



The Relevance of Paulo Freire's Work for Higher Education Today – Towards a Critical Pedagogy of Global Connection

**Conversations on Freire's Influence on Global Development Practice
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Dr. Eilish Dillon

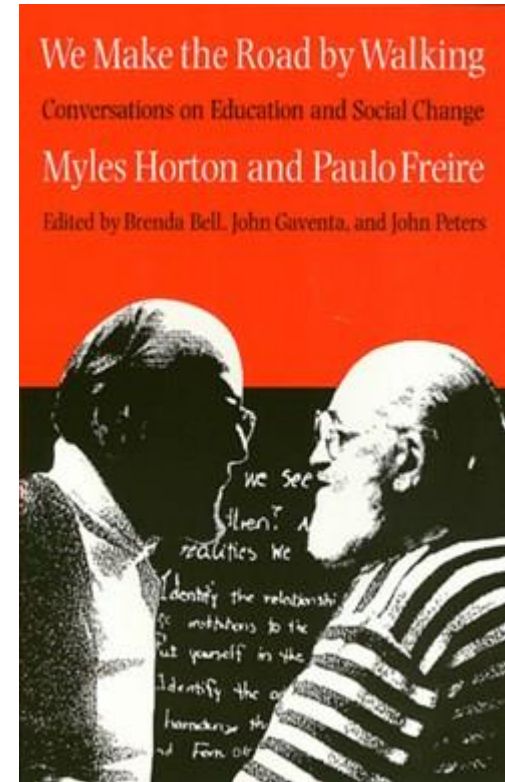
Department of International Development

Maynooth University

Email: eilish.dillon@mu.ie

Let's Begin...

- ... 'though we live in a world that dreams of ending, that always seems about to give in, something that will not acknowledge conclusion, insists that we forever begin'.
- bell hooks – Teaching to Transgress – Paulo Freire - “. . . to begin always anew, to make, to reconstruct, and to not spoil, to refuse to bureaucratize the mind, to understand and to live life as a process—live to become ...”
- Conversations between Paulo Freire and Myles Horton (1990), 'we make the world by walking'.



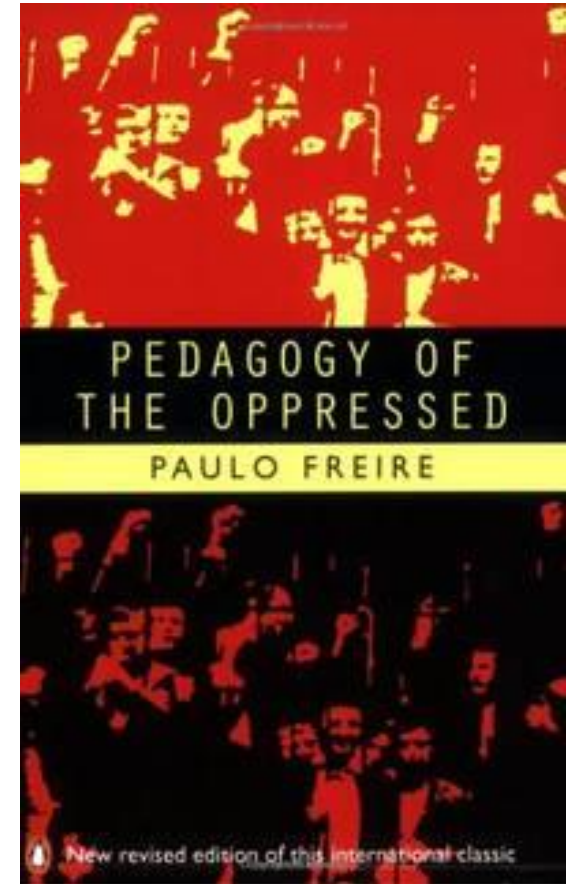
Global Challenges...

- It can be hard to keep going, especially in the face of the immense challenges that we are living with today – the confluence of the global crises of poverty, climate change and COVID-19, underpinned as they are by inequality; capitalist economic growth and self-interest; neoliberalism and consumption; disconnection from people and the environment, and from taking responsibility for the past and the future. But his poem also highlights the irrepressible human spirit, and the politics and radical hope which requires us to face these challenges, to ‘begin again’.



Beginnings...

- 1986...
- Freire's ideas of praxis and conscientisation, and his efforts towards social change through democratising knowledge and grassroots literacy programmes based on critical social analysis and 'reading the world', left a deep impression on me and it helped to shape my approach as a young teacher.
- Not only that education could be used as a tool for transformation but that its whole raison d'être was about a transformed world of equality, participation and justice.



Critical Pedagogy and Higher Ed

- Kimmage – Freire central to approach – working relationships



- Maynooth – new department, 2018 – impressed by Maynooth University with how person-centred the emphasis was; its significant focus on critical pedagogy and GCE; by how prominent and important the Green Campus initiative was to the life of the college; and about the emphasis on global citizenship and sustainable development in its Strategic Plan 2018 – 23.

Dept of Int Devt

- Strategic Plan 2019 – 23
- Our “work at the Department is underpinned by a commitment to the values of inclusivity and diversity, equality and justice. We emphasise the importance of creating and supporting respectful relationships in all our interactions. We value a democratic approach to the construction of knowledge, and knowledge based on connectedness to the world and those around us. We value inclusive approaches to learning which support diversity, respect for all those involved, participatory processes, and critical reflexivity.”

I read these words with a mix of satisfaction, humility, fear and urgency. I am happy to own those values and aspirations but humble in knowing that we don't (or maybe can't) always realise them. My urgency, and sometimes fear, lies in concerns about how difficult (but necessary) it can be to challenge the status quo and create other ways, and to engage in the kinds of teaching and learning which contribute to meaningful, just and equal global transformation.



Maynooth University Department of International Development Strategic Plan (2019 – 2024)



University context - Ireland



- **Complex challenges** questions about access, inequality and systemic racism (Michael, 2021); reduced government financing in favour of individual and corporate sponsorship (IUA, 2021); emphasis on innovation, skills and the economy (Gaynor, 2015; OECD, 2020); and longstanding challenges of neoliberal capture and individualisation of higher education across the world (Giroux, 2004; 2014; Lynch, Grummel and Devine, 2012)...

Maynooth University ranked 1st in Ireland for Quality Education by THE Global Impact rankings 2020



Monday, April 27, 2020 - 17:15

Maynooth University (MU) is in the top 200 universities in the world as ranked by the Times Higher Education (THE) University Impact Rankings, which capture universities' impact on society based on their success in delivering the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Over 760 institutions from 85 countries participated globally.



- **Opportunities...** sustainable development goals -research grants, surveys, rankings; GCE in initial teacher and adult education etc; Govt strategies on Education for Sustainable Dev and new DE strategy (2017: 31) has as one of its goals to “support higher education institutions, NGOs and development education practitioners to increase the number and spread of third level students engaging in quality development education in both the formal and non-formal spheres of higher education”.

Research on Discourses of Global Education in Ireland

- **2016 – DE and GCE Facilitators**
- **Different discourses – from technical to critical and post-critical**
- **Critical influenced by critical pedagogy** - In supporting understanding of the causes and effects of oppression and inequality, it emphasises learning as praxis, the intersection of knowledge, understanding, reflection and action, and experiential and participatory learning processes.
- **Post-Critical influenced by post-structuralism and post-colonialism** - It tries to capture the tensions involved in regarding education as political while at the same time questioning its politics. There is growing emphasis on processes which facilitate learners to face complex realities (Alhadeff-Jones, 2012). Here, processes which involve decolonizing knowledge (Andreotti, 2011b), critical self-reflexivity (Alasuutari & Andreotti, 2015) and embracing the affective (Bryan, 2020) are emphasised.
- **Criticality gaps in terms of lack of connections** – emotional level and sanitised treatment of difficult issues; between local and the global - othering etc; fixed, idealised notions of the future and processes rather than uncertainty and ambiguity

Towards a Critical pedagogy of global connection

- Critical Pedagogy - influenced by Paulo Freire
- Different understandings, debates and strands... (including those influenced by feminism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism as I have been)
- Joe Kincheloe... critical pedagogy is grounded on “a social and educational vision of justice and equality” (2008a: 6). As such, it is “constructed on the belief that education is inherently political” (Kincheloe, 2008a: 8); it takes account of complexity, context and diversity; it is “interested in the margins of society” (2008a: 23); is “searching for new voices” (2008a: 24); and is “dedicated to resisting the harmful effects of dominant power” (2008a: 34).

1. Education as Political, Understanding and Facing the World



“Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.”

~ PAULO FREIRE

“Education as the practice of freedom-- as opposed to education as the practice of domination--denies that people are abstract, isolated, independent and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as reality apart from people”.

1. Education as Political, Understanding and Facing the World....

- Interconnectedness and relationality emphasised
- Relevant higher education for our world today emphasises the importance of pedagogies which build understanding of these processes of interconnection, of human responsibilities in relation to them and action for just alternatives. But not in any fixed or deterministic way...
- Sharon Todd questions “how do we imagine an education that seeks not to cultivate humanity ... but instead seeks to face it – head-on, so to speak, without sentimentalism, idealism, or false hope” (2009: 9). She argues that education should be concerned with the “complexities of the human condition, in all its pluralities” (Todd, 2009: 16).



Vanessa Nakate
Climate justice activist

2. Congruence, Critical Literacy and Subversion

- People admired the congruence in what Freire talked about and how he lived, what he said and how he engaged with people.... not about 'going along with' or 'repeating' orthodoxies, but challenging or subverting them. This congruence and subversion is central to bell hooks' emphasis on engaged pedagogy which transgresses...
- Subversion of banking education – creation of alternative processes of 'reading the world and the word'... critical literacy and self-reflexivity (Vanessa Andreotti)
- HEADS UP Check list - designed to support conversations among those who may inadvertently be reproducing “seven problematic historical patterns of thinking and relationships: hegemony, ethnocentrism, ahistoricism, depoliticization, salvationism, un-complication and paternalism” (Andreotti, 2012)





EDUCATION

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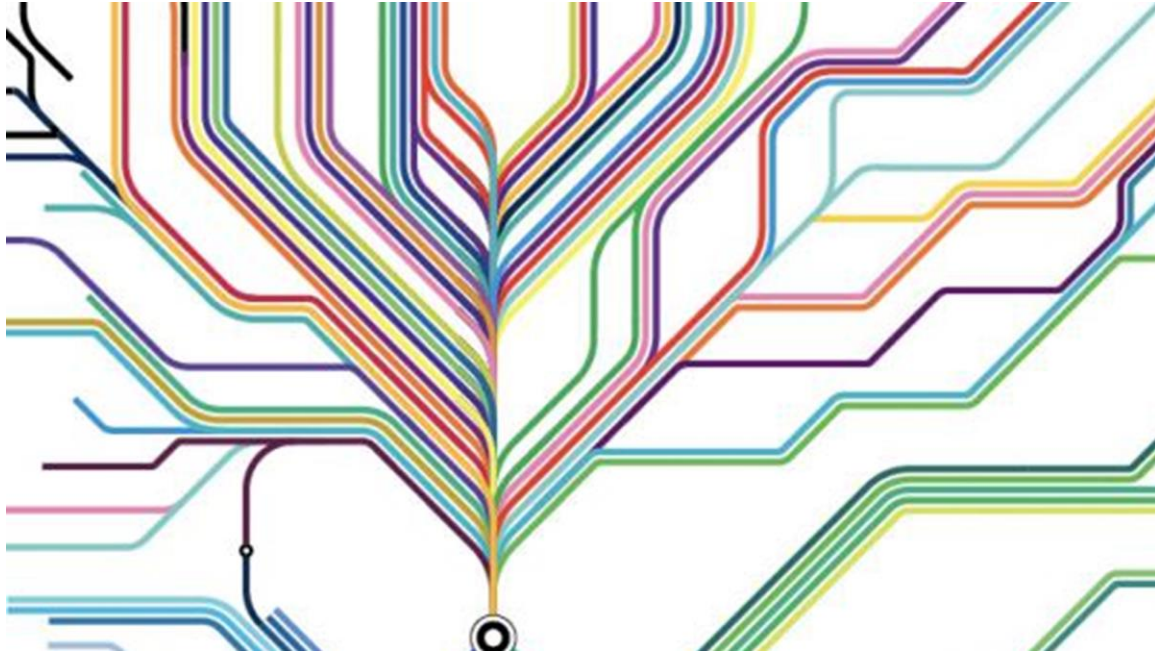


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2. Critical Literacy and Subversion...

- Need to reflect on how, through critical GCE, we often reproduce stereotypes and binaries, disconnected analyses of global development etc... ‘the elephants in the room’. Treating global issues as outside, objective or easily solvable crises can put global educators into the position of being part of the problem rather than the solution.
- Critical literacy in higher education supports questioning, understanding and relating through the subversion of traditional banking education processes, and of notions of expertise, and through expanding understandings of valuable knowledge. Universities cannot do that, as outlined by Hall and Tandon (2017), without embracing calls for equality, diversity and inclusion and decolonising development and global education (Sultana, 2019).





- This also involves challenging the neoliberal influences on higher education financial structures, epistemologies and curriculum politics; and supporting more active and critical engagement with the SDGs.
- Chankseliani and McCowan (2021:3) argue that universities “need to go beyond the dominant development orthodoxy and advance a more nuanced and holistic understanding of university education, research and engagement”. They recognise the global dynamics that act against the promotion of the public good in higher education, “including privatisation of public sectors, growth of for-profit institutions and pressures of international rankings to prioritise elite research over local engagements” (2021: 7) Though staff are committed to sustainable development, they encounter what they call “an increasingly compressed space in which to contribute to it” (ibid).

3. Radical Hope

- Freire says that though he “cannot ignore hopelessness as a concrete entity, nor turn a blind eye to the historical, economic, and social reasons that explain that hopelessness – I do not understand human existence, and the struggle needed to improve it, apart from hope and dream. Hope is an ontological need” (1997: 8). He goes on to argue that “one of the tasks of the progressive educator... is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be. After all, without hope there is little we can do. It will be heard to struggle on” (1997: 9).
- Freire’s rooted, generative and determined focus on hope as constituted through action has been central to approaches to critical global education over many years. This is the kind of hope that is about reality carved out of deep critique of the imbrication of our lived lives with destructive and disconnected practices on the one hand and restorative potential and collective agency on the other. This is the kind of hope we see evident in young climate activists’ scathing critique of life as currently lived yet determination to achieve alternative, more egalitarian, just and inclusive futures.

And so...

- These closing remarks about hope bring us back to Brendan Kennelly and Paulo Freire and their invocation to begin, “to live life as a process”.
- There’s nothing easy in this kind of education but it certainly has potential, especially when we put it and ourselves under the same level of scrutiny as we do the world around us. More emphasis on the political, on congruence and radical hope, through a critical pedagogy of global connection, may help us to advance the kind of relevant and critical global citizenship education needed in higher education today for a just and liveable future.

Thanks...

Email: Eilish.Dillon@mu.ie

