

## Molloy College DigitalCommons@Molloy

---

Faculty Works: Education

---

2018

# Walking with Freire: Exploring the Onto-Epistemological Dimensions of Critical Pedagogy

Tricia M. Kress Ph.D.

Molloy College, [tkress@molloy.edu](mailto:tkress@molloy.edu)

Robert Lake

Georgia Southern University, [boblake@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:boblake@georgiasouthern.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.molloy.edu/edu\\_fac](https://digitalcommons.molloy.edu/edu_fac)

 Part of the [Education Commons](#)  
[DigitalCommons@Molloy Feedback](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Kress, Tricia M. Ph.D. and Lake, Robert, "Walking with Freire: Exploring the Onto-Epistemological Dimensions of Critical Pedagogy" (2018). *Faculty Works: Education*. 73.  
[https://digitalcommons.molloy.edu/edu\\_fac/73](https://digitalcommons.molloy.edu/edu_fac/73)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Molloy. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Works: Education by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Molloy. For more information, please contact [tochter@molloy.edu](mailto:tochter@molloy.edu), [thasin@molloy.edu](mailto:thasin@molloy.edu).



INTER  
FACES  
CIENTÍFICAS

EDUCAÇÃO

ISSN IMPRESSO 2316-333X

E-ISSN 2316-3828

DOI-10.17564/2316-3828.2018v7n1p47-60

NÚMERO TEMÁTICO - CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

---

## WALKING WITH FREIRE: EXPLORING THE ONTO-EPISTEMOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

**CAMINHANDO COM FREIRE: EXPLORANDO AS DIMENSÕES ONTO-EPISTEMOLÓGICAS DA PEDAGOGIA CRÍTICA**

**CAMINANDO CON FREIRE: EXPLOTANDO LAS DIMENSIONES ONTO-EPISTEMOLÓGICAS DE LA PEDAGOGÍA CRÍTICA**

---

Trícia Kress<sup>1</sup>

Robert Lake<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

One of the great misconceptions about critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire's democratic theory of education, is that transformative learning is an activity that takes place in the mind. In this paper, the authors demonstrate the significance of material context in Paulo Freire's conceptualization of his philosophy of democratic education. By using the theories of wayfinding (a sub-division of human geography) and critical posthumanism in dialogue with Paulo Freire's autobiographical reflections in his post-*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* writings, the authors illustrate how critical pedagogy involved a literal reading of the material world. By sharing vignettes from his work in Brazil, Guinea-Bissau, Porto Mont, New York we highlight the

significance of the body, emotions, and individual and local history as partners in the political-pedagogical project of transformative learning. Critical pedagogy is recast as an onto-epistemological praxis in which critical consciousness is understood as a process of becoming that is made possible through the relationship between the person and their land, including all its human and non-human inhabitants.

### KEYWORDS

Critical Pedagogy. Paulo Freire. Autobiography. Wayfinding. Human Geography. Critical Posthumanism.

## RESUMO

Um dos grandes equívocos sobre a pedagogia crítica, a teoria democrática da educação de Paulo Freire, é que a aprendizagem transformadora é uma atividade que ocorre na mente. Neste artigo, os autores demonstram a importância do contexto material na conceituação de Paulo Freire no que diz respeito à sua filosofia de educação democrática. Utilizando as teorias de *wayfinding* (uma subdivisão da geografia humana) e pos-humanismo crítico em diálogo com as reflexões autobiográficas de Paulo Freire em seus escritos pós-Pedagogia dos Oprimidos, os autores ilustram como a pedagogia crítica envolveu uma leitura literal do mundo material. Ao compartilhar vinhetas de seu trabalho no Brasil, Guiné-Bissau, Porto Mont, Nova York, destaca-se

a importância do corpo, das emoções e da história individual e local como parceiros no projeto político-pedagógico da aprendizagem transformadora. A pedagogia crítica é reformulada como uma praxis onto-epistemológica, na qual a consciência crítica é entendida como um processo de transformação que se torna possível através da relação entre a pessoa e sua terra, incluindo todos os seus habitantes humanos e não humanos.

## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Pedagogia Crítica. Paulo Freire. Autobiografia. Wayfinding. Geografia Humana. Pós-humanismo Crítico.

## RESUMEN

Una de las grandes ideas erróneas sobre la pedagogía crítica, la teoría democrática de la educación de Paulo Freire, es que el aprendizaje transformativo es una actividad que tiene lugar en la mente. En este artículo, los autores demuestran la importancia del contexto material en la conceptualización de Paulo Freire de su filosofía de la educación democrática. Al utilizar las teorías de *wayfinding* (una subdivisión de la geografía humana) y pos-humanismo crítico en diálogo con las reflexiones autobiográficas de Paulo Freire en sus escritos posteriores a la Pedagogía del Oprimido, los autores ilustran cómo la pedagogía crítica involucraba una lectura literal del mundo material. Al compartir viñetas de su trabajo en Brasil, Guinea-Bissau, Por-

to Mont, Nueva York, destacamos la importancia del cuerpo, las emociones y la historia individual y local como socios en el proyecto político-pedagógico del aprendizaje transformador. La pedagogía crítica se reformula como una praxis onto-epistemológica en la que la conciencia crítica se entiende como un proceso de devenir que es posible a través de la relación entre la persona y su tierra, incluidos todos sus habitantes humanos y no humanos.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Pedagogía Crítica. Paulo Freire. Autobiografía. Wayfinding. Geografía Humana. Pos-humanismo Crítico.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Let's begin with the concrete context. Let's think about important moments of one day in our lives. We wake up, take our morning showers, leave home for work. We run into people we know and people we don't know. We obey traffic lights: if they are green, we cross the streets; if they are red, we stop and wait. We do all this without ever once asking ourselves why we do it. We realize that we do it, but we don't ask the reasons. It is this that characterizes our moving around in the concrete world of daily life. (FREIRE, 2005, p. 139).

One of the great misconceptions about critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire's democratic theory of education, is that transformative learning is an activity that takes place in the mind. It is not so difficult to understand why this is the case. When parsed out, the major tenets of critical pedagogy that are highlighted in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* include, reading the word and the world, demystifying the relationship between subject and object, aesthetic versus anesthetic education, praxis, dialogue and conscientization (FREIRE, 2007). When abstracted from the larger context of Freire's life and work, these tenets ironically work to entrench the European Enlightenment project's privileging of mind over body which runs counter to Freire's commitment to changing material conditions for oppressed peoples.

With the end goal of "conscientization" or critical consciousness, it seems that transformation happens by changing people's minds about politics and social inequality, which somehow leads to changing the world. While there may be some logical truth to this – we cannot separate what people believe from how they act, and therefore to change how people act we must change their beliefs-- the danger of allowing critical pedagogy to be anchored to changing people's minds is that it feeds into two interrelated and counterproductive perspectives of critical pedagogy:

- 1) critical pedagogy is abstract and not practical;
- 2) to become practical, critical pedagogy must be translated into a method that can be used to bring about "empowering" learning in people's minds.

In other words, critical pedagogy is misunderstood as mirroring the Cartesian dualism that Enlightenment humanism relies upon for legitimacy, and students are yet again objectified as teachers consider how critical pedagogy as a method can be done to students' brains. The effect is an undermining of the end goal of humanization, which is fundamental to Freire's philosophy: mind is divorced from body, content is divorced from context, and students and teachers cannot be fully human as beings *in* and *with* the world.

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is one of the most widely read education philosophy books in the world, having sold over one million copies since its publication 50 years ago, but it is infrequently taken into account that this text represents the distilling of a philosophy that Freire developed by being deeply immersed in local contexts that included classrooms, communities, and board rooms. Furthermore, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is an early articulation of Freire's philosophy; it was drawn from Freire's formative work in Recife (FREIRE, 1996), some of which was the basis for Freire's doctoral dissertation.

Paulo Freire's life as an education scholar-activist continued for nearly three decades after *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was first published, and he worked in numerous international contexts. Consequently, when *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is centered as the authoritative text for understanding critical pedagogy the vision of Freire's own conceptualization of his philosophy becomes extremely narrow. Critical pedagogy is deeply contextual, and Freire continued to develop this philosophy throughout his life and in multiple contexts. The power of the philosophy's usefulness for bringing about material transformations in people's lives is diluted when it is assumed that transformation is first epistemological and second ontological and that it can be accomplished by a particular method.

When we move beyond *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, critical pedagogy, as Freire describes it throughout his many later works, is an onto-epistemological, political, and material project. For Freire, democratic education was always rooted first in people's concrete lived realities, in the material con-

ditions of their lives. The concrete material reality was the object of investigation, and therefore the primary occupation of transformative education. He specifically and repeatedly points to the significance of embodied knowing, similar to Barad's (2007) on-to-epistemology, because people are connected to the world through their bodies (FREIRE, 2005).

In this article, we disrupt the fallacy that critical pedagogy is primarily a cerebral endeavor and bring to the surface the centrality of context, the body and materiality in Freire's philosophy of critical pedagogy. We bring critical pedagogy to the ground by exploring place, the body and materiality in Paulo Freire's autobiographical and philosophical works following *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Inspired by postformalism (THOMAS; KINCHELOE, 2006), we position our analysis within an unlikely framework of "wayfinding," a branch of human geography that seeks to understand people's experiences navigating built environments (LYNCH, 1968), and posthumanism which seeks to decenter the "rational Man" of the Enlightenment and develop a holistic understanding of people within the complex history of a much larger natural world (BRAIDOTTI, 2013).

We trace multiple places and spaces in which Freire developed his ideas and identify Freire's thoughts about the relationship between space, place, materiality, non-human entities, the body, and learning. In doing so, we upend the Enlightenment mind/body duality and privilege the embodied knowing that lay at the heart of Freire's praxis. The contemporary post-truth moment marks a time when attending to scientifically abstracted facts to assert "truth" no longer seems a viable means of informing policy change for social justice (D'ANCONA, 2017), nor swaying people's opinions such that they advocate for social change. Moreover, it is increasingly evident as the physical world reacts to the abuses of its human inhabitants that, globally, there needs to be a revolution in how we think about our relationship with the world and the role that education plays in that relationship (MARTUSEWITZ; EDMUNSON; LUPINACCI, 2015).

Critical pedagogy through the lenses of wayfinding and posthumanism allows for an escape from the

trappings of Enlightenment humanism that compel researchers to hold firmly to decontextualized truth claims that may ring hollow in people's day-to-day lives, paradoxically, resulting in a complacency that reinforces status quo conditions of human oppression and earthly destruction. From this perspective, critical pedagogy approaches knowledge as always in process, always contextual, and always informing and being informed by people's journeys throughout their material worlds. Engaging in critical pedagogy from such a grounded perspective opens up avenues for people to read the world while being both *in* and *of* the world, tapping into the relationship between world, body, mind, self and other, resulting in knowledge that is immediately relevant and transformative for people and the world.

## 2 A POSTFORMAL ENTWINING OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY, "WAYFINDING" AND POSTHUMANISM

[A]s I exist in the world and with the world, the reading of my body, as well as that of other bodies, implies the reading of space. In this sense, the class's space, the space of the classroom, stretching out into the play yard and into the surrounding areas of the entire school, which houses the fears, illusions, desires and dreams of teachers and learners, must also constitute an object of this reading by teachers and students. (FREIRE, 2005, p. 95).

In order to move beyond calcified misconceptions of Paulo Freire's philosophy, our analysis is guided by postformalism, which encourages unique combinations of seemingly disparate ideas to generate unexpected possibilities for knowing and being. As described by Thomas & Kincheloe (2006, p. 105),

Postformalists promote the power of difference, the indispensability of obtaining multiple perspectives from divergent disciplines, theoretical constructs, cultural perspectives, historical moments, etc. in the effort to cultivate their intellect and transform the existing social order.

A postformal approach encourages us to draw from multiple, perhaps seemingly incompatible, perspec-

tives in order to bring about unanticipated insights on a day-to-day reality that has settled into the hegemonic “common sense” that limits transformative visions of education and society. In addition, postformalism encourages us to attend to the totality of Paulo Freire’s life and work, paying particular attention to his autobiographical writings throughout his life’s history and the historical moments of the countries in which he worked, in order to better understand Freire’s work as a living praxis that was in perpetual motion as he himself moved through the world. We have chosen to bring into conversation Freire’s own stories about his life’s work with the human geography tradition of wayfinding and posthuman and new materialist thought because these three strands converge in their attention to material context and commitment to social and eco justice.

They diverge from each other as each pools toward particular preoccupations, respectively, the acts of teaching and learning, human navigation of built environments, and disruption of the egocentrism and violence of Enlightenment humanist thought. Together and separately, they are able to illuminate the ways in which Freire’s praxis was a) guided by a rich knowledge of local contexts, b) served as a guide for demystifying and navigating those contexts in a more vigilant manner, and c) was remarkably humble as context itself, that is, the land and all its human and nonhuman inhabitants, were his partners in dialogue that invigorated and informed his praxis.

While to our knowledge Paulo Freire did not use the terms “human geography” or “wayfinding” in his texts, there is a clear synchrony between Freire’s approach to literacy as reading the world and the discipline of human geography’s focus on space and place as fundamental to people’s sense of being and knowing and their relationships to others and the material world. According to Fouberg, Murphy and de Blij (2009, p. 7), “Geographers have a long tradition of fieldwork: they go out into the field and see what people are doing, and they observe how people’s actions and reactions vary across space”. For Freire, education reform always began with going out into the

field, into schools and communities, to get a sense of how people went about their daily lives and to come to know people in context (FREIRE, 1996).

In the sub-discipline of cultural geography researchers attend to “Issues of discourse, power, justice, the body, difference, hybridity, transnationalism, actor networks, resistance, transgression, performance and representation” (DUNCAN; JOHNSON; SCHEIN, 2004); many of these concepts hold centrality in Freire’s philosophy as well. Furthermore, common between human geography and Freire’s philosophy is the focus on geo-spatial analyses for activism: by better understanding people’s material conditions, local and global inequities, and their causes, people are better equipped to struggle for socially just change. While Freire might not have called himself a geographer, the practice of reading the world and his focus on onto-epistemology align well with the aforementioned concerns of human geographers.

As a sub-discipline of human geography, we are drawn to wayfinding, or the study of navigation in built environments, including cities and complex structures. We find this area of human geography especially useful for understanding the onto-epistemological dimensions of Freire’s philosophy because wayfinding makes sense of geographical spaces by examining how people read the world. In fact, one of the primary themes of wayfinding analysis is the “legibility” of cities and structures (LYNCH, 1968). As such, the geographical mental picture of a particular place is important, but how people come to this picture through the experiences of the body is of prime concern. Lynch (1968, p. 4) explains,

In the process of way-finding, the strategic link is the environmental image, the generalized mental picture of the exterior physical world that is held by an individual. This image is the product both of immediate sensation and of the memory of past experience, and it is used to interpret and pattern our surroundings and to guide our actions.

Hence, wayfinding is concerned with the relationship between people’s bodies, minds, emotions,

memories, and the man-made structures that constitute the urban or industrial landscape. In other words, wayfinding links the individual to the systemic via the body's interaction with institutional architecture. Through this relationship spaces are made legible to their inhabitants in particular ways, meaning that people may read the same place differently based on their unique autobiographical experiences and prior frames of reference. This was a running thread in Freire's work as well, and in his post-*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* writings he uses his autobiography to lace together a theoretical tapestry drawn from his lived experiences engaging in critical pedagogy while navigating multiple local contexts.

By pairing wayfinding with posthumanism, we are able to mitigate the anthropocentric tendencies in human geography by foregrounding the embodied and multiple dimensions of knowing that emerge from the relationship between people and the world. Context is much more than built environments that through a humanist lens replace the pristine nature of a more "primitive" age as humanity's history rolls along the industrial tracks of "progress". Every living and non-living aspect of the world has a history independent of people, and as such, there is knowledge and agency all around us, happening sometimes with us and often without us. Posthumanism calls for a halt to Enlightenment humanism's arrogance (SNAZA; WEAVER, 2015). "Man" is not the center of the world, and the mind is not separate from and superior to the body (BRAIDOTTI, 2013).

When applied to education, posthumanism reveals the epistemic "technologies" that people construct to ostensibly progress mankind toward an ideal enlightened human (PETIFILS, 2015). For example, as we consider trends such as standardization, testing, and accountability through a posthumanist lens, indeed, even as we consider schooling itself as a humanist institution, we can see the artificiality of humanist "learning". Children sit in classrooms in batches according to their age. They all should know the same things after receiving a particular lesson, and this knowledge will then be displayed on a common as-

essment. Humanism attempts to contain the chaos of the world so that it can be measured, controlled and worked upon – it is a social engineering project. Consider the following quote by Petifils (2015, p. 39) who discusses curriculum as a humanist "technology of production":

In terms of technologies of production, we might consider the ways in which our students are limited by their experiences of objectivity; that is, in many classrooms, students are not empowered to 'produce' anything that is outside the confines of the objective measures demanded by governmental agencies (at least, they are not able to produce anything that 'matters' in the eyes of school systems). Next, what is the dominant sign system in terms of educational or curricular discourse? Certainly in the K-12 classroom, the sign systems that carry the most meaning seem to stem from the Common Core. After all, it is within the Common Core that 'ways of knowing' are defined and delineated: these are the expectations that qualify what it means to 'be' an educated fourth grade student, eighth grade student, or twelfth grade student.

This technocratic and decontextualized conceptualization of learning parallels Freire's notion of the "banking" model of education. From a posthuman perspective, the world is complex and wholly unknowable and learning is unpredictable. Learning is not simply an interaction between children's brains, teachers' pedagogies, and textbook contents. It is an interaction between bodies among bodies (human and non-human), all entering into a particular space-time together carrying with them particular histories and knowledges and multiple potential futures.

We insert posthumanism into this theoretical entwining with full recognition that Freire is typically categorized as a humanist, and there have been post-humanist critiques leveled at Freire's work. Most notably, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as Freire discusses consciousness he distinguishes between people and animals and appears to create a hierarchical division where Man is superior to animals, and we see a similar issue in *Pedagogy of the City* (FREIRE, 1993), written nearly 30 years after *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Furthermore, Freire's focus on conscientization as a

desirable outcome of critical pedagogy seems to echo the Enlightenment's normative end goal of progress toward the ideal rational Man.

On the surface this could make Freire's work incompatible with posthumanism, and in fact, certain posthumanist traditions that focus on animal interiority and agency (MORRIS, 2015) might find it impossible to dialogue with critical pedagogy. However, we contend this discord does not hold throughout the body of Freire's work, and critical posthumanism (BRAIDOTTI, 2013) bears much resonance with many of Freire's priorities. As just one example, in *Pedagogy of the City*, in an interview with Carlos Torres, Freire (1993, p. 110-111) explains that he stopped using the word conscientization in 1974 because he felt that people were misunderstanding his intention. In his words:

I had, without a doubt, reasons to stop using the word conscientization. During the seventies, with exception, of course, people would speak or write about conscientization as if it were a magical pill to be applied in different doses with an eye toward changing the world. One thousand pills for a reactionary boss. Ten pills for an authoritarian union leader. Fifty pills for intellectuals whose practice contradicted their discourse, and so forth.

For Freire, conscientization is not a thing or a permanent state, it is a constant process of becoming that people engage in as they critically read the world. He expounded upon this concept in interviews, seminars, articles and books, all produced well after the publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and began instead using the term "conscientizing" to emphasize the active process of becoming critical (FREIRE, 1993). As time goes on, Freire's priorities shift even more pointedly toward the role of the body, emotions, and material context in knowledge production for liberation. We cannot help but see the parallels between Freire's later work and Rosi Braidotti's notion of "critical posthumanism".

As Braidotti (2013, p. 35) explains, "Subjectivity is rather a process of auto-poesis or self-styling, which involves complex and continuous negotiations with dominant norms and values and hence also multiple

forms of accountability". Braidotti goes on to describe subjectivity as a "process-oriented political ontology" that allows for the continual re-writing of the self in relation to both human and non-human others. For us, posthuman and new materialist thought is important in the contemporary context, and while there may be points of divergence, in accordance with Freire's philosophy, there is always room for dialogue across difference because it is by engaging with difference that transformation is made possible.

## 2 WALKING WITH FREIRE: ONTO-EPISTEMOLOGICAL PRAXIS IN CONTEXT

In this analysis, we draw forth the onto-epistemological dimensions of Paulo Freire's praxis in order to generate new insights about how Freire's praxis works within and against humanist dualities (self-other, man-nature, subject-object, mind-body). We place vignettes from his autobiographical writings in *Pedagogy in Process* (FREIRE, 1978) and *Teachers as Cultural Workers* (FREIRE, 2005) and *Pedagogy of Hope* (FREIRE, 1992) in dialogue with wayfinding and posthumanism. By doing so, we illuminate the centrality of material context and the body in Freire's conceptualization of critical pedagogy that is articulated in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Our goal is not to overlay the theory onto Freire's work, categorizing and classifying what is or is not wayfinding or posthumanism, but rather to create a dialogue between these traditions and Freire's work in order to gain a fuller perspective of critical pedagogy as an onto-epistemological praxis. To accomplish this, we isolate particular autobiographical vignettes drawn from Freire's later works and then include the theories as needed, illustrating points of synchrony. We consider wayfinding's concept of "legibility" which encompasses identifying features of built environments including, "paths," "edges," "nodes," "districts," and "landmarks," and posthumanism's concepts of "ethics," emotion, "the body," and the relationship between people and the material/non-material world.



## 2.1 SITUATING FREIRE: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW

In order to understand the significance of materiality and the body in Freire's work, it is necessary to first have some knowledge of his biography. Paulo Freire spent his childhood in Recife and Jaboatão, coastal cities in the Northeast of Brazil. At 13 years old, his father died, leaving the family in an uncertain financial state. He recalled later that his father's death sent him into bouts of deep depression (FREIRE, 1994). As an adolescent he lived in nearly a constant state of physical hunger that affected his ability to concentrate on his education (FREIRE, 1996, p. 15.). As a result, he fell two years behind in his schoolwork and was diagnosed as "mildly mentally retarded" (HORTON; FREIRE, 1990, p. xix) by some of his teachers.

Yet through his mother's relentless advocacy, he was admitted to secondary school where he excelled in his studies of the Portuguese language and as a result, was asked to teach it while he was still a student himself (KIRYLO, 2011). He went on to study law and philosophy at the University of Pernambuco (ELIAS, 1994) and practiced law for a short time after graduation. In his early twenties he married Elza Oliveria, "from whom he was to learn much that would inform his work as an adult educator" (ROBERTS, 2017, p. 2). At 25 he was offered a position working for the Social Services of Industry (SESI) a non-government organization that provided social services, including education to workers and their children (FREIRE, 1996). This work, what he calls his "formative years" became the foundation for his philosophy of democratic education that informed his famous literacy project where he taught 300 Brazilian sugarcane workers to read and write in 45 days.

After the military coup of 1964, Paulo Freire's work was considered dangerous by the new regime, and he was imprisoned for 70 days. Upon his release was forced into exile for fifteen years. He wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* during the four and a half years when he lived mainly in Chile, although he traveled to other countries during this time as well. This is significant because his exposure to different geographical con-

texts (Chile, Bolivia, the United States) in those first years in exile provided him with a distance that was necessary for him to abstract his philosophy drawn from his lived experiences in Brazil (FREIRE, 1992).

In addition, it provided him with a means for comparison; as he visited different nations and regions, by reflecting on his past experience in Brazil he was able to see particular socio-economic and political patterns across contexts, each with their own particularities that then informed his larger understanding of the roots of oppression locally and globally. After the publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* he lived in or traveled to various other countries, most notably Switzerland, the United States, Nicaragua, and several African countries including Tanzania, Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau.

These travels had a profound impact on him personally and on the development of his philosophy, and he speaks of these times in relation to his philosophy in his later works. It is important as well to note that in most cases, he does not present his travels in a linear timeline, except when he is asked to describe his time in exile (FREIRE, 1993). Rather, he includes reflections as touching points to link various aspects of his theory to one another and to his praxis. This enables him to provide in-depth analysis by contextualizing his theory in relation to people's lived realities in various locales and in relation to his own lived experiences as well. It is his attention to self in relation to world and in relation to others that compels us to engage his work alongside wayfinding and critical posthumanism. In the next section, we illuminate the theoretical connections that surface the onto-epistemological dimensions of Freire's praxis.

## 2.2 READING AND BECOMING IN AND WITH THE WORLD

We begin this analysis with an in-depth discussion of Freire's work in Guinea-Bissau in the early 1970's and the ways it illustrates the onto-epistemological dimensions of his conceptualization of liberating education. We opted to start here because his work in Guinea-Bissau took place less than a decade after *Pedagogy of*

*the Oppressed* was published, and he devotes an entire book, *Pedagogy in Process* (FREIRE, 1978), to this particular time in his life, indicating that the experience held deep significance for him. During this time, Freire was living in Geneva, Switzerland and consulting with the President of Guinea-Bissau as the Republic was undergoing reconstruction following the war of independence from Portuguese colonial rule. Throughout the letters that comprise majority of the text, Freire's discussion is couched in Marxism and focuses on production and labor, linking production to learning by situating learning in the context of people's work.

This is largely because of the historical context and the movement toward reconstructing the country in a socialist and egalitarian way after having gained independence. Freire's reading of Guinea-Bissau was greatly influenced by the writings of Amílcar Cabral, leader of the nationalist movement who was assassinated in 1973. Throughout Freire's letters to leaders of the reconstruction efforts, he dialogued with the ideas that were already moving through the currents of post-colonial Guinea-Bissau. In the introduction to the letters, however, he presents his reflections on his visits to Guinea-Bissau. His writing is filled with vivid sensory experience and emotion. He refers to his first visit as his "return" to Africa as it triggers his memory of his visit to Tanzania years prior and also resonates with his memories of his childhood in Brazil and time in exile in Chile.

I make this reference to underline how important it was for me to step for the first time on African soil, and to feel myself to be one who was returning and not one who was arriving. In truth, five years ago, as I left the airport of Dar es Salaam, going to the university campus, the city opened before me as something I was seeing again and in which I reencountered myself. From that moment on, even the smallest things, like old acquaintances, began to speak to me of myself. The color of skies; the blue-green of the sea; the coconut, the mango and the cashew trees; the perfume of the flowers; the smell of the earth; the bananas and, among them, my very favorite, the apple-banana; the fish cooked in coconut oil; the locusts hopping in the dry grass; the sinuous body movements of the people as they walked in the streets, their smiles ready for life;

the drums sounding in the depths of the night; bodies dancing and, as they did so, 'designing the world'; the presence among the people of expressions of their culture that the colonialists, no matter how hard they tried, could not stamp out. (FREIRE, 1978, p. 5-6).

Notice here the intensity of the experience of self in and with the material world and the political ideas that are not abstract but alive within this particular space-time. He positions himself in dialogue with the world itself as "even the smallest of things, like old acquaintances, began to speak to" him.

In another example from this text, we see Freire in dialogue with then President of Guinea-Bissau, Luiz Cabral. Here, we see the inter-relation between the decolonial struggle of the people with the plight of the earth itself and other non-human inhabitants.

On the return trip to Guinea-Bissau, looking from the window of the helicopter piloted by two Soviet citizens together with two young nationals learning from them, I saw spread below us the foliage of the trees burned by napalm. I looked intently and with curiosity. There was not one animal. A few large birds flew calmly by. I remember what President Luiz Cabral had said to us in our first meeting when he spoke, with the same seriousness displayed by the young school director, about the different incidents in the struggle. 'There was a time,' said the President, 'when animals of Guinea all sought "asylum" in neighboring countries. Only the small monkeys stayed behind, taking refuge in the liberated zones. They were deathly afraid of the 'tuga' [white colonists]. In the end, the poor things feared us, too. That was because we found ourselves forced to eat them. I hope that very soon all of our animals will return, convinced that the war is over'. (FREIRE, 1978, p. 35).

Throughout the introduction of the book where Freire included these reflections, the emotional experience of reforming education in a place that has been scarred by the violence of colonial rule and revolutionary struggle is overwhelming. For the reader, it evokes empathy for the land itself and all its inhabitants, human and non-human – the scorched trees and earth, the refugee animals, the monkeys and people whose relationship had been severed by war. For Freire, this was further confirmation that

education for liberation must be rooted in and respectful of the knowledge and needs of the people in their world. In Guinea-Bissau, the need to literally reconstruct the country while also cultivating a literate citizenry compelled the nation's leaders to create schools in the spaces where people were working, for instance, by constructing learning sites (both buildings and open air) on farmland.

In line with posthumanist thinking, in Freire's recollections and then in his urgings in his letters to Luiz Cabral, Freire saw the necessity of having the people of Guinea-Bissau become literate in relation with their world. Reclaiming the relationship between people, land and non-human others was essential to the de-colonial reconstruction process. He passionately asserted that the colonizers' schools could not serve as the basis for learning as the people were charged with the task of reunifying their culture while recuperating their land.

In Guinea-Bissau, Freire's wayfinding tendencies are revealed as he expresses his sense of being at home in Africa. He notes the significance of particular locations and particular non-human material entities as he reads and identifies the land. Of particular note is his attention to trees and earth. In the next two vignettes, he makes connections between the mango trees in Brazil, the trees in Chile, and the people in Guinea-Bissau learning and conducting their community meetings under the trees.

When I was a child, I learned my first letters from my parents in the shade of a wonderful mango tree in the yard of the old house where I was born in Recife. The words that I first learned were the words of my child's universe. My first blackboard was the ground itself, and my first chalk a small stick. Much later, in Chile, I had occasion to see words written by newly literate peasants with their farm implements on the roads leading to their work fields. (FREIRE, 1978, p. 132).

We see parallels in the following reflection about Guinea Bissau:

The meeting did not take place in a formal hall but in the shade of an enormous and very ancient tree. The

people demonstrated their hospitality by receiving the delegation in the inviting shade of that tree, in intimate relation with their own natural world.

My impression was that the shaded area beneath that tree was a kind of political-cultural center-- a place for informal conversation-- where they made their work plans together. I also thought how such a place, taking advantage of the shade, might be used for programs of nonformal education.

As I went toward the tree, admiring its thick foliage, I remembered that it had been in the shade of just such trees that Amilcar Cabral met with armed militants during the struggle to evaluate their action against the colonialist armies. At such times, military and tactical analyses never failed to be accompanied by political discussions and debates about culture. [...] Once, during a conversation with peasants in the shade of a tree, Cabral arose, holding the seed of a dende palm in his hand. He chose a good place, dug a hole and planted the seed. Afterwards, looking at the peasants gathered about him, he said, 'We the people of Guinea-Bissau, will accomplish many things before the palm tree that grows from this seed will bear fruit'. 'Years later,' the young man told me, 'there was a meeting of the committee of PAIGC in that region beside the palm tree that had just borne its first fruit'. (FREIRE, 1978, p. 60).

As we read these passages, we are struck by Freire's identification of spaces of learning, culture and politics that are harmonious with people's lived realities. Moreover, we suggest, these political and educational moments would have been impossible without the co-participation of the people and the world. In thinking about Lynch's (1968) framework of "building the image", Freire identifies the tree as a landmark and the shade as a district, with literacy literally marking the paths to and from different places in people's lives. We also cannot help but notice the symbolism of the stick or worker's tool as a writing instrument with the earth as a tablet. The interconnection between literacy, political struggle and personal agency was brought to fruition as people interacted with the material world and its non-human inhabitants and entities.

These place-based undercurrents were not unique to *Pedagogy in Process*, they were a running thread woven throughout Freire's texts. For example, in *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach*, Paulo Freire spends considerable time attend-

ing to the connection between the body, emotions, physical spaces and learning. This text, published posthumously in 1998, one year after Paulo Freire's passing, is acutely conscious of the relationship between materiality and transformative education. In fact, two letters (1st and 9th), are specifically focused on this issue. Strikingly, the 1st letter of the book is titled "Reading the World/Reading the Word", a reversal of the critical pedagogy catch phrase "reading the word and the world". The Ninth letter bears the title "Concrete context/Theoretical context," again positioning the material context in the foreground.

Throughout this text, and others written during this later phase of Freire's life, place and embodied knowledge are clear preoccupations and are not treated as separate from the other tenets of critical pedagogy described in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. For Freire, learning could never be separated from people's physical relationships with the world. As living beings people's lives are shaped by and also shape their surroundings. Their interpersonal relationships are forged and demarcated by spatial configurations and people's engagements with other worldly entities; hence, reading the world is literal and not a figurative activity. For example, he recalls his time on the island of Sao Tome off the western coast of Africa, conducting professional development for teachers in the fishing village of Porto Mont, and how he encouraged the teachers to literally read their surroundings:

During one of these afternoon sessions-- in a discussion about codification depicting Porto Mont with its little houses lined up along the beach, facing the ocean, and a fisherman who walked away from his boat holding up a fish-- two of the participants stood up, as if they had planned it, walked to the window of the school where we were, looked at Porto Mont in the distance, and faced with codification that depicted the village once again, and said, "Yeah, this is what Porto Mont is like, and we didn't even know it!". (FREIRE, 2005, p. 39).

Here, the village itself becomes a partner in the learning activity as the participants literally peer at it from a distance and make sense of their world. Note the houses, the beach, the fisherman, the boat, the

fish, the window, the school, Paulo Freire and his participants, all converging in a particular moment ripe for learning; each with its own history and future, contributing to the formation of all. This learning activity encouraged the participants to notice the world around them, without the haze of familiarity. Noticing was key for conscientizing and questioning what appeared to be unquestionable, drawing forward critical understandings of power relations and people's lives as historical beings in the world.

Consider another example from *Pedagogy of Hope* (FREIRE, 1992). Here, Freire recalls his visit to New York City in 1967, which he calls his "oral time" of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, meaning, he was speaking with people about the book but he had not yet written the actual text. He describes the work being done by two priests in segregated and impoverished Black and Latino neighborhoods:

In one home, with blacks and Puerto Ricans participating in the group, the educator had a blowup of a photograph carried in and placed on the arms of a chair. It was a picture of a street -- as it happened, of the very street that ran in front of the building in which we sat. In the photo, a near mountain of garbage could be seen piled on the corner of the street.

"What do you see in this picture?" asked the educator. A silence ensued, as it always did, no matter where we were or to whom we were addressing the question. Those present were somehow failing to recognize their own street. Then, emphatically, with false assurance, one of them came out with, "A street in Latin America." "But the street signs are in English," the educator now pointed out. [...] "Why not New York?"

"Because we're in the United States and we don't have nothin' like that here!" [...]

After another, longer silence, a third participant spoke up, and said, with difficulty, and painfully, as if he were relieving himself of some terrible burden: "Might as well admit it's our street. Where we live". (FREIRE, 1992, p. 45).

Here, we again see resonance with wayfinding and Lynch's (1968, p. 6) description of "building the image" of a city. In his words:

Environmental images are the result of a two-way process between the observer and his environment. The environment suggests distinctions and relations, and

the observer – selects, organizes, and endows with meaning what he sees. The image so developed now limits and emphasizes what is seen while the image itself is being tested against the filtered perceptual input in a constant interacting process. Thus the image of a given reality may vary significantly between different observers.

This two-way relational process of image building accounts for the participants' blindness to their own neighborhood in a picture that is extracted from their day to day context. The city street was recognizable as a city street, but through their filters of personal experience and the hegemony of US culture, the participants could not easily identify the street as their own. The condition of neglect (i.e., the pile of garbage) in their neighborhood was incongruous with how they understood their locality and their nation. Looking at their home from a distance created an incongruence that then forced a more critical reading of their world. From a posthumanist perspective, the interaction between learners, teachers, technology (i.e., blown-up photograph), non-human entities (chair, pile of garbage), context (apartment, street, neighborhood), emotion, and ideology culminated in a de-familiarization that generated fertile conditions for affirmative politics. By literally reading their world, they were better positioned to act upon it to change it.

### 3 CONCLUSION

In Freire's writings from the 1990's, he levels harsh critiques against the violence of neoliberal capitalism and its impact on hastening conditions of inequality, exploitation and oppression. In many ways, his critique was prophetic of the current moment as he identifies neoliberalism as a fatalistic ideology that destroys dreams of liberation. In his words:

There is some sort of 'dark cloud' enveloping present history that currently affects the different generations, albeit differently-- 'a heavy dark cloud' that in fact is the obfuscating fatalistic ideology contained in neoliberal discourse. It is the ideology that seeks the demise of ideology itself and the death of history,

the vanishing of utopia, the annihilation of dreams. It is a fatalistic ideology that, by stripping education of politics, reduces it to mere training in the employment of technical dexterity or scientific knowing. (FREIRE, 2004, p. 102).

Freire was making this critique at a time when the Internet was still in its infancy. There was no such thing as social media and the line between journalism and propaganda had not yet been fully erased by "fake news" and "alternative facts". While the written words of Freire's philosophy are just as powerful and relevant now 50 years later, we believe his grounded reflections speak more loudly than the abstract ideas alone. In the contemporary post-truth, hyper-reality, neoliberal context, abstraction is everywhere and has become increasingly dangerous. Information is so readily available via the internet that people can find data to support nearly any belief they may hold (D'ANCONA, 2017).

This makes the task of anti-oppressive educators more difficult as what constitutes "truth" and "fact" waivers like heat rising off hot pavement. Attending to material context, to people's lived realities, to the connection between land, life, political struggle, and social and eco justice can assist in staving off paralyzing relativism. Attending to people's material worlds allows for the emergence of critical questions, curiosity, and imagination, but always in relation to that which we can see, smell, touch, feel, hear, and the deep emotional resonance of the world in our bodies. In Freire's words,

The fundamental point, however, is that people not only see the world as a 'base from which they carry out their own lives' but that they also see daily life as the object of an ever more rigorous knowledge. This knowledge should clarify and illuminate their practical and emotional existence that takes reality as its base. (FREIRE, 1978, p. 135).

Learning while being in and with the world makes room for learners to consider their dreams and desires as tangible and significant, right here and now.

As we illustrated above, in his reflections, Freire paid significant attention to a number of human ge-

ography and posthumanist concerns. Even in his early works, which it might be argued are deeply informed by Enlightenment philosophy, he always held a pre-occupation for eliminating the influence of Cartesian duality and Enlightenment rationality because they objectification of learners by disallowing them to create their own knowledges from their lived experiences. Attending to people's lived realities and material worlds, literally working with people to read and re-write what they see around them every day, affords ways of being and knowing that go beyond the boundaries of Enlightenment thought. Furthermore, it brings new ethical imperatives to the surface as the plight of people becomes intertwined with the world and all other human and non-human inhabitants. As he explains,

When people are able to see and analyze their own way of being in the world of their immediate daily life, including the life of their villages, and when they can perceive the rationale for the factors on which their daily life is based, they are enabled to go far beyond the narrow horizons of their own village and of the geographical area in which it is located, to gain a global perspective on reality. (FREIRE, 1978, p. 57).

Even before posthumanism had gained traction in academic discourse, Freire was edging toward the margins of humanist thought, pointing out the gross limitations of the cerebrocentric (CALLIES; KELLER; LOHOFER, 2011) tendencies of Enlightenment philosophy to perversely create conditions of oppression and dehumanization. Freire's onto-epistemological stance is one where ethics, ways of knowing and ways of being are mutually reinforcing as people strive toward a cohesive, critical, creative praxis of becoming. This harmonizes with critical posthumanism's emphasis on

[ ] cartography accuracy, with the corollary of ethical accountability; trans-disciplinarity; the importance of combining critique with creative figurations; the principle of non-linearity; the powers of memory and the imagination and the strategy of de-familiarization. (BRAIDOTTI, 2013, p. 163).

His praxis embodied a subjectivity that aligns with wayfinding, as people simultaneously read and write

the world by identifying its architectural features in relation to personal autobiography, and then re-writing their images of those spaces anew as they demystify the relationship between the systemic and the self. Most potently for us, however, as we walk with Freire through his autobiography, exploring what it means to engage in critical praxis, is the role of humility.

As we view the world through his eyes, we see one man in a much larger and continuously unfolding world. We see people engaged in work and learning, celebration and struggle, full of life and passion. We see a world with rich texture, sharp contours, warm breezes, sources of nourishment and human and non-human inhabitants moving in multiple directions, coalescing and dispersing at junctures, what Lynch (1968) calls nodes. We see transfers, exchanges and changes of direction, the influence of others that we carry within our bodies as paths and journeys connect and unfurl.

## REFERENCES

- BARAD, K. **Meeting the Universe Halfway**: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.
- BRAIDOTTI, R. **The posthuman**. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013.
- CALLIES, M.; KELLER, W.R.; LOHOFER, A. **Bi-directionality in the cognitive sciences**: Avenues, challenges and limitations. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011.
- D'ANCONA, M. **Post-truth**: The war on truth and how to fight back. London, UK: Ebury Press, 2017.
- DUNCAN, J.; JOHNSON, N.; SCHEIN, R. **A companion to cultural geography**. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.
- ELIAS, J. **Paulo Freire**: Pedagogue of liberation. Malabar, Fla. USA: Kreiger, 1994.

FOUBERG, E.H.; MURPHY, A.B.; DE BLIJ, H.J. **Human Geography: People, Place and Culture**. 9th Edition. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2009.

FREIRE, P. **Pedagogy in Process**: The letters to Guinea-Bissau. New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1978.

FREIRE, P. **Pedagogy of Hope**: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 1992.

FREIRE, P. **Pedagogy of the City**. New York, NY: Continuum, 1993.

FREIRE, P. **Letters to Cristina**: Reflections on My Life and Work. New York, NY: Routledge, 1996.

FREIRE, P. **Pedagogy of Indignation**. Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2004.

FREIRE, P. **Teachers as Cultural Workers**: Letters to those who dare teach, Expanded Edition. Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2005.

FREIRE, P. **Pedagogy of the Oppressed**. 30th Anniversary Edition. New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2007.

KIRYLO, J. **Paulo Freire**: The man from Recife. New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2011.

LYNCH, K. **The image of the city**. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1968.

MARTUSEWITZ, R.A.; EDMUNSON, J.; LUPINACCI, J. **Ecojustice education**: Toward diverse, democratic and sustainable communities, 2nd edition. New York, NY: Routledge, 2015.

MORRIS, M. Posthuman education and animal interiority. In: SNAZA, N.; WEAVER, J.A. (Ed.). **Posthumanism and educational research**. New York, NY: Routledge, 2015. p.44-55.

PETIFILS, B. Researching the posthuman: The “subject” as curricular lens. In: SNAZA, N.; WEAVER, J.A. (Ed.). **Posthumanism and educational research**. New York, NY: Routledge, 2015. p.30-43.

ROBERTS, P. **Paulo Freire**: A brief intellectual biography. **Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education**. 2017. Retrieved 4 Jul. 2018, from: <<http://education.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264093-e-10>>. Access in:

SNAZA, N.; WEAVER, J.A. **Posthumanism and Educational Research**. New York, NY: Routledge, 2015.

THOMAS, P.L.; KINCHELOE, J.L. **Reading, writing and thinking**: The postformal basics. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense, 2006.

---

**Recebido em:** 5 de Maio de 2018

**Avaliado em:** 12 de Julho de 2018

**Aceito em:** 15 de Agosto de 2018

---

1 Associate Professor; Leadership for Diverse Learning Communities Ed.D, Program Molloy College Rockville Centre, NY. E-mail: tkress@molloy.edu

2 Professor Curriculum, Foundations & Reading Georgia Southern University Statesboro, GA. E-mail: boblake@georgiasouthern.edu