



## Chapter 4.1: Conclusion

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This volume opened with a discussion about hope and desire within the context of a changing world. Nita Freire reminded the reader in her preface about the driving force underpinning Paulo Freire's relentless questioning and search for answers:

*What was the difference between a white middle-class me studying at school and my poor black school-less street friends? Why do they treat us differently? How can you justify that my neighbour or the son of a peasant are so little respected? We play together and share our sad moments, why then do they say that we are not equal?*

These simple questions are the threads that run throughout this book and bind it together. Contributors have discussed inequality and hope in many contexts, local, national and international. However, the strongest tie is the propagation of inequality through neo liberal pragmatist agendas and the small but powerful counter actions community practitioners

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and activists are employing and sharing here. Education is empowerment, therefore education is political. The ceiling on learning or becoming one of the learned is historical within Western influenced imperialist societies. This ensures inequality and keeps a significant and socially complex mass of people engaged in a self-destructive symbiotic relationship with the neo liberal agenda. So much so that every socially disadvantaged community has their own tale of knowledge deprivation. In a world built on power structures, the oppressed, as a condition of fatalism, frequently adopt their oppressors discourse and employ it within their own spaces. A common thread is prohibition on the acquisition of knowledge, as knowledge equates to power; and this control is frequently gendered. A small but powerful story that counters the dominant narrative concerns a woman who arrived in the UK as a small child during the 1960s. Her family hid her away from the authorities and she never went to school. She is illiterate and cannot speak English. At a very young age, this woman was married and the control on knowledge continued. She was chaperoned outside and when in the house. Excluded even from the television room, as this was another source of 'knowledge'. The lack of education and basic knowledge of the world left this woman in a state of utter dependence on her oppressors. It was impossible to independently seek medical help, draw money out of the bank, shop alone or communicate with anyone outside of the extended family. This woman did not exist; she was a ghost. To challenge oppression a small group of local women have formed a learning circle. This learning circle is peer led, non-institutional and organic in nature. The purpose is empowerment of women through access to learning. Through involvement in this learning circle the woman is now empowered, overcoming oppression and countering the narrative that dictates exclusion.

With this in mind, I refer back to Margaret Ledwith and the concept of counternarrativecounter narrative and the importance of the small stories that counter the big stories put forward by the dominant culture. Here is an opportunity to share a small story that counters a big dominant myth homogenizing deprivation of education in terms of culture and gender. Truly authentic community practice is always open

to sharing learning, so there is no power dynamic and the process is as creative and developmental as it is cultural.

The Western education system consists of structures culturally imposed through the neo liberal discourse of measurement and productivity. I was an indignant witness to a Government initiative gilded in weights and measures designed to create a learning hierarchy, which in turn promoted abjectivity. The pragmatist initiative known as ‘Gifted and Talented’, divisive by its very name, involved creaming off the ‘gifted and talented’ pupils for an enhanced learning experience (The Guardian Education 2010). A young boy poked his head around the door of a so-called learning space to be told by the teacher, “get out, you’re not ‘gifted and talented’”. This immediately imposed a social distance between those privileged in receiving an ‘esoteric’ knowledge and those abject or ‘undeserving’. Education therefore, in whatever the context, either in the community or institutional, is a political space and a *determining* factor. Being in the ‘gifted and talented’ group helps *determine* the future of the children and promotes the notion of fatalism in those excluded; it is not for us and we do not belong there. This is the paradox of education. It creates disdain for formal learning within the groups excluded, further perpetuating the myth of poverty as inevitability. The neo liberal discourse of social exclusion as inevitable is manifest and the politics of distance continue. Those children who are not ‘gifted and talented’ have their dreams taken away. Freire states, ‘There is no change without dreams just as there are no dreams without hope...’ (Freire 2007, p. vii)

During the last few years the senses of inevitable and hopelessness abound. Barriers, exclusion and social distance dominate our thoughts. It is within this context that creating opportunities for transformational pedagogy are imperative. Freire states that, ‘as progressive educators, one of our main tasks seems to be with respect to generating political dreams in people, political yearnings, and political desires. It is impossible for me, as an educator, to build up the yearnings of other men and women. That task is theirs, not mine’ (Freire 2007, p. 5). The outcome of a truly transformation pedagogy is hope, whereby people generate their own dreams.

## References

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