Pedagogy of the Connected: Facilitating e-Educative Transformation

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Abstract: In 1970, Paulo Freire brought to the world's attention the destructive nature of the "banking" model of education and the "culture of silence" this methodology promotes. Freire demonstrated how dialogue with others and reflection on our circumstances through "problem-posing" pedagogy brings about true education: people educating each other through their interactions in the world. In this first decade of the 21st century, I suggest that Frances Moore Lappé has brought the soul of Freire to our cyber age. In this paper I will connect the dots from Freire through Lappé then into online learning theory and practice through Communities of Inquiry research. I will delve into the transformational pedagogies of empowerment which are coming together into what I am designating a pedagogy of the connected. In the process of connecting these dots, I hope to bring into focus the promise and power of the 21st century e-Educative revolution which I propose this "pedagogy of the connected" facilitates. I will use examples from an online Women's Studies course I teach to provide color and texture for the image we will bring into focus when we connect the dots.

Introduction

Nearly four decades ago, with his groundbreaking dialogical pedagogy work, Paulo Freire brought to the world's attention the destructive nature of the "banking" model of education and the "culture of silence" this banking model promotes. Through *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire ([1970] 1997) showed how dialogue with others and reflection on our circumstances through "problem-posing" pedagogy brings about true education: people educating each other through their interactions in the world. Now, in this first decade of the 21st Century, I suggest that Frances Moore Lappé has brought the soul of Freire to our cyber age with her engaging missive entitled *Getting a Grip* (2007). I propose that Freire and Lappé have much to offer those of us engaged in online education, collaboration, communication, and social networking. In this paper I will connect the dots from Freire through Lappé, then into online learning theory and practice (Ally, 2004) through Communities of Inquiry research (Anderson, 2004; Vaughan & Garrison, 2008). I will delve into the transformational pedagogies of empowerment (Davis, 1992; Deay & Stitzel, 1991; Giroux, 1983; Titus, 2000) which are coming together into what I am calling a pedagogy of the connected. In the process of connecting these dots, I hope to demonstrate how Freire's and

Lappé's work might inform our best practices and thus bring into focus the promise and power of the 21st century e-Educative revolution which I propose this pedagogy of the connected facilitates. I will share examples from an online Women's Studies course I teach to provide color and texture for the image we will bring into focus when we connect the dots.

Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Paulo Freire expressed his revolutionary ideas regarding philosophy of education in a doctoral dissertation he wrote in 1959 at the University of Recife, Brazil. The "critical dialogical encounter" methodology Freire ([1970] 1997) developed and taught was quickly picked up by literacy campaigns throughout the north and east of Brazil. Because Freire's work exposed the "culture of silence" within which Brazil's (and the world's) poor were captive, and pointed out that the ignorance and lethargy of the poor were a direct product of the economic, social, political domination, and paternalism of which the poor were victim; his methods were considered a threat to the prevailing order. Following a military coup in 1964, Freire was thrown into jail. Upon his release, Freire was "encouraged" to leave Brazil. Freire went first to Chile, later to the United States, spending over twenty years in exile from his home, traveling and consulting throughout the world, spreading the notion that everyone is capable of critically examining the world through dialogical encounter with others. Freire, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* ([1970] 1997), and through his work for liberation and freedom, politically and educationally, provided all of us with tools that facilitate transformation of our personal and social realities. Some of the important concepts from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* which I propose might inform our e-educative best practices include:

- **banking model of education** – Freire identifies the banking model of education which he claims turns students into receptacles which are to be filled by the teachers, as in making deposits at a bank. The student role is to receive, memorize, file, store, and, when tested, repeat or regurgitate. Freire says the banking model of education controls thinking and action and inhibits creative powers by "mythicizing" reality, concealing certain facts that explain the way we exist in the world. In this way, the banking model of education fails to acknowledge that we are historical beings, and that what we take as "reality" is in actuality "particular" historical conditions framed in "particular" ways to consolidate power and perpetuate the status quo. Freire shows us how the banking model of education develops and maintains a submersion of consciousness in which students are merely spectators, not actors, creators or re-creators.
- **either/or inherent in education** – Freire says education either conditions students into acceptance of the status quo OR, if education provides the tools for critical dialogical encounter, it becomes a practice of freedom by which people learn to deal critically and creatively with reality and thus discover how to transform their world(s)
- **culture of silence** – Freire points out how the ignorance and lethargy of the poor and disadvantaged are the direct result of the economic, social and political domination, as well as the paternalism of which they are victims. Even though

many have been kept "submerged" in a "culture of silence" in which critical awareness and response are practically impossible, every person is capable of critically examining and transforming the world IF provided with the proper tools to engage in dialogical encounter with others.

- **object to subject transformational potential of education** – Freire articulates how, through a process of dialogue with others, each person can gradually come to perceive his or her personal and social reality as well and the contradictions of these realities. In this transformational process the paternalistic teacher-student relationship is overcome as each student becomes conscious of his or her own perception of reality, learns to think critically about his/her reality, and through this process is transformed to be no longer a mere object responding as social forces direct, but as one who can take action in regard to his/her own and others' circumstances.
- **problem-posing pedagogy** – Freire proposes problem-posing pedagogy, the posing of problems of human beings in their relations with the world, as the basis of a libratory education, a constant unveiling of reality through dialogical encounters, the emergence of consciousness, and the facilitation of critical intervention in reality. Freire says that looking at and engaging in critical dialogue about our circumstances provides a means of understanding more clearly what and who we are so that we can more wisely build the future.
- **critical dialogical encounter** – Freire claims "Human existence cannot be silent…To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it." (69) And that dialogue is encounter between people, mediated by the world, in order to name the world. Freire says that in speaking their words, in naming the world, people transform the world, and that dialogue is the way by which people achieve significance as human beings.

<div align="right">Freire ([1970] 1997)</div>

Each of Freire's concepts above hold evocative truths to enlighten those of us engaged in online education, collaboration, communication, and social networking. I will elaborate on how these concepts might enliven as well as inform our best practice, but first, in an effort to lay the groundwork for understanding the Pedagogy of the Connected which I propose is a possibility those of us in online learning can help to actualize, and which I suggest will facilitate e-Educative transformation, it is important to connect the dots through Frances Moore Lappé's 21st Century embodiment of the soul of Freire's teachings in our cyber age.

Frances Moore Lappé's Spiral of Empowerment

Here in the first decade of the 21st century Frances Moore Lappé challenges us to interrupt the spiral of despair and powerlessness so many have been caught up in for so long. Lappé calls us to embrace the spiral of empowerment that she envisions and articulates in *Getting a Grip: clarity, creativity, and courage in a world gone mad* (2007). She explains how four revolutions are heightening the transformational power and possibilities we have at our fingertips to help us embrace the spiral of empowerment. The first two revolutions Lappé identifies are of particular importance to this discussion:

- **a communications-knowledge revolution** – Lappé points out how instantaneous global communication is connecting us to the rest of the world in real time, and that open courseware like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology course materials available free to anyone in the world are helping to dissolve the scarcity paradigm. She touts open software, Wikipedia, online independent news services, blogs, podcasts, and YouTube as making it harder for officials to keep secrets and easier for all of us to tell the truth and find the truth. She tells how the web-based scorecard.org service has helped people find out which companies in their area are polluters and what toxic chemicals these companies are emitting (2007, pp. 63-66).
- **a networking revolution** – Lappé says that closely related to the communications-knowledge revolution is a networking revolution which enables citizen campaigns and facilitates global collaboration among grassroots movements around the world. She offers wiserearth.org as an example of the networking connections possible through the web, as well as the online Independent Media Center which uses open-source software to allow anyone to publish on "Indymedia" sites in over a dozen countries (2007, p. 67).

Lappé goes on to lay out ten arts of democracy which I suggest are a 21st Century actualization of Freire's principles, and which are facilitated and supported through the communications-knowledge revolution and the networking revolution she identifies in *Getting a Grip*. According to Lappé these ten arts of democracy so needed in our age include:

- **ART ONE: ACTIVE LISTENING**
- **ART TWO: CREATIVE CONFLICT**
- **ART THREE: MEDIATION**
- **ART FOUR: NEGOTIATION**
- **ART FIVE: POLITICAL IMAGINATION**
- **ART SIX: PUBLIC DIALOGUE**
- **ART SEVEN: PUBLIC JUDGEMENT**
- **ART EIGHT: CELEBRATION**
- **ART NINE: EVALUATION AND REFLECTION**
- **ART TEN: MENTORING**

(Lappé, p. 88)

We will next discuss and follow these ten arts of democracy, in conjunction with Freire's and Lappé's pedagogical principles. We will follow these ten arts into exemplary online communities of inquiry research in order to identify the common themes, and as a way to connect the dots from Freire's pre-internet pedagogy of the oppressed, through Lappé's internet enhanced spiral of empowerment.

Communities of Inquiry Research

We can connect the dots from Freire and Lappé's theory and philosophies directly into Communities of Inquiry research, where Anderson (2004) describes the critical components for effective online learning communities. The critical components for effective online learning communities which Anderson identifies seem to bubble up from the pages of Freire and flow into Lappé's 10 arts of democracy. Anderson terms these critical components *cognitive presence* (an environment that supports the development of critical thinking skills – epistemologically, culturally, and socially), *social presence* (an environment where students can express their ideas in a collaborative context, share viewpoints, disagree, explore differences, and accept support and confirmation), and *teaching presence* (structure/process that encourages discourse between and among students, between teachers and students, between individual students, groups of students, and materials/content/ideas). Vaughan and Garrison (2008) elaborate on these critical components, and connect to further aspects of Freire's and Lappé's ideas when they point out how social presence includes having the opportunity to communicate purposefully in a trusting environment. They say cognitive presence is facilitated through opportunities for construction and confirmation of meaning through reflection and discourse in a critical community of inquiry. Freire's ideas about grounding critical dialogical encounters in learners' circumstances is reflected in Vaughn and Garrison's characterization of teaching presence as "design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes." (2008, p. 4) Vaughn and Garrison go on to elaborate on best practices for student engagement in communities of inquiry. Again, these are best practices that I identify as bubbling up and flowing from both Freire's and Lappé's work.

Critical Dialogical Encounter + 10 Arts of Democracy + Communities of Inquiry + Transformational Pedagogies of Empowerment = Pedagogy of the Connected

In the early eighties, Giroux (1983) was picking up on Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed and was theorizing about resistance in education and of pedagogy for the opposition. Nearly a decade later, Deay and Stitzel (1991) followed Freire's suggestions, developing field exercises that connect course materials to students' lives, and Davis (1992) found students to be more engaged and less resistant when the students themselves were afforded the opportunity to examine their own circumstances and to uncover the stratified nature of society rather than to have professors delivering lectures on inequality. Titus (2000) provides more connecting dots when she points out that, "When students learn to investigate their own social environment, the evidence they gather extends the context of their own experience (and their expertise) for responding to course materials" (p. 29). Further explicating on the critical dialogical encounters aspects of Freire's ideas, Titus says, "An important dimension is students' discovery that they are not alone in their experiences or their quests. When they hear stories from others and share their own, they can begin to appreciate the social (and political) in the personal, and witness concrete and local examples of how stratification systems can be bent" (p. 33). I consider all of these educators as theorizing and developing critical transformational pedagogies of empowerment grounded in Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed. Add in the

best practices for online education, collaboration, communication, social networking, and communities of inquiry, along with the facilitative power of Lappé's two revolutions and her 10 arts of democracy, and the pedagogy of the connected begins to take shape.

Implications – Actualizing the Connected Dots – Examples from WMS 201

In my perusal of and deep engagement with *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *Getting a Grip*, I became convinced that these two volumes laid the groundwork for an evocative and evolutionary e-educative revolution which is at the fingertips of those of us involved in online education, collaboration, communication, and social networking. I felt called to put Freire and Lappé, along with critical transformational pedagogies of empowerment and best practices from communities of inquiry research into all of my teaching, and especially my online classes.

I teach an online Intro to Women's Studies course. I realized a complete overhaul of the course was essential to craft the existent course I'd inherited into a more connected package with scaffolding and support which might facilitate a pedagogy of the connected. The overhaul of this course gave me the chance to connect the dots, from Freire to Lappé into best online learning theory and practice, incorporating communities of inquiry research and critical transformational pedagogies of empowerment. The transformed course has evoked voluminous student comments and praise, including: "the best course I have ever taken", "thank you for WMS 201, I learned so much that I can apply directly to my life … for the rest of my life", "this course taught me to look deeper into what I'm taught and what I'm told", "I now know that I can make a difference in the world, and I now know HOW to make that difference".

How did I infuse critical dialogical encounters, the spiral of empowerment, cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence into this online Intro to Women's Studies course? I created assignments and a scaffolding structure and environment that:

- supports the development of critical thinking skills,
- facilitates students' expression of their ideas in a collaborative context, sharing viewpoints, disagreeing, exploring differences, and
- encourages discourse between and among students, between myself and the students, between individual students, groups of students, and the course materials, content, and ideas (essential questions and enduring understandings)

To keep this paper to a reader-friendly length, I will not lay out the entire course and all of the activities and projects (which include concept quilt tables, making connections maps, and critical concept crossword puzzles). I will merely share the introductory project for the course, the final cumulative project, as well as one example of each of these assignments, to bring into focus the e-educative and transformative possibilities.

First, a word about the uniting theme around which this course is constructed. Quilt squares and quilting metaphors are utilized throughout to explore the interconnectedness of the enduring understandings of the course. These quilting metaphors help to highlight

what women's studies scholars believe is the *social constructedness* of all aspects of social life, including gender.

Introductory Visual Digital Quilt Assignment

This assignment is to create a visual digital quilt of four or more squares or major images to introduce yourself to the instructor and your class members (the learning community for this WMS 201 Intro to Women's Studies course). Students share their Introductory Digital Quilt with all of the other students in the class through the **Group Pages File Exchange**. (Sharing Introductory Visual Digital Quilts through the Group Page File Exchange helps us get to know each other and facilitates development of our learning community.)

Figure 1 (below) provides an example of one student's introductory visual digital quilt.

Figure 1. Example: WMS Introductory Visual Digital Quilt Assignment.

For this example, I will share what Wendy said about the top left square of her quilt:

- The first square represents me as a woman. A year ago I was quiet, introverted, timid, and very unsure of myself. One year ago, I made a life or death decision to have a gastric bypass because I weighed 316 pounds. Today I have lost 160 pounds, most of the weight that I needed to lose. I use a butterfly to describe myself because it is a symbol of rebirth and I use the background of Japanese Cherry Blossoms because they represent the transience of life-the shortness of life. Today I am a vibrant, liberated, happy woman. Today I have found myself.

Wendy went on to talk about her family, work, hobbies, and interests. Many of these aspects Wendy shared in her introductory quilt were addressed through specific readings for the course, and throughout the course as topics of discourse in the course discussion board and group collaboration and reflection areas. The vital insights into their life circumstances that Wendy and the other students share in these introductory quilts facilitate critical dialogical encounter within our WMS learning community as well as critical dialogical encounter with the course materials, content, and ideas.

Final Cumulative Visual Digital Quilt Assignment

At this point we will fast forward to the final cumulative quilt assignment for the course: to create a final, cumulative visual digital quilt of four or more squares or major images to pull together and demonstrate what each student had explored, experienced, and learned through the course. Complete analysis, citations, and examples from the course are required in this final cumulative assignment, but will not be shared here due to space limitations.

Figure 2. Example: WMS Final Cumulative Visual Digital Quilt.

For this final quilt example I will include only Wendy's final reflective conclusion, which explains the bottom right image of her quilt, and highlights some of the high points of what she got out of the course. Her reflections bear witness to "the personal is the political" aspect of Freire's work, as well as to the power of critical dialogical encounter with others and with the course materials which online learning theory best practices promote.

> "So what have I learned through this course? I had always lived my life under someone's thumb such as my parents, and my husband. I had become extremely over-weight which caused major self-esteem issues on top of the issues that women normally face. After years of failing at losing weight, I decided to have gastric bypass surgery. It has been a life-altering experience for me. I have transformed from a woman who let everyone make decisions for her into a woman who is capable of thinking for herself. This year my eyes have been opened in a way that I never thought possible. I am learning that I can make a difference in my life and I can stand on my own two feet. This course has really helped me see that even clearer. Women can opt to make a difference in their lives even through the struggles. The bottom picture is an art compilation of me. It is my way

of breaking away from that 1950's idealization that women are only good for the home. I am not a domestic person at all. I would rather be out in the workforce. After years of apologizing for this "fault" I have finally learned to embrace who I am and why. Women still have a long struggle, but if we embrace who we are, we will succeed. Women as individuals and as a group have so much to offer our society."

Conclusion

Wendy's quilts are examples of the level of engagement and reflection which most students put into (and get out of) the WMS 201 online class. I've focused, with these examples, not on the course content per se, but on how assignments designed with attention to Freire, Lappé, online theory and best practice might facilitate a pedagogy of the connected by:

- supporting the development of critical thinking skills,
- facilitating students' expression of their ideas in a collaborative context, sharing viewpoints, disagreeing, exploring differences, and
- encouraging discourse between and among students, between myself and the students, between individual students, groups of students, and the course materials, content, and ideas

The critical thinking and robust discourse these quilts and the other projects and assignments facilitated were unprecedented in all of my years of teaching up to this point. The past incarnation of this course elicited little of the learning and reflection, and none of the excitement and engagement that this "Freire, Lappé, communities of inquiry" enhanced course evokes. This leads back to where this paper began: my suggestion that Frances Moore Lappé has brought the soul of Paulo Freire to our cyber age; along with my proposal that Freire and Lappé have much to offer those of us engaged in online education. In this paper I connected the dots from Freire through Lappé, into online learning theory and practice through Communities of Inquiry research. I explored transformational pedagogies of empowerment which are coming together into what I termed a pedagogy of the connected. I trust that in the process of connecting these dots with the examples from my Women's Studies course, that I brought into focus some of the promise and power of the 21st century e-revolution which I suggest our engagement with a pedagogy of the connected might facilitate.

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