and found that much of our

traditional arts had undergone a kind of sustained cultural invasion and become degraded. Many Scots people, having had their musical culture adopted and transformed firstly by the Queen at Balmoral and aped by the British aristocracy, and then Holywoodised in movies and television, smelt the inauthenticity of what was presented for their consumption and turned their backs on it. Following the Second World War, the industrial working classes have adopted the values and practices of the global popular entertainment industry and become passive consumers of commodified art, and less and less producers of music song and dance in their own communities. As Freire argues in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

> Cultural conquest leads to the cultural inauthenticity of those who are invaded: they begin to respond to the values, the standards and the goals of the invaders. (p122)

He goes on:

> The more invasion is accentuated, and those invaded are alienated from the spirit of their own culture, the more the latter want to be like the invaders: to walk like them, dress like them, talk like them. (p122)

Thus, all over the world, young people turn their backs on indigenous art forms to ape American pop music, sing in American accents and reject community dancing in favour of individualistic 'bopping'. Important challenges to this increasing musical hegemony have come from folk musicians, the Beatles 'English' Pop, and the Proclaimers singing pop songs in their native Scots language.

ALP proposed to help reconnect people with their traditional music, song and dance in ways that challenged the dominant ideas of individualism through the celebrity system, and regain knowledge of and respect for the power of these traditional practices. We would set up a system of teaching, performing, and promoting to try to rediscover and remake our own musical culture. The Scots Music Group became a phenomenon in Popular Adult Education. Starting with 60 students in 4 classes in 1990, numbers more

than doubled year on year till, by 1999, more than 500 adults were attending classes in instrumental music, song and dance.

Since the establishment of the ALP project in 1979, at the end of each phase of learning, or on significant calendar dates, the learners/activists and workers had celebrated the work done with social events, and parties, to make the education, as Freire encourages, 'always - always social', and as a way of sharing what we had discovered and created in the various learning groups. This sharing demonstrated that, whatever theme we were collectively exploring, each group had a different sub-theme to contribute. Thus, at a party during a study tour to the Highlands, the Land group would share discoveries of landlord oppression, the History group would discover the background, and the Gaelic language group would translate significant land features which related to these struggles. We encouraged poets, and musicians, amongst the participants, to perform and find appropriate work to illustrate what we were learning. We would create a 'living code' in presentations and performance. We were learning 'authentic comradeship rather than false gregariousness'.

The in- house parties followed a natural pattern that is known in Gaelic culture as a 'ceilidh', meaning a gathering in a house for gossip, storytelling, music, song and dance.

What we needed to do, once the Scots music group was established, was create larger social events which would involve the, by now, hundreds of ALP students, but also continue the sharing and dialogical ethos of these social events. We thought of Ceilidh Dances. As part of the general cultural renewal, which was flowering in Scotland in the early1990s, a small number of people across Scotland sought to reinvent community dancing in a more authentic manner, and we invited learner musicians and tutors to make a band for dancing. Community dances in larger halls seemed wholly appropriate to our organisation's Freirian ethos. We then stared to hold regular ceilidh dances in local community halls, have done so for 20 years now, and they perform vital community development and fundraising functions, for what has become the ALP Democratic Learning Community.

Since the 1950s, community dancing in western society has diminished to such an extent that it is generally perceived as the preserve of a weird minority of eccentric hobbyists. It has been replaced by a general phenomenon of individual dancing in response to music, without reference to anyone else on the dance floor, or of course the mutation of dance music from the dance hall to the concert platform for passive consumption. Thus, a participative community activity becomes commodified into a spectacle. While doing your own thing has its own liberating aspect, the loss of competence in community dance seems very significant.

By community dance, I mean a group of people dancing the same bodily movements and patterns, in time with one another and the music: keeping together in time. William McNeill in *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* (ACLS POD), argues that: 'Indeed community dancing is, like language, a capability that marks humans off from all other forms of life'. In other words, community dancing makes human groups more successful by encouraging co-operation translated into hunting and agriculture. He postulates a deep understanding of synergy and collectivism experienced in keeping time together:

> Words are inadequate to describe the emotion aroused by the prolonged movement in unison. A sense of pervasive wellbeing; more specifically, a strange sense of personal enlargement: a sort of swelling out, becoming bigger than life, thanks to participation in collective ritual.

All human societies have marked the calendar and celebrated rituals with Community dance. The Harvester vase from Minoan Crete in 1500 BC is one of the earliest known representations of community dance, so we are losing something important and profoundly 'humanising' if we forget this powerful cultural expression.

Paulo Freire would have recognised that dancing together is part of being 'fully human'. In 1988, we put on a ceilidh in Dundee, where Dr. Freire was working with community educators from across Scotland, and, after the dancing, I had a conversation with him about the importance of community dance in Brazil; in particular 'Forro' dancing in Northern Brazil. This was the dance of his region and he recognised the similarity and

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liberating aspects of our community dances. Twenty years later I discovered that 'Forro' was a corruption of 'For All' signs with which the British railway company in the area encouraged workers to come to dances.

So, what are the elements of the Ceilidh dance that have a resonance in the ideas of Paulo Freire?

First, 'dialogue is an encounter between men [humans], mediated by the world in order to name the world' (p61).

Ceilidh dances invite the active participation of dancers in dialogue with each other, and between the dancers and the musicians. They encounter each other. All are engaged in the act of creation, in 'naming the world'. The dialogue between the dancers, first of all, requires a responding to your partner, seeking a balance of weight, strength, competence and vigour. Experienced dancers teach and encourage the less experienced, and new dancers encourage a gentleness and care by the more experienced, and an equilibrium is reached.

Second, 'through dialogue –a new term emerges teacher-student with student-teachers. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow' (p53).

The couple then has to be aware of all the other dancers, either simply to avoid crashing into them or, in circle dances and group dances, making complex patterns of movement. In ceilidh dances, there is absolutely no hierarchy; they are organised so that everyone gets a turn in taking the lead, and the dance is complete once everyone has done so. The group comes to understand that, in order to make the dance flow, every member must reach a level of competence that at least will not disturb the flow, and so much support and encouragement goes on. All the dancers are 'subjects' not 'objects' in this process:

As the dancer loses himself in the dance, as he becomes absorbed in the unified community, he reaches a state of elation in which he feels himself filled with energy or force immediately beyond his ordinary state, and so finds himself able to perform

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prodigies of exertion. (A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (1922)*The Andaman Islanders: A Study in Social Anthropology*, The University Press, Cambridge)

The musicians and the dance caller can seem at first sight engaged in 'Banking education' by simply issuing instructions for the crowd to follow and may seem at times authoritarian, but this is to miss the nature of the dialogical contract between them and the dancers. A band will be sensitive to the character of the dancers, their level of experience, their age, and adjust the programme and tempo accordingly. Experienced dancers will request particular dances and make demands of the band in terms of tempo and style of playing. The caller could be viewed as introducing the 'theory' of the dance and the dancers as the 'action' and the joint performance is the liberating 'praxis' which, through rhythmic muscular bonding and prolonged aerobic activity, induces joyfulness.

Becoming skilled at community dancing is not easy! As Freire says of dialogue: 'It is not a weekend on a tropical beach. It is hard but enjoyable work'. As the dancers become more competent, they start to express their own style and moves. Community dance satisfies what, in self-determination theory, are the three prerequisites for full humanity and happiness: relatedness, autonomy and competence.

> The revival and development of ceilidh dances in Scotland, particularly in the cities where the populations had almost wholly lost touch with indigenous art forms, addresses the phenomenon Freire describes as 'cultural invasion'.

In this phenomenon, the invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group, and ignoring the potential of the latter, they impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression. (p.121)

Sometimes this invasion via global media is urbane, and covert, so that the relentless propaganda for, and air play of, American derived pop music, coupled with huge investment in production values (Its slick and bright!) convinces the listener that this is the new and sexier way to go. Sometimes all that is required, when most of our

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information comes through electronic media, is for indigenous music not to be given any air time, and then the people forget about it and are unfamiliar and disconnected when they are exposed to it. Their aesthetic sense has been dulled and limited in the battle to sell them the latest sound. They have become 'alienated from the spirit of their culture':

> For cultural invasion to succeed, it is essential that those invaded become convinced of their intrinsic inferiority. (p122)

Sometimes the invasion is more aggressive and direct. In the 1940s and 50s, Scottish dance music on the radio was very popular. The BBC, anxious to impose their own bourgeois western values, side stepped the local traditional musicians, who they considered too wild and rough, and employed members of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra to remake the music and introduce classical harmonies, under the musical direction of mainly western classical musicians. When they began to employ local musicians, they insisted on a style of playing which reflected this aesthetic. If the musicians did not agree to 'inhibit their creativity… by curbing their expression', they were simply not employed or given airtime. Thus, a generation of Scots folk accepted this amended and invaded form of their tradition and began to reproduce it.

The dances, and the music for them, have evolved in a particularly Scottish idiom. They have, as Freire would say, an intrinsic 'historicity'. They are drawn from a carrying stream of traditions over many centuries. That is not to say the ceilidh dance revival is, like some heritage movements, a sort of cultural archaeology. The revival has encouraged some fusion with rock and other music, and the dancers are developing new moves and dances within the authentic spirit of the dance. The maintenance of these traditions, as well as an aesthetic process (we just like their power and vigour!), has been crucial for maintaining and developing a sense of identity in the community, and with migrants overseas, even when made less 'authentic' as outlined above.

Freire maintains that 'without a sense of identity there can be no real struggle'. The role of folk music in struggles in Latin America has been profound. Folk singer Victor Jara for instance was so threatening to the regime in Chile that he was brutally murdered in

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1973. It is no coincidence therefore that the 1990s, as well as a political reawakening in Scotland, was also a cultural re-awakening – and the development of Scottish community dancing was part of that. Young people who were engaged in that cultural and political process adopted and adapted ceilidh dancing in the period, took ownership as subjects, and transformed the invaded dance form. In this period, also, young men re-invented the wearing of the kilt, often despised as a symbol of conservatism and in the ownership of the Scottish aristocracy, made it cool and a symbol of the movement towards autonomy. The kilt and ceilidh dance are now considered essential at weddings, and other community celebrations.

Throughout the 90s as demand for, and creation of, a Scottish Parliament grew, so we witnessed a huge revival of community dancing at ceilidh dances. Voluntary organisations and political movements were consolidated and sustained at these dances, many of which took place at political rallies and gatherings. It was no surprise then that the opening of the Scottish parliament was marked by a great ceilidh dance held for all the new MSPs in the historic Assembly Rooms in Edinburgh's George Street (George Street – oh the irony!). The music for that dance was played by the Robert Fish Band, formed at ALP in the white heat of cultural action

Of course, a dance revival does not a revolution make, but we see from examples of cultural resistance in other parts of the world, the crucial political role traditional and folk arts have had in maintaining identity in the face of cultural invasion and political domination. During the 1990s, the post-Soviet and Taliban governments banned instrumental music and much public music making. In spite of arrests and destruction of musical instruments, musicians have continued to ply their trade into the present. This echoes with the burning of fiddles by fundamentalist ministers in many parts of Scotland in the 19th century. Indeed, one unknown Shetland fiddler's response was to compose a dance tune "Deil stick da Minister"

> Cultural action, as historical action, is an instrument for superseding the dominant alienated and alienating culture. In this sense every authentic revolution is a cultural revolution. (P.147)

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As I play for the dance, I like to imagine Paulo and Nita Freire, whose love for each other was palpable and physical, taking to the floor and losing themselves in a wild and unbridled foursome reel. They would recognise dialogue, cultural authenticity, cultural synthesis, relatedness, praxis, humanity, love and joy in the process.

For nought can cheer the heart sae weel
As can a canty Highland reel;
It even vivifies the heel

To skip and dance:

Lifeless is he wha canna feel its influence.

Let mirth abound; let social cheer

Invest the dawnin' o' the year;

Let blythesome innocence appear,

To crown our joy;

Nor envy, wi' sarcastic sneer,

Our bliss destroy.

From *The Daft-Days*

Robert Fergusson 1750- 1774

This is an edited version of an article published in *Concept* in 2011

CONCEPT
THE JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITY EDUCATION PRACTICE THEORY

Vol. 9 No. 3, Winter, 2018

Why Antonio Gramsci offers us a framework for understanding the work of Paulo Freire: And why their work is crucial at this time

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What does an Italian social theorist born in the late 19th century and a South American educator whose main work took place in the 1960s have in common? Well, at first look, perhaps not a lot. However, if one is Antonio Gramsci and the other Paulo Freire then there are a good deal of complementary links. In fact, there is evidence that one can inform the other and can provide community work practitioners with a powerful way of understanding and interpreting their work. I will consider the contribution Gramsci and Freire can make in developing a theory and practice that is aimed at achieving change for oppressed and marginalised people, and why their work is important at this time.

First, examining the writings of Gramsci (1891-1937) we see that he recognised the inadequacies of Karl Marx's powerful but rigid economic deterministic vision of society. Instead, Gramsci builds on the German philosophers' work to provide us with a more expanded and reflexive version of politics. He rejects the concept of politics as solely being about electoral and narrow party politics, or the occupancy of state power. Instead Gramsci perceives politics as a struggle for moral and intellectual leadership.
In his extensive writings, Gramsci discusses the notion that any ruling elite dominates subordinate classes, groups and communities with a combination of force and consent. He argues that this force is exercised through the armed forces, the police, the law courts and prisons, while consent is gained through the political, moral and intellectual leadership within civil society. This is described as hegemony which, to quote Simon, is:

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> …the relation between classes and other social forces. A hegemonic class, or part of a class, is one which gains the consent of the other classes and social forces, through creating and maintaining a system of alliance by means of political struggle. (Simon, 1982: 22)

Gramsci argues that civil society, which we understand as consisting of organisations such as political parties, trade unions, churches and cultural, charitable and community groups, is central in sustaining the hegemony. According to Gramscians, civil society is the sphere where popular democratic struggles are grouped together – 'race', gender, age, sexuality, community, ethnicity, nation, and so forth – and it is here that the struggle for hegemony takes place.

To achieve an effective hegemony, Gramsci argued, there must be a number of beliefs or ideas which are generally accepted by all but which serve to justify the interests of the dominant groups. These images, concepts and ideas which 'make sense' of everyday experiences are collectively known as an 'ideology'. Gramsci also argues that ideology is the cement that keeps society together and any change in ideology has to be undertaken at the institutional level. However, he also argues that the subordinate classes or groups do not necessarily have the conceptual tools to fully comprehend the situation, or the means to formulate the radical alternatives to change the ideology or overcome the hegemonic forces. If change is to take place, Gramsci believes that 'external agents' in the form of intellectuals, organisers and leaders, are necessary. Gramsci's definition of 'intellectuals' extends beyond the traditionally held notion of thinkers, philosophers, artists, journalists and writers. It includes organisers such as civil servants and political leaders who are active in civil society, as well as engineers, managers and technicians who work in the production sphere. He describes 'organic' intellectuals as those who have been created by a particular class and 'give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields' (Gramsci, 1971: 5). These intellectuals are members of the class they represent. Thus, a dominant class creates its own intellectuals in the form of economists, civil servants, industrial managers, writers and media personnel who reflect and support the values of that class.

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The question we can pose as community development activists and academics is whether Gramsci's notion of 'organic' intellectuals is relevant for our activity. We know that most practitioners are in one way or another employed by the state either directly or by nature of their funding. They are therefore acting with particular instructions or authority, so that they could be considered to be a subordinate branch of the dominant 'organic' intellectuals. On the other hand, the fact that community workers can be at odds with the dominant ideology, and are encouraging individuals and groups to articulate their own discourse, means they do not fully agree with the dominant system or hegemony. Therefore, it could be interpreted that community workers are strategic players in helping people make connections between their position and the need for change in the hegemonic structure.

What Gramsci offers us is a view of the world where the dominant groups maintain and reproduce their ascendancy through a complex web of ideological processes, in an attempt to establish an agreed understanding of reality. This understanding of reality is intended to permeate our principles, social relationships and intellectual and moral positions. However, this understanding is never completely secure because our daily experiences of the world are frequently at odds with the view offered by bourgeois ideology. We can, therefore, simultaneously hold different and apparently contradictory and inconsistent interpretations of the world – one determined and shaped by the prevailing dominant ideology, and the other determined by our everyday experiences in communities which give us 'common-sense' knowledge. In this paradigm community workers are situated in a pivotal position in civil society, for though they are employees of the state and are required to play a part in maintaining the social system, they are not necessarily in agreement with its ideology. Accordingly, community workers have opportunities to work alongside members of communities as they articulate their contradictory understanding of the world and their situation within it.

In summary, Gramsci's theoretical work allows us to develop concepts that enable us to locate community work within a site of resistance. It is this valuable explanation of hegemony, and the function of community workers as 'organic' intellectuals in their role of finding oppositional space to work for change, that leads us to the work of Paulo

Freire, whose main focus is the use of education for transformation and whose work was to challenge school-based models.

Freire (1921-97) worked with some of the economically poorest and destitute communities in Latin America, developing approaches through which people could express their feelings and experiences and in doing so regain their confidence and develop skills and insights to change their circumstances. He argues that dominant social relations create for many people a 'culture of silence' that results in their negative, and usually suppressed, feelings about themselves. His educational approach is aimed at changing this by showing how educators can work alongside those considered oppressed in order for them to reflect on their experiences and question what was previously taken for granted.

As students of Freire will know, he proposes an educational process which rejects the traditional hierarchical 'banking' system, where knowledge is considered to be a commodity accumulated in order to gain access to positions of power and privilege. Education for Freire is a political act and he developed a philosophy and practice termed 'education for liberation' whereby learners and teachers engage in a process in which abstract and concrete knowledge, together with experience, are integrated into *praxis,* which can be defined as action intended to alter the material and social world. The fundamental features of this praxis are critical thinking and dialogue (as opposed to discussion) which seek to challenge conventional explanations of everyday life, while at the same time consider the action necessary for the transformation of oppressive conditions.

The extensive work of Freire centres on the concept of 'conscientisation', otherwise known as politicisation and political action. According to Freire, before people can engage in action for change, they have to first reflect upon their present situation. However, the nature of ideological domination means that subordinate groups accept, and frequently collude with, the reproduction of society's inequalities and the explanations and justifications offered for the status, power and privilege of their oppressors: a notion similar to that developed by Gramsci. Overcoming this false ideology means overcoming people's pessimistic and fatalistic thinking. Freire

understood this was not an easy task, but his great optimism and purpose have led to educators globally taking up the challenge.

Freire's work on the educational process needed to both validate people's experiences, culture, dreams, values and histories, while recognising that such expressions carry both the seeds of radical change and the burden of oppression – a reality well known to community work practitioners. It is this contradiction that is at the heart of the writings of Gramsci. How can we both understand and provide space for people to voice their experiences whilst working with them to create the conditions where they can critically reflect on their circumstances and begin to take action to collectively challenge those who oppress them?

We are presently living in difficult times, where the damage done to individuals and communities by neo-liberalism and the pursuit of austerity policies is being revealed on a daily basis. These policies, shaped by those who lack any real understanding or concern for the needs and lives of 'ordinary people' have created a widening gap between rich and poor in terms of income, health and life chances, coupled with the increasing massive accumulation of wealth by the global super-rich. This alongside swingeing cuts in public services, and in particular welfare services, is leading people to look seriously at just, socially equitable and democratic alternatives. It is now clear that globalisation and neo-liberalism have clawed back many of the gains made by working class and subordinate groups as the market has moved centrally into people's lives.

It is against this background that the contributions of Gramsci and Freire have never been so important for informing the practice needed to counter the ideology of individualism, the pursuit of instant gratification, the frequent disregard for moral standards and the acceptance of massive inequalities; and to help liberate communities from the shackles of social and economic division. Gramsci and Freire may have lived and worked in the last century but their ideas taken together are increasingly necessary for the circumstances we now find ourselves experiencing.

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CONCEPT
THE JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITY EDUCATION PRACTICE THEORY

Vol. 9 No. 3, Winter, 2018

In Solidarity: International Reflections

Freire at the University

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In this short article, I try to examine the role of Freire's thought in an institution such as the university which is characterized by its banking education, and scarcely democratic functioning, based on rankings, competences and the lack of a humanistic and liberating approach to education. It is my opinion that we cannot refuse to work in all educational spaces, and the university must be considered, against the dominant tendencies, as one of these. To reflect on the role that the university can play in becoming more accessible and working alongside their communities, I would like to briefly refer to a singular experience that took place at the University of Seville from 2009 to 2013: the creation and functioning of The Paulo Freire Chair. During these years, diverse projects and activities were carried out by the Chair. I describe them briefly. For a more detailed explanation see Lucio-Villegas (2016).

Educational activities

Two different educational activities took place. One was an introductory course on Freire devoted to university students coming from different faculties. The major goal of this course was to introduce the works of Paulo Freire and his relevance at the present time. The Chair held four courses with an average attendance of 15 people per course.

A second activity was dedicated to preparing university students who were going to Nicaragua to collaborate in the Literacy Campaign 'Yes, I can do it' (*Yo, si puedo,* in Spanish) during the summer. Over the four years, around 30 university students went to Nicaragua on grants from the university.

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Teaching materials and resource centre

Some teaching materials were developed during this time. (i) An adaptation of the 'Currach Project', an initiative developed in Edinburgh, Scotland by the Adult Learning Project that combines the learning of literacy skills and the building of a traditional Irish boat. (ii) A readers' guide to diverse Freire books. This readers' guide was used in the introductory courses discussed earlier. There was also an attempt to set up an Online Resource Centre but it failed due, among other things, to significant problems related to authors' rights.

Publications

The Chair has published two books. One was the translation to Spanish of a book by Clover, Follen, and Hall (2010). The second one is a small book called *To Participate by Participating* (García & Lucio-Villegas, 2009). It holds short stories written by people involved in social movements including a Historic Memory Workshop, a group of neighbours that occupied a block of social houses, and a theatre workshop by women, among others.

Keynotes and roundtables

Different types of events were developed in these years. Keynotes were organised at the beginning of each academic year on university premises. In this case, people from social movements and communities came to the university to discuss the keynote speaker or to launch a book. This always took place in particular academic spaces.

Roundtable series were planned as a dialogue amongst people – not necessarily between university teachers and people in communities – for reflecting and co-creating knowledge starting from their own reality. Three roundtable series were arranged: One related to the reading of Freire's books; a second on gender issues in Freire´s works and a third regarding Popular Education.

Taking into account the particularity of each place and the degree of interest in every event, the usual development of almost all the roundtables consisted of four phases: (1) an individual gave an opening address, (2) other people – such as practitioners, members of social movements in the community, and others – gave a speech. It was

always conducted with an attempt to be sensitive to the diversity of each place, (3) everyone in the room could add something from their own experience and (4) people from the table responded to questions, clarified meanings and so on. In some cases, activities concluded with a theatrical performance of their own plays by people from the community.

Conclusion

The work done by the Paulo Freire Chair has been based on stressing that the most important element is the people in their own context and not the expert coming from the university. In this sense, I think that these activities, such as the diverse keynotes and roundtables can be considered nearest to a Freirean way of producing knowledge by dialogue (Freire, 1970).

The Chair has held a great number of activities outside of university premises. But, it is also significant for activities to take place in the university. In this direction, the Chair has used symbolic spaces inside the university – mainly the *Paraninfo*, the most magnificent inner space – to give voice to the people. On the other hand, the way that events were organised is important. In a keynote on literacy, the participants were immigrant people that were learning Spanish at the time. They could debate the theory from their own experience as learners.

In connection with Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, it can be said that these activities enable people to reflect on and criticize their own traditional knowledge. In regards to the university, I think that encouraging these kinds of grass-roots activities can help bring the university down from its ivory tower. It is the way to co-create knowledge between communities and universities.

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Reflections on Popular Education in the context of Latin America and the Caribbean

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CEAAL was founded by Pablo Freire and is currently a Popular Education movement, which as a Network, acts and accompanies processes of educational, social, political, cultural and economic transformation of Latin American and Caribbean societies, in local, national and regional dialogue with the world. It was founded in 1982, and currently has a presence in 21 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, with around 200 organizations and affiliated groups. Affiliates develop educational actions in multiple fields of social development and with multiple social subjects, which includes a series of experiences, capacities and potentials that express an active wealth in each country.

Historically, Latin America and the Caribbean have been victims of European and North American imperialism, militarization, colonization, patriarchy, racism, slavery, and genocide. To this day, we continue to be victim to the interests of a small world elite. These situations have generated, and continue to generate, much inequality which, in turn, generates all kinds of tensions. Thus, to provoke social transformations,

multiple interventions and fronts have been needed, in which Popular Education has been a transcendent means of action and transformation.

Throughout our history it has been necessary to carry out demonstrations, confrontations and peaceful and armed rebellions aimed directly at dominant sources of power. We have also had, in some cases, to take power, occupy political power and use the Political Parties and the State to emancipate the peoples. Occupying such spaces of power and influence has allowed us to work to transform oppressive structures from within, with proposals aimed at equity, solidarity, sustainability and cooperation. But that has not been enough. We have also had to fight other more daily sources of biopower, internalized power and micro-power, in which the goal is for people to be able to disempower the other, break the limitations imposed by and from the other, transgress and create our own rules of coexistence.

Achieving a radical and lasting change in social relations requires that people first achieve autonomy and self-determination. There is important and necessary political work to be done to enable people to regain their personal power, their ability to do, create and develop ideas, activities, projects, plans and dreams. It is necessary to continue opening and creating spaces of security, equity, creativity, fun, hope and joy, in which existing social relations are problematized and questioned, while opening or creating new possibilities of being, living and feeling. These spaces can be called cracks, between spaces, which challenge, transgress, fragment and weaken the external and oppressive forces. That is why the approach to Popular Education has been and continues to be relevant and valid in Latin America and the Caribbean, in order to provoke and sustain a true social transformation.

> Popular Education works consciously … to understand structural injustice – how we are dominated and oppressed, but by the conditions that allow some to act with impunity to serve their own, minority interests. …. This education is deeply political and partisan: it is based on an analysis of the nature of inequality, exploitation and oppression, and informed by clear political purposes. Popular education aims to support the struggle for a more just and egalitarian social order, and for a living planet based on a

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> sustainable future. Through its rootedness in the real interests and struggles of people, its critique of the status quo and its commitment to progressive social and political change, popular education … [works]to strengthen the struggles of exploited and oppressed people in the interests of the majority (PEN, 2018).

Therefore, it is necessary that we politicize the discussions on all the phenomena that affect us; that we look critically at our reality, and reflect on our practices; that the participation and democracy of all sectors of society be strengthened in matters by which they are affected, without forgetting that reality can only be understood through a continuous, dynamic, and systematic process over time; that it is important to believe in our own potential for understanding, growth, action and transformation; that it is important to trust and accompany others in their efforts; that for us to think, question, insert ourselves into processes of self-transformation and social transformation it is essential to create and protect safe spaces where that may happen.

Some tools that contribute greatly to Popular Education processes are the pedagogy of questioning, participatory-action research, and the incorporation of the arts, technology and social networks. These tools not only facilitate the process of expression, questioning and awareness of groups, but also contribute to the creation of the necessary conditions in which to be able to think, imagine, dream and propose different and revolutionary ways of being and living. However, these processes of individual and collective formation and transformation must also be systematized, documented and disseminated through all possible means, with an emphasis on alternative means of social or popular communication, so that they serve as inspiration to other groups and communities of the world. It is ever more necessary to communicate with neighboring countries and with the world, establish alliances and work in networks in a way that allows us, as popular educators, to exchange our knowledge, support, and protection, and to accompany each other as we grow together. And, as Freire taught us 'radicalisation, nourished by a critical spirit is always creative'.

CONCEPT
THE JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITY EDUCATION PRACTICE THEORY

Vol. 9 No. 3, Winter, 2018

Celebrating Freire – A message of solidarity from South Africa

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My first copy of *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was bought in Botswana, covered in newspaper so it would look like an exercise book, concealed under the spare tyre and smuggled across the border. It was a banned book under the Apartheid government: considered dangerous and hence forbidden. Before it got lost, it went on a long journey through metal workers factories, along with Brecht poems, Gorky, Biko, Fanon. It would reappear, sometimes with new underlinings and annotations, held together with sticky tape. When we ran a course on workers' culture using a popular education approach, some participants remarked that this was very different from the 'banking' method and that was good because bankers were not to be trusted (!) They asked whether the repeated, continuous drilling down to root causes of problems, asking 'but why', came from Freire. Wasn't this critical investigation what he called 'education as the practice of freedom'?

Some 48 years later, the ideas in the book are still 'dangerous': they suggest education should be a process of conscientisation aimed at action for radical transformation. But now the book forms part of syllabi for higher education students. I wonder whether the central ideas are lost in neo-liberal speak and values.

Within the context of calls to de-colonise knowledge, education and cultural values, Freire's epistemological interventions are often cited together with the anticolonial writings of African philosophers and revolutionary writers, such as Frantz Fanon, Aime Cesaire, Julius Nyerere, Amilcar Cabral. As Africans, we look at the colonizing politics of cultural and economic domination in our history and present lived reality, and note how Eurocentric rationality, the systematic deletion or exclusion of systems of knowledge have been used to oppress people. In the quest to re-explore who we are and

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assert both the right and urgent responsibility to become more fully human, despite and because of the context of rising fundamentalisms and patriarchal authoritarianism, we turn back to Freire for guidance. Dialogue as the means to challenge the reciprocal incompleteness of knowledge and to articulate counter-narratives is crucially important – and Freire's insistence that such dialogue should not manipulate, domesticate, nor sloganise is a useful reminder in these days of bland populism.

The ancestral concept of 'ubuntu' that encompasses people and other living organisms (akin to the Latin American notion of *buen vivir*) demands being through the other. It asserts that my freedom is contingent upon yours. As an ethic of interrelationships situated in relations of caring and sharing, 'ubuntu' resists the commodification of people and nature. It is akin to eco-socialism and demands agency.

Many educators committed to popular education in South Africa still draw on Freire for inspiration. He is recognised as the 'father' of education for transformation and of the radical hope that sustains the work of community activists engaging liberating pedagogies. Many of the workers who passed around that old copy of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* are no longer around, and their trade unions no longer have the clout of the eighties. Young people will have to rediscover, for themselves, how education can be a liberating force; how really useful knowledge is co-constructed in a process of dialogenous questioning, and finally, how agency is the first step towards creating something radically new. This work is a struggle that requires solidarity: working collectively for the good of all – rather than competing individually to fashion competitive advantages. *A luta continua.*

CONCEPT
THE JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITY EDUCATION PRACTICE THEORY
Vol. 9 No. 3, Winter, 2018

Review

Antonia Darder (2018) *The Student Guide to Freire's 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed* London: Bloomsbury Academic, £11.69, pp 216, pbk.

This book is opportune and essential reading. All educators are in some form of relationship with the dominant neoliberal political economy of our times and need to determine their position within it. How does neoliberalism shape the options for learners, teachers and pedagogical methods? Who are the teachers and learners anyway? What can be done to challenge and change the oppressive elements of society? How can educational systems be redefined in terms of the needs of the many and not the few? These are all questions contemporary educators need to answer and Antonia Darder's guide to Paulo Freire's famous exposition of the relationship between education and political economy offers a way of finding answers. Darder is a well-known radical educator and Freire scholar, who holds the Leavey Presidential Chair of Ethics and Moral Leadership at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, USA. She is also a Distinguished Visiting Professor of Education at the University of Johannesburg, Republic of South Africa. Her qualifications for the task of writing this guide are impeccable.

The book addresses its topic in four chapters, looking first at Freire's life and describing the dynamics of his personal experience and his role as a major educational and social activist. Secondly, Freire's intellectual history is detailed and the breadth of its influence mapped and explained. Thirdly, Darder provides a detailed chapter-by-chapter exposition of the major themes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Lastly, the author addresses the impact of Freire's ideas through an interview with his widow, Ana Maria Arujo Freire. By addressing all of these elements, a comprehensive, critical and nuanced picture of Freire's life, philosophy and practice is established. It would be understandable if students jumped straight to the chapter detailing the thematic development of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and if so they would be rewarded by a clear guide to the coherence and subtlety of Freire's thinking in that book. However, as the chapter is written as the author in dialogue with Freire's text, the writing strategy

rehearses the Freirian approach to learning and offers the reader double benefit – knowledge and experience of the Freirian approach.

The book is aimed at novice readers of Freire and there is an emphasis on the importance of students being aware of the difficulties they might experience with *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Difficulty can arise from the encounter with apparently unfamiliar ideas about such topics as: colonialism and the nature of knowledge, society and politics; critical epistemology as a challenge to western habits of thinking and reading; and perhaps an over-reliance on western models of thinking as the basis for understanding education. These are challenging areas, and in response Darder emphasises the transformative power of Freire's thought, urging students to engage with his text and not simply adopt a surface approach to their reading. Teachers using the Guide can use it to generate questions, dialogue and reflection on the major themes and positions set out in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and relate them to contemporary conditions and issues of concern to students.

A key value in the book is Darder's understanding of the interplay between notions of epistemology and social context in relation to Freire's particular engagement with the legacy of Portuguese colonialism in his native Brazil, and the associated anti-colonialism of Latin American scholars and activists of his period. This is no arid historical exercise given Darder's ability to relate the dynamics of a given historical time to the ontological concerns of contemporary readers of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Finding one's own historical positionality is a central task of becoming an educator and this book can be seen as a touchstone for that undertaking. By engaging in a dialogic relationship with Darder's book, and adopting her dialogic approach to reading Freire's work, students can move beyond simple summaries of 'critical pedagogy' or the 'banking concept' of education for essay writing purposes to a deeper appreciation of how critical pedagogy can be enacted in their own practice and in dialogue with others.

In this book Antonia Darder opens the door to Freire's concept of education and invites students to join in dialogue over his meaning and relevance to their contemporary circumstances. The dominant neoliberal political economy and power structure of our

time continues to favour the affluent and powerful at the expense of the majority, just as its precursor did in 20th century Latin America. The common thread is the power of the oppressor to inscribe their ideology on the epistemology of the classroom. This is the case whether your classroom is in a school, college, university or community setting, or, indeed, takes a digital form. Consequently 21st century educators need to be as committed to challenging educational oppression as Freire's generation. This book provides the resources required to mount the challenge and to nourish the commitment to do so.

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http://concept.lib.ed.ac.uk/ Online ISSN 2042-6968