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Reclaiming Praxis: A Tribute to Paulo Freire!

Like many of you, I am a staunch admirer of Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. Freire's internationally acclaimed work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), touches our hearts, inspires action and reflection, and above all, motivates us as educators to be transformers and liberators. Glass (2001) says it best: "Freire's legacy is unprecedented for an educator: None other has influenced practice in such a wide array of contexts and cultures, or helped to enable so many of the world's disempowered turn education toward their own dreams" (p. 15). But how do educators help the world's disempowered "turn education toward their own dreams?" In this our inaugural edition of *Ubiquity*, I pause for a moment to consider how the Praxis strand of *Ubiquity* may contribute to Freire's dream of educators liberating the disempowered—be they mentally and/or physically challenged; rich, poor, black, white and all the colors in between; those culturally, linguistically, historically privileged and/or marginalized; those with power and those without; local, national or international; multilingual or monolingual; immigrant, refugee or citizen; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered or otherwise—toward their own dreams through *Literature, Literacy and the Arts*.

When considering what Praxis is all about, I draw on the introductory statements on our website pages (<http://ed-ubiquity.gsu.edu/wordpress/praxis/>):

Praxis can be defined as the meeting ground of theory and practice. This meeting ground has the potential to be transformative. It is not just thinking or reflecting about our action but it is also taking action as a result of our thinking and this action; the two are seen as acting upon each other as if in a *dialectal dance*...

We use the symbol of a bridge to show the relationship for connecting, merging, informing, theorizing, knowledge building, and traversing from one end to the other to "get somewhere, or

to go places, hopefully new places as in the development of knowledge, which can be acted upon to change the world for the better. Smith (1999, 2011) calls Praxis, the “continual interplay between ends and means” and “thought and action.” Smith deconstructs the “quality of Praxis” as informed and committed action that is “risky, creative, other seeking and dialogic” (p. X).

Paulo Freire, in an interview with Donald Macedo (Macedo, 1995) reinforces the importance and equality of the partners in the dialectal dance which cannot happen if one is “dancing alone.” He states:

...I am not suggesting an over-celebration of theory. We must not negate practice for the sake of theory. To do so would reduce theory to pure verbalism or intellectualism. By the same token, to negate theory for the sake of practice, as in the use of dialogue as conversation, is to run the risk of losing oneself in the disconnectedness of practice. It is for this reason that I never advocate either a theoretic elitism or a practice ungrounded in theory, but the unity between theory and practice. In order to achieve this unity, one must have an epistemological curiosity--a curiosity that is often missing in dialogue as conversation (p. 377).

In Praxis we reinforce the dialectal interplay between theory and practice, knowledge and reflection, and action and not just any action, but critical and transformative action! As critical pedagogues and cultural workers, we live, research and teach a hopefulness and possibility that counters hegemonic educational discourses and practices. In this inaugural edition, we celebrate The Arts as forms of resistance and expression in all the many Spaces and Places where Literature, Literacy and the Arts merge and transform lives.

Our authors do a wonderful job of helping us appreciate the many diverse and possible places and spaces where the arts, literature and literacy can be transformative in promoting

communication for liberation and social good. Our honorary board member, Christine Sleeter, in her invited piece, describes the power of public art which she believes can serve to be “a potent form of literacy.” Sleeter takes us to the Salinas River Valley in California where she uses public art to critique its literary power while noting the urgent need for the arts, especially for low-income families and in particular for Mexican farmworkers. Paulo Freire would be proud!

Our peer-reviewed submissions all speak to critical praxis by demonstrating the power of the arts to express and develop social commentary and inclusive and culturally relevant and personally meaningful curriculum. Katie Bush moves the conversation to the southeastern United States to summarize art movement and five different programs that are currently underway and accessible via social media. From Bush you will appreciate learning about how you can access yarn bombs, street painting, Free Arts Friday (FAF), living walls and living museums. Bush truly makes the arts accessible to all in forms from which we can all benefit.

Again situated in the southeastern United States, specifically, Atlanta, GA, Ashley Holmes extends the sites of pedagogy from the classroom to take street art to another dimension to provoke social commentary and put a stop to gender-based street harassment. The Stop Telling Women to Smile (STWTS) Project by Tatyana Fazlalizadeh and described by Holmes is presented as a case study to get everyone talking about the message which becomes a form of public pedagogy and community literacy. Here we see critical community pedagogy in action at work!

Wong and Grant, like Holmes, protest the discriminating behaviors toward women through their examination of the Clothesline Project at a northeastern university in the United States. The Clothesline Project takes on violence against women on college campuses, and Wong and Grant use the art-in-action approach to critique violence against women and how we can use

public spaces to promote problem posing to stop the violence. Women's traditional work of washing and hanging clothes on the line, in this project, becomes a transforming metaphor to speak back to the dominant discourses that violate the productive lives of women. All feminists would be pleased!

Our two final papers in this inaugural edition promote student voice and differentiated learning styles in PK-12 settings in the western and eastern United States. Reimer looks at an inner city high school art academy and the problem-based learning projects that are done by the diverse student population. One of the described multimedia- multidisciplinary projects, *Stories of Home: The Southeast Asian Story Project* went on to debut at the Hmong International New Year 2014 festival and was presented at a national conference. Learning can be personal, meaningful, and purposeful and its products can be shared with the community! This article is a powerful message for all educators who see themselves as cultural workers.

Graves, Hagood, Auman, and Rieger examine student voice, student choice, curricula differentiation, and varied learning styles through the lens of interdisciplinary, multiliteracies and multimodalities in the development of teaching and learning activities. They use a first-grader's love for movement as the expressive platform to develop their thesis: Rather than censoring students for perceived off-task behaviors, educators need to be more inclusive in curricula design through incorporating dance or movement and the visual arts to promote equal access to literacy. Children learn in multiple ways but educators cannot capitalize on their varied learning styles unless they divest themselves of a singular traditional academic mode of teaching.

I sincerely hope that you enjoy reading our submissions for this inaugural edition of which Paulo Freire would be proud. It is critical, reflexive Praxis that serves to make the world a better place for everyone. Above all, I hope these pieces will serve to be transformative to your

knowledge and practice, to your reflections on how you can continue to develop your practice, and as you consider how you incorporate more of the arts in your work in the many places and spaces around you, including traditional classrooms at schools, communities and universities.

Welcome and Enjoy Our Inaugural Edition!

Gertrude Tinker Sachs

Editor

Ubiquity Praxis Strand

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