



Chapter 3.4: Using a Freirean Approach with in the Global Youth Solutions Programme

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This paper will be providing an understanding of a research project that will be undertaken as part of a doctoral study. It will begin by providing a background to the study before exploring ways of evaluating the Global Youth Solutions programme to see which aspects of the programme allow the facilitators to act for change through critical thinking. It will also be looking at way to see whether or not the programme provides the participants an opportunity to break away from the ‘culture of silence.’

The paper will begin by outlining any literature that supports the work before highlight the key questions intended for investigation. The methods and methodology to be used in this study will be explored and how they will allow any conclusion to be drawn from the data. The ethical implications and a reflection on areas for further study will also considered.

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Literature

Having successfully completed a recent research project on the peer led aspect of the Global Youth Solutions programme, it brought to the forefront two aspects for further study. The first one being, the delegates understanding of the word empowerment. The study found that delegates who had attended the programme felt a sense of empowerment, however each individuals understanding of the word empowerment differed. Gillman (1996, cited in Humphries 1996: 99) claims that there are a number of theorists and practitioners who use the term empowerment however they all have their own interpretation of the word. Similarly each individual that attended the programme interpreted the notion of empowerment in their own individual way and as a result further study was needed to understand how it is defined by young people. As well as gaining an understanding of the young people's interpretation of the word empowerment there was still a need to evaluate the programme further and look into what aspect of the programme contributed to the feeling of empowerment.

The Global Youth solutions programme is based within the Centre for Volunteering and Community Leadership at the University of Central Lancashire and it prides itself on the ethos to engage, empower and enable young people in finding and fulfilling their true potential. In order to achieve this, the Centre has largely based its teaching methods on the work of Paulo Freire. Paulo Freire, a Brazilian philosopher influenced and dominated the educational arena in the late twentieth century with his theory of liberating education. He felt that education was a means of providing individuals, who were oppressed in society, a way of breaking away from the 'culture of silence' and transforming the world around them.

According to McLaren and Leonard (2004) Freire offers a system where the power of learning is shifted from the tutor to the student. The role of the tutor is to facilitate sessions to ensure learning is taking place however the learning is guided by the students. Murphy (2008, cited in Hall et al. 2008: 32) argues however that according to Freire's perspective the role of the teacher is not to only facilitate the sessions, it is about

posing problems about ‘codified existential situations in order to help learners arrive at a more critical view of their reality.’ Allowing the students to take control of the power of learning in a critical manner enables them to achieve critical awareness and break away from the ‘culture of silence’ (Fritze [year unknown](#)). It also allows the young people to develop a self-awareness which will free them to be more than just ‘passive objects’ (Fritze [year unknown](#)).

Mizen (2010, cited in Banks [2010](#): 24) states that we live in a society where the structures and cultures are alien to us and those in power determine how we live our lives. Similarly, young people are also determined by those in power and their way of dealing with the youth is by fostering ‘certain models of family conduct’, educating them ‘in particular mores and values’ and shaping ‘the nature of youth’s involvement in work’ (Mizen 2010, cited in Banks [2010](#): 25). Paulo Freire ([1996](#): 26) outlines individuals strive for humanisation however dehumanisation is historical reality and this idea of dehumanisation occurs due to the unjust social order. In order to overcome this Freire developed an approach that enables individuals to critically reflect on the world and act on changing it so it is humanised and more just (Beck and Purcell [2010](#): 26). According to McLaren and Leonard ([2004](#)) Freire offers a system where the power of learning is shifted from the tutor to the student. This shift in power is a way of providing the students with the opportunity to empower themselves through their own learning. The role of the tutor is to purely facilitate the sessions to ensure learning is taking place however the learning is guided by the students. Murphy (2008, cited in Hall et al. [2008](#): 32) argues that according to Freire’s perspective the role of the teacher is not to only facilitate the sessions however to pose problems about ‘codified existential situations in order to help learners arrive at a more critical view of their reality.’ Allowing the students to take control of the power of learning in a critical manner enables them to achieve critical awareness and break away from the ‘culture of silence’ (Fritze [year unknown](#)). It will also allow the young people to develop a self-awareness which will free them to be more than just ‘passive objects’ (Fritze [year unknown](#)).

As the Global Youth Solutions programme provides the participants with a similar system, it would be interesting to explore further, the portrayal of the Freirean methods within the Global Youth Solutions

programme. This exploration will provide colleague within the Centre with a more theoretical understanding of the programme as well as draw our attention whether the adoption of the Freirean approach can contribute to the delegates feeling of empowerment.

In order to evaluate the Freirean methods with in the Global Youth Solutions programme the following questions will be asked to address the issues.

- What aspects of the programme allow the facilitators to act for change through critical thinking?
- Does the programme provide the participants with the opportunity to break away from the ‘culture of silence?’

Methodology

In order to identify the most appropriate methodology to use to gain reliable and valid findings it is vital I explore the ontological and epistemological understanding of the researcher. The ontological and epistemological understanding of the researcher will determine theoretical view point of the topic (Kuhn 1996, cited in Plowright 2011: 177). There are a number of theoretical viewpoints with the main ones being positivists and anti-positivist. Plowright (2011: 177) points out that positivists basic beliefs are that ‘it is an objective reality in which facts about the world are “universal.”’ The polar opposite of this is what Plowright (2011: 177) explains as a constructive paradigm or even anti positivist. Those that take on an anti positivist stand point see reality as something that ‘is socially constructed through relationships, psychological activities and shared understandings that we all take part in’ (Plowright 2011: 177). Those that take on a positivist approach to their research tend to favour a quantitative approach whereas anti positivists favour a more qualitative approach or a mixed method approach.

Due to the nature of this study and the ontological and epistemological understanding of the researcher this doctoral study will be adopting an anti-positivist approach. It is felt that it would be rather difficult for the researcher, to remain totally objective due to their involvement with

the programme. Darlington and Scott (2002: 1) also argue that ‘scientific methods of investigation have great difficulty coping with the dynamic and complex social world of the human services.’ Following further reading it was decided that the methodological approach most suited to this doctoral study was a pragmatic approach. Rossman and Wilson (1985, cited in Creswell 2009: 10) state that pragmatists focus on the research problem and use all the methodological approaches available to understand the problem. Using all the methodological approaches allows the researcher to understand the world and its participants with some level of objectivity. Additionally using a variety of methods to collect data will help expand the range of inquiry as well as allowing the different methods to target the different enquiry components (Darlington and Scott 2002).

In order to evaluate the Global Youth Solutions programme and its adoption of the Freirean approach this study will be looking at both long term impact and short term impact on the participants. To identify which aspects of the programme allowed the facilitators to act for change through critical thinking the researcher will interview (unstructured) past and present facilitators of the programme, exploring the long term impact of the programme. The participants that attend the Global Youth Solutions programme in 2014 as delegates will complete open ended questionnaire so they are able to state whether or not the activities within the programme provided them with the opportunity to break away from the ‘culture of silence.’

Unstructured Interviews

As mentioned above the study will be using unstructured interviews and open ended questionnaires to help evaluate the programme. It will begin by individually interviewing ten facilitators that have been involved in the programme over the past five years. The programme is delivered on an annual basis and each year five young people are recruited and trained to facilitate the programme and as a result two facilitators from each year will be interviewed. McIntyre (2005: 222) states that ‘the best qualitative interviews are guided not by the researcher but by the interviewees’ and so incorporating unstructured interviews within the study will provide a

more in depth view of how the programme has helped the facilitators act for change through critical thinking. Interviewing two facilitators from each year will also provide the opportunity to compare the thoughts and feelings of the facilitators over the years.

McNeill and Chapman (2005: 58) state that interpretivists are more likely to favour the use of unstructured interviews as it gives the interviewee the opportunity 'to say what they want rather than what the interviewer might expect.' The use of unstructured interviews also gives the interviewer the flexibility to change direction of the interview as they are not confined by an interview schedule (McNeill and Chapman 2005: 57).

Fontana and Frey (1994, cited in Punch 2009: 148) discuss seven aspects that need to be considered when planning to conduct unstructured interviews. They list the seven aspects as firstly assessing the setting, understanding the language and culture of the respondent as well as deciding on how to present yourself when conducting the interview. Additionally the interviewer needs to locate the informant and then gain the trust of the respondents as well as establish a rapport so that the raw data can be collected. Out of the seven aspects discussed by Fontana and Frey the most important aspects for this study is establishing a rapport and gaining the trust of the interviewee. Establishing a rapport and the trust of the interviewee may help to generate more qualitative information about the respondent's beliefs, attitudes and interpretation of the world. As a result of this the respondent may feel comfortable and more willing to open up, increasing the validity of the data (McNeill and Chapman 2005: 58).

When conducting the unstructured interviews for this study the participants will be informed that the session will be recorded which could result in them feeling slightly nervous. Additionally due to the researcher's role as the Global Youth Solutions co-ordinator, the participant may feel uneasy to fully share their thoughts and feelings. Keeping this in mind it is vital the researcher develops and establishes a strong rapport with the interviewee by engaging in an informal conversation, in familiar surroundings to them. Engaging in a more informal discussion will allow the researcher to extract rich and valuable data. Punch (2009: 148) on the other hand states that in order to gain this rich and valuable data the

interviewer needs to have the skill to probe, interpret and be able to develop realistic significance of the data, a skill that does not come naturally.

Cohen et al. (2011: 414) state that although unstructured interviews are easier to conduct and do not need to be worked out in advance, the analysis of the data on the other hand does take some time to uncover. This is due to the lack of clarity and direction of the interview that leaves the interviewer to spend some time to identify the issues that emerge. Similarly McNeill and Chapman (2005: 59) also point out a number of weaknesses attached to unstructured interviews. Firstly due to the lack of structure the participant may not focus on the topic that interest the interviewer. In the case of this study the researcher will need to be mindful of this possibility and ensure that the participant is gently redirected back to the topic in hand.

Conducting unstructured interviews have also been claimed to be an unreliable method as it depends on the unique relationship developed between the interviewer and interviewee bringing into question the objectivity of the interviewer (McNeill and Chapman 2005: 59). Although the role of the researcher within this study is to establish a strong relationship with the interviewee in order to make them feel comfortable to share personal information the researcher needs to be wary that subjectivity does not creep in. This will be done by making sure that it is the participant that is mainly sharing their thoughts and feelings and the researcher's role will be purely to prompt and facilitate the discussion.

Also due to the time consuming method of conducting unstructured interviews, the sample more often than not, generates small numbers and so as a result generalisations to the wider population cannot be made (McNeill and Chapman 2005: 59). As this study is only concentration on the Freirean approach used within the Global Youth Solution programme, generalisation to the wider population is not needed.

Open Ended Questionnaires

Additional to the semi structured interviews, open ended questionnaires will also be used to collect data for this study. The questionnaires will allow

the researcher to evaluate the short term impact the Freirean approach has on the delegates attending the Global Youth Solutions programme.

According to Munn and Drever (2004: 20) when designing a questionnaire there are a number of things to consider such as how attractive the questionnaire is, how easy is it to understand, how quick it is to complete as well as it being brief and to the point. Munn and Drever (2004: 20) state the researcher needs to ensure that they cover these aspects as this will encourage the participants to complete the questionnaire and most importantly provide them with the information that they require. Additionally the questionnaires allow the respondents to complete it at their own pace without the presence of the researcher, encouraging them to provide a more honest response (Stangor 2004).

As this study will be using the questionnaire to evaluate the short term impact the Freirean approach has on delegates who attend the Global Youth Solutions programme the researcher will need to consider whether to use closed questions or open ended questions within the questionnaire. The use of closed questions limits the participant in how they respond however open ended questions gives the respondent the flexibility to word their answer (McNeill and Chapman 2005: 37).

As part of this study the participants will be asked to state how each activity within the programme has contributed to their critical thinking of reality and their ability to break away from the 'culture of silence.' McLaren and Lankshear (1994: 180) write about Freire's understanding of 'critical consciousness' and 'naïve consciousness' they state that those of 'naïve consciousness' see the world as complete and their role is to be passive and accept that they can only be what they already are. In order for the humans to make that transformation from 'naïve consciousness' to 'critical consciousness' they need to engage in the social process of dialogue between the teacher and the student and this dialogue needs to be equal. This dialogue consists of the student reflecting on the unjust aspects of their reality and working towards solutions to transform them. The curriculum within the programme is designed to ensure students are able to make this transformation and the questionnaire will be designed to evaluate this.

When designing the questionnaire the researcher also needs to be wary of the wording and ensure that the questions are appropriate for the

target audience. Before commencing the drafting of the questions it is important to decide on the number of questions that will be asked as well as identifying what it is that I want to ask. Munn and Drever (2004: 20) state that the researcher needs to be focused and firm about the questions that will be included and having an upper limit of 15–20 questions will encourage the researcher to think hard about the questions that are essential. As the aim of this study is to evaluate the curriculum the number of questions will be determined by the number of activities the delegates will be engaged with on that particular day. The research questions will also help decide which aspects of the curriculum are relevant and need to be included in the questionnaire and which are not.

Once the data has been collected the next process of the study will be to analyse the findings. According to Swift (2006, cited in Sapsford and Jupp 2006: 153) the stage for analysing data is the point ‘at which the researcher “tunes into” the meaning and messages in his or her data and builds up an appreciation of the nuances and structure and the possibilities for analysis.’ As the data gathered will consist of qualitative data, it will be categorised using a coding system to identify any emerging themes which will allow to understand whether or not adopting the Freirean approach within the Global Youth Solutions programme is effective or not. Punch (2009: 176) states that coding is a process where tags, names or labels are placed against the data. This then can lead to advanced coding which ‘enables the summarizing of data by pulling together themes, by identifying patterns.’ Darlington and Scott (2002: 145) go on to point out that the ‘choices made here about what to code and how will influence every stage of the research from here on.’

Ethical Considerations

When conducting research it is vital to take into account the ethical implications the study may have on the participants. Alderson and Morrow (2004, cited in Plowright 2011: 149) provides a straightforward explanation of ethics by stating that it ‘is concerned with respecting research participants throughout each project, partly by using agreed standards.’ Oliver (2004) also highlights that the research community is

becoming increasingly concerned with collecting data from people and as a result this is raising questions about the way in which the people who provide data are being treated by researchers.

As a result, it is vital that the researcher respects the participants taking part in the study. This will be done by making sure that anyone taking part in the study is doing so through mutual consent and on a purely voluntary basis. In order to gain consent from the participants, consent forms will be included with the questionnaires and semi structured interviews, the consent form will also highlight the full aims of the study. Although all the participants who will be interviewed will be over the age of 18, some participants who will be completing the questionnaire may be under 18 years old and so as a result those participants will be asked to complete a parental consent forms. All participants will be informed that they have the opportunity to opt out of the study at any point and confidentiality will be maintained at all times. The participants will also be informed as to how, the information they provide, will be used as well as how the information will be stored in line with the University guidelines.

During the delivery of the programme the participants will be given the questionnaire at the end of each day. The participants will be made aware of the research project during the introduction to the programme on the first day as this will allow the participants to make an informed decision on whether they would like to take part in the study. Any participants that require a parental consent form will be made aware of the study prior to their attendance on the first day. The facilitators who will be delivering the programme will be gently reminding the participants of the questionnaires and collecting them at the end of each day. This is to ensure that the participants do not feel obliged to provide answers they feel the researcher would like to hear and bringing into question the reliability of the data.

The participants taking part in the semi structured interviews will be contacted in advance and informed of the aims of the study. The participants will then be provided with the contact details of the researcher and advised to respond, should they wish to take part in the study. Providing the participants with the researchers contact details ensures that the participants are volunteering to take part in the study rather than feeling obliged to do so. Due to the lack of funding the participants will not be

paid for the travel expenses and so as a result the researcher will be travelling a venue which is familiar and convenient for the participants. Ensuring the participants are in familiar surroundings will result in the participant being more relaxed and more likely to share their thoughts and feelings. The participants will also be fully aware that the session will be recorded and that they have the opportunity to opt out of answering any questions to ensure they do not feel uncomfortable at any point.

Reflection

Evaluating the Freirean methods within the Global Youth Leadership programme will help identify whether or not it contributes the feeling of empowerment within the delegates and their ability to break away from the 'culture of silence.' This will allow the Global Youth Solutions coordinator to revise the curriculum and the way the programme is delivered as well as highlighting whether or not the Freirean approach is best suited to the programme.

As mentioned above the Centre for Volunteering and Community Leadership largely base their teaching and learning methods on the work of Freire and use the basic principle of shifting the learning from the teacher to the student. Aronowitz (1993, cited in McLaren and Leonard 1993: 8) states that it is not rare for teachers to say they are using Freirean methods within their teaching styles however what they mean by this is vague. Similarly the Global Youth Solutions programme is adopting the methods of Freire however there is no clear evidence of its impact and how the methods are implemented. This study will help identify and determine the methods as well as identify if this shift in power from teacher to student is only in the classroom or does it extent to a broader social context. This will also help inform the teaching and learning methods within the Centre.

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