

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!

References

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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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