



Introduction

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History as a Possibility

At the end of a Century that is at the end of a Millennium, touched and challenged by world wars, by local wars, of an almost global character, by radical transformations of social, political, economic, ideological, ethical nature, by revolutions in science and technology, by the overcoming of beliefs, of myths, by the return to doubt that puts judgement an exceedingly certain certainty in modernity, it is not easy to catalogue all that may seem to be fundamentally problematic. And that men and women of the nascent century will soon have to respond to. The challenges at the end of the century carry on into the next one.
(Paulo Freire)

This volume is an attempt to bring together the outputs of a robust practitioner dialogue, inspired by the work of Paulo Freire and the tireless drive for a transformative and humanising education. Hopefully, it goes some way to confronting those challenges named above by inspiring others interested in putting Freire into authentic community action. Freire believed in

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the possibility of change and rejected the neo liberal discourse that presents poverty as inevitable, therefore rendering ‘opportunities for change’ invisible. Freire believed that it is a prerogative of ‘being’ in the world to transform it, rather than adapt to an unethical order of things. Freire states that it is our responsibility (and privilege) to intervene in reality, and as ‘progressive educators, we must be committed to those responsibilities.’

The conference from which the following work is drawn, *Transformative Education: Changing Lives and Transforming Communities*, manifested as a practitioner led learning community, presenting broad themes addressing some of those responsibilities Freire invokes: segregated communities, mobility, border crossing, and associated pedagogies, the emphasis on impact and transformation. Moreover, in Freire’s words, this dissemination of authentic community practice aims to create a small but significant context, where a group of educators have come together to ‘question the fatalistic perceptions of the circumstances in which they find themselves’, and share their ideas for positive change.

At no other time has Freire’s work been more pertinent. Latterly, the world has seen an unparalleled refugee crisis in Europe, with thousands of desperate families trying to escape the ravages of war in Syria, Africa, Libya, Yemen and Iraq. As people flee terror, militant movements exploit the chaos to carry out atrocities across the European Union, in the United Kingdom, Russia, Egypt and North Africa. As Governments debate the nature of their military intervention, it is important to pause and think of the oppressed in this situation. The first section of the volume addresses the international context. Tim Ireland draws our attention to the fact that a number of international agendas are changing; Sustainable Development Goals have recently replaced the Millennium Development Goals. The United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated:

We are forging a bold vision for sustainable development, including a set of sustainable development goals. And we are aiming for a new, universal climate agreement. —

As one set of goals close and another set begins, it is distinctly obvious that a number of priorities are still unattainable (United Nations 2015). The Millennium Development Goals were ambitious and there is some

progress, however, as Tim Ireland points out, these priorities are a product of Western paternalism and European liberal ideology. Therefore, the process becomes one of disempowerment rather than of reciprocal growth through mutual respect. Taking us straight back to Freire's seminal work, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, this is development through 'Banking', a concept never progressive and unsustainable due to the unequal power dynamic involved. Ban Ki-Moon's statement about forging a bold vision for sustainable development through the 2015–2030 Sustainable Development Goals (hereafter SDG),¹ is unachievable without true praxis, built on respect, sharing and equality. However, the Western neo liberal approach rejects true praxis in favour of quantifiable measures, targets and external political power agendas. Moreover, the United Nations Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a proposal for change based upon a management model consisting of 169 measurable targets. Unless these 'targets' manifest as authentic people led praxis, change cannot ever be sustainable.

Tony Bennett, a veteran of Management School education, and a strong critic of the neo liberal management model. Bennett also equates it to the exercise of power. Like Tim Ireland, he believes that Freire, (and Gramsci), offer alternatives through a 'pedagogy that challenges the hegemony of neo liberal conventions'. Through this approach, students can explore and understand hidden alternatives available to them as 'future business leaders and citizens'. Mick McKeown, Fiona Jones and Helen Spandler draw our attention to the impact of neo liberal agendas and the resulting disempowerment of both service user groups and trade Unions within the public health and welfare systems of the UK. Mckeown, Jones and Spandler seek to challenge the hegemony of neo liberal conventions by creating alliances for true praxis between both unions and service user groups.

During the Transforming Communities Conference, Terry Bucci and Sarah Schmidt delivered a paper addressing these issues through an analytical overview of the Haiti Empowerment Project and the 'working with' structure of development work.² This project implements sustainable development through a 'dialogical methodology' that combats banking education. They believe that engagement and dialogue at grassroots level is the key to empowering communities, promoting equality and

therefore combating the ‘false generosity’ sometimes epitomised as volunteerism; hitherto a key aspect of development work. Bucci and Schmidt advocate study abroad service learning initiatives. Thus bringing university students into this equation, allowing them to ‘explore and understand hidden alternatives’ as advocated by Bennett. Furthermore, engage in the ‘radical dialogue’ of positive change: “How incredible it would be to have a generation of students who not only read, studies, and struggled with the ideas of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, but actually lived that frame on the ground....”

Margaret Ledwith also refers to the power of ‘radical dialogue’, referring to Freire’s view that education is politics. Ledwith concludes her paper on the ‘Politics of Disposability’ by advocating action and reflection as a ‘critical living praxis with the potential to transform society for a more just, fair and sustainable future’. This is the ‘bold vision for sustainable development’ that we all should be seeking to achieve. Freire states victory over destitution is a political struggle in support of profound transformation in the structures of society. He emphasises the need for a political pedagogy to ‘invite people to understand the relationship between the problem (the context of the Millennium Goals) and other factors such as politics and oppression’ (Freire, *Daring to Dream: Towards a Pedagogy of the Unfinished* 2007a: 7). Freire sought to create a pedagogy of desire; a desire to overcome a fatalism that instructs the oppressed to accept oppression as the natural order. It is therefore only through a ‘pedagogy of desire’ where ‘we can build up a context for that (a bold vision for sustainable change) to happen’ (Freire, *Daring to Dream: Towards a Pedagogy of the Unfinished* 2007a: 5).

The relentless march for capital gain has a significant impact on community sustainability, leaving those populations who followed a once robust subsistence culture, fragile. According to the UN, ‘Forests are a safety net, especially for the poor, but they continue to disappear at an alarming rate’ (United Nations 2015). Despite the Millennium Goals initiative, subsistence communities are ‘**abjectified**’³ in order to make way for unsustainable business interests. Subsistence communities such as the Aborigines are respectful of the Earth that supports them, reflected through their Shamanic faith, culture and lifestyle. John Pilger’s 2014 Documentary, *Utopia* (Pilger 2017), explores in detail the ongoing

tension between big industry and a culture that holds environmental sustainability as sacred. The Aborigine community has been subject to extreme levels of ‘abjectification’. By abjectifying subsistence cultures, and pushing them outside the realms of citizenship, big business can legitimise land theft, as these peoples are ‘disqualified from belonging’ and therefore undeserving of the rights of citizenship. With reference to his own experience of Brazil, Freire discusses the ‘excess of power’ that characterises such relationships and the way that the powerful use such ‘abjectification’ and ‘social distance’ as a barrier to dialogue, and therefore critical participation: ‘societies denied dialogue in favour of decrees become predominantly silent’ (Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* 2007b: 21).

During his reflexive journey through the ‘Seminary of the Streets’,⁴ David Mowat sought to create a ‘Pedagogy of Desire’ around socio/eco justice. Freire rejected prescriptive approaches to working with people on the streets (Freire, *Daring to Dream: Towards a Pedagogy of the Unfinished* 2007a: 5) and Mowat, through his own experience learned that the ‘empowerment of the poor was done with poor people, through dialogue, shared living, trial and error’. Mowat embraces Freire’s belief that true dialogue is only possible within an environment based on the ‘relation of empathy between two poles who are engaged in a joint search’ (Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* 2007b: 40). Mahmood Chandia and Bob Walley also suggest the need for a ‘global consensus or movement towards an informed pedagogical approach’ to social justice, environmentalism, and ‘the related issues concerning social mobility, (and) empowerment’. A movement that will promote a deepening ‘conscientizacao’ through dialogue. Once a challenge is conceptualised, and the possibilities of response are recognised, action will follow (Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* 2007b: 39–41).

Fernando Lannes Fernandes believes Universities have a major role to play in facilitating social justice and the development of such dialogue. Gramsci advocated academia in the struggle for social justice, proffering the cultivation of ‘organic intellectuals’ (Gottlieb 1989: 113) and the mobilisation of sympathetic academics in taking the social justice agenda forward. Fernandes looks to the Brazilian model for community engagement and seeks to replicate it at Strathclyde University in Scotland. The

University of Central Lancashire, in England, has developed a similar concept of integrated learning communities engaging students in skill sharing with the local people (Melling and Khan 2012: 190). University extension and the associated pedagogy of social justice is an important aspect in the true transformation of communities. Victoria Jupp Kina and Jean McEwan-Short, University of Dundee, Scotland, believe universities can act as ‘catalysts for social transformation’. With reference to Pain’s argument to engage ‘beyond the journal article’, Jupp Kina and McEwan-Short assert that higher education institutions ‘have a role within social, economic and political development’. Jupp Kina and McEwan-Short emphasise this concept manifested in Higher Education policy and practice, whereby research outputs must include ‘demonstrable benefits to the wider economy and society’.

Transforming communities through a truly democratic pedagogy forms a strong thesis throughout this text. Sheridan takes us back to Scotland’s disadvantaged communities exploring the theme of empowerment and **Conscientization**⁵ within the context of youth work. Sheridan uses Freire’s (1998) guiding principles for transformative education as a lens for part of the research analysis. Sheridan explores the notion of love as a key feature of transformative education (observing Freire’s notion that ‘love cannot be sentimental’). This particular guiding principle underpins the work of Hafford-Letchfield and Lavender who engaged with the elderly members of the community. Hafford-Letchfield and Lavender draw our attention to the links between altruism and reciprocity established through a mutual Conscientization process between the elderly community and their learning mentors. This integrated learning community have taken the guiding principle of love to create mutual transformation.

Larkins and Satchwell have also explored the need for mutual dialogue and the notion of non-sentimental love in their work in relation to literacy and families from segregated communities. Quoting Freire: “One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people”, Larkins and Satchwell address the ‘abjectionification’ of families stigmatised as being part of the Benefit Britain ‘poverty porn’ (Tyler 2014) culture (Channel 5, 2014). Utilising their position as part of a

‘University extension’, as advocated by Fernandes, they aim to overcome social distance by giving ‘children and young people in those families the space and facility to share their stories and build connections between the communities they inhabit’.

Bucci and Cook take these concepts to their work in Haiti. Bucci and Cook contend that ‘literacy volunteer preparation offers an opportunity to bridge differences between literacy volunteers and community members’. This in turn rejects the notion of social distance and replaces it with one of love. As in the case illustrated by Hafford-Letchfield and Lavender, it bonds the links between altruism and reciprocity established through a mutual Conscientization process. Hafford-Letchfield and Thomas provide an excellent example of bridging distance between students and the community through the Families and Schools Together (FAST) programme. This international evidence based parenting programme, delivered within a community setting around the school, provides an ‘open space’ where dialogue can take place (Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* 2007b: 33). Hafford-Letchfield and Thomas illustrate how social work education and FAST can work together ‘to bridge diversity and communities using a model of empowerment and conscientization in practice’. FAST in this context allows a mutually and therefore truly transformative process to take place. FAST rejects a ‘traditional’ or paternalistic way which has “... not been to exchange ideas, but to dictate them; not to discuss themes, but to give lectures; not to work with the student, but to work on him (or her), imposing an order to which he (or she) has had to accommodate” (Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* 2007b).

C. Lambert, M. Diviney, D. Cowman, M. Ivers, and M. Fitzpatrick share the belief that the reciprocal learning generated through interaction between students and community organisations provides a dialogical space for conscientization. Gurjee also discusses the ‘magic’ of the dialogical space in her work on peer mentoring. In this context, the word ‘magic’ describes a transformational relationship based upon the facilitation of codification and the ‘critical search for something’ (Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* 2007b: 40). Gurjee believes that this is necessary in order to ‘create an effective learning environment so as

to develop consciousness and self-realization, contributing to the researcher's own reflexive processes.'

Pedagogies of Hope run through the work of contributors. Ruth Pilkington advocates a 'shift away' from the prevailing view of 'educators as producers' with its emphasis on disempowerment and performativity', towards an 'enabling structure and learning space'. C. Lambert, M. Diviney, D. Cowman, M. Ivers, & M. Fitzpatrick, likewise reverse the notion of production through a community based action learning pedagogy emphasising in practice what Pilkington refers to as 'enabling'. Yasmee Ali in her work as a community educator with young people believes this shift of power from production to enablement is a truly transformative 'way of providing the students with the opportunity to empower themselves through their own learning'. Ali refers to Freire's perspective the teacher is not only present to 'facilitate' the learning, but rather to 'pose problems' regarding 'codified existential situations in order to help learners arrive at a more critical view of their reality.' A process intrinsic to enabling young people to have the confidence to transform their world. Paul Breen, Rob Clarke and Sam Khan also work within a community context enabling learners facing some of the toughest barriers to accessing education. Therefore, Breen, Clarke and Khan are creating a *Pedagogy of Desire*, or in Freire's words, the *Desire* to start again, to start being different, to see reality and challenge it (Freire, *Daring to Dream: Towards a Pedagogy of the Unfinished* 2007a: 5). Breen, Clarke and Khan emphasise that this is unachievable without passion, as passion creates the context for *Desire*.

Deborah Bentley explores transformative pedagogy within the context of teacher education. Bentley reiterates Pilkington's notion of production from a teaching perspective, criticising the use of 'educational discourses of instrumental rationality, underpinned by standards and performativity and supported by invasive and oppressive external surveillance is well established'. Bentley refers back to Freire's faith in the 'the freedom to create and to construct, to wonder and to venture'. Aleksander Szram and Trinity Laban have built their creative pedagogy upon the latter conviction by rejecting traditional production methods, 'leading to relatively predictable approaches to musical organisation and encouraging the student to channel his/her musical creativity according to hegemonic

norms.’ Alternatively, Szram and Laban advocate ‘forming a peer-responsive community where each member educates the others by sharing their musical reflections/responses prompted by their pre-college musical life and experiences’. By embedding Freire’s conviction in the freedom to create and to wonder, this peer – responsive community is ‘a multifarious pedagogical diet’.

This volume of hopes and desires is in itself a multifarious pedagogical diet, created by people who reject the way that neo liberal discourse seeks to reduce the boundless opportunity of education, to a mindless technological practice. As Freire states, education cannot on its own solve all the world’s problems, but it can empower those abjectified by societies’ power structures with the tools for effective political dialogue and action. A truly transformative pedagogy is liberating, consequentially the powerful deny education to those whom they wish to subjugate. The work illustrated within these pages shows clearly that social distance presented as inevitable is needless and knowledge is neither property of the privileged. It talks of new knowledge created through reciprocity, dialogue and the rejection of production based learning. Processing new knowledge, created through often challenging learning relationships takes courage. However, as Freire states, ‘education is an act of love, and thus an act of courage’ (Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* 2007b: 33). The non-sentimental love of humanity and the courage to banish social distance will help us all to engage in a pedagogy of desire.

Notes

1. In 2015, The United Nations announced 17 Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved by 2030, (**Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**) This included 169 targets across the goals.
2. Terri Bucci & Sarah Schmidt, The Ohio State University, (USA) presented this work at the Transforming Communities Conference, University of Central Lancashire, UK, 2014.
3. Editor’s note: the term **Social Abjection**, explored by sociologist Imogen Tyler in her work *Revolted Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain* (Tyler 2013).

Margaret Ledwith refers to Tyler's argument from a British perspective stating; "*British Citizenship has been redesigned to abjectify specific groups or populations, producing paralysed, dejected and deplorable populations of non – citizens within the borders of the nation state. The aim is to target certain social groups and to disqualify them from belonging, abjectifying them outside the realms of citizenship*" (Ledwith 2016: 129). Although here Ledwith and Tyler refer to the UK context, this concept is transferable to any culture deemed 'maladjusted' by Western neo liberalism.

4. David Mowat, Independent Activist, Community Development Worker Musician and Human Ecologist, (UK/International) The aSALT course re-launched in 2014 after a three year interval by David Mowat, a freelance facilitator and trainer and an Associate at the Schumacher Institute in Bristol. The Schumacher Institute is an independent 'think and do' tank that applies systems approaches to change work in the light of transitions to more resilient, just and humane social orders. Mowat presented a workshop at the Transforming Communities Conference, University of Central Lancashire 2014.
5. Editor's note: The Freire Institute describe **Conscientization** as, '*the process of developing a critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action. Action is fundamental because it is the process of changing the reality. Paulo Freire says that we all acquire social myths which have a dominant tendency, and so learning is a critical process which depends upon uncovering real problems and actual needs*' (Freire Institute 2017).

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