How the Ideas of Paulo Freire Contribute to the Cultural Roots of the Ecological Crisis

C. A. Bowers

One of the challenges in assessing the merits of Paulo Freire’s emancipatory pedagogy is that his ideas are so widely promoted in leading colleges of education that criticism of his ideas will, in effect, be a criticism of these institutions. The challenge is further magnified by subtle changes in his thinking during his last years that suggest his concern with how he was being interpreted by his followers. In *Mentoring the Mentor: A Critical Dialogue with Paulo Freire* (1997) he titled a subsection of the chapter he wrote in response to his followers “Allowing Me Also to Continue Growing and Changing in My Contexts”. Indeed, his philosophical anthropology, which he articulates so forcefully in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and in *Education for Critical Consciousness*, would appear at first glance to be fundamentally at odds with the Freire found in *Mentoring the Mentor*. Witness the essentialist assumption about human nature that he universalizes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* when he states that to “exist humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming” (1974, p. 76). Near the end of his life he writes

> What I have been proposing is a profound respect for the cultural identity of students—a cultural identity that implies respect for the language of the other, the color of the other, the gender of the other, the sexual orientation of the other, the intellectual capacity of the other; that implies the ability to stimulate the creativity of the other. But these things take place in a social and historical context and not in pure air. These things take place in history, and I, Paulo Freire, am not the owner of history. 1997, p. 307-8

To state the challenge of assessing the ideas of Freire more directly: should he be viewed as an essentialist thinker whose philosophical anthropology is based on western assumptions that were also the basis of the Industrial Revolution, or should he be understood primarily as an advocate of dialogue and a cultural sensitivity that precludes imposing on other cultures a western understanding of the emancipated individual? I think the answer can be found in how his philosophical anthropology continually reasserts itself even as he writes in *Mentoring the Mentor* about the need to avoid a paternalistic relation to the oppressed and the need to understand that the meaning of democracy has to take account of specific historical and cultural contexts (pp. 307, 308). For example, his philosophical anthropology underlies his warning that if teachers over romanticize the students’ language, they “are
not engaging with their students in a mutual process of liberation” (p. 307). His philosophical anthropology also frames his understanding of the teacher as a mentor. As he put it,

> The fundamental task of the teacher is a liberatory task. It is not to encourage the mentor’s goals and aspirations and dreams to be reproduced in the mentees, the students, but to give rise to the possibility that the students become the owners of their own history. This is how I understand the need that teachers have to transcend their merely instructive task and assume the ethical posture of a mentor who truly believes in the total autonomy, freedom, and development of those he or she mentors. p. 324 (italics added)

Here he restates his belief that the essence of being human is the ability to continually create anew the conditions of one’s own existence. This view of “total autonomy” is summed up in his statement that “to speak a true word is to transform the world” (1974, p. 75).

It is important to note that neither Freire nor his followers have questioned whether consistency with their own position would require that members of different cultures be allowed to express their own views on whether total autonomy is the core feature of a fully realized human being. Apparently, the members of different cultures that have not been liberated, and thus cannot speak a true word, need not be consulted on such an important question as to what constitutes humankind’s essential nature. Neither Peter McLaren nor Henry Giroux, who are two of the leading proponents of Freire’s ideas, have been troubled by Freire’s abstract pronouncements on a universal human nature that ignores the profound differences in cultural epistemologies. McLaren, for example, claims that “we (teachers) need to occupy locations between our political unconsciousness and everyday praxis but at the same time be guided by a universal emancipatory world view in the form of a provisional utopia or contingent foundationalism” (1995, p. 59, italics added). While I must admit to not understanding what McLaren means by a “provisional utopia” or a “contingent foundationalism”, it is abundantly clear that his use of the phrase “universal emancipatory world view” is a restatement of the Freirean assumption that each generation should rename the world, and that their achievements should be overturned by the generation that follows them. Ironically, even though McLaren is correct in his assessment of the dangers of economic globalization, he does not recognize that the ideal of universal emancipation is based on the same assumptions and silences that underlie the language of globalization. Henry Giroux’s understanding of the mission of a critical pedagogy is also based on the Freirean assumption that to be fully human is to engage in a continual world transforming process. In *The Pedagogy and Politics of Hope* (1997) he writes that
Critical pedagogy would represent itself as the active construction rather than the transmission of particular ways of life. More specifically, as transformative intellectuals, teachers would engage in the invention of language so as to provide spaces for themselves and their students to rethink their experiences in terms that both name the relations of oppression and offer ways to overcome them. p. 224

I think a strong argument can be made that the promotion of Freirean ideas in leading graduate schools of education, as well as the recent efforts to restore the ideas of John Dewey to a prominent place in the curriculum, can be traced to the deep cultural assumptions these thinkers share with other elite groups that are continually mislabeled as conservative capitalists. In effect, I am suggesting that the uncritical embrace of Freirean emancipatory ideals and pedagogical practices is largely accountable in terms of a sociology of knowledge insight into how people tend not to recognize as problematic, and thus criticize, what they take for granted. Or in Gregory Bateson’s terms, thought occurs when there is a difference which makes a difference.

What has not been widely recognized by Freire or his followers is that there are no real differences between the deep cultural assumptions that underlie his philosophical anthropology and his more recent emphasis on dialogue, and the western cultural assumptions that underlie the current digital stage of the Industrial Revolution—which universities promote in the language of the market place one might expect to find in corporate boardrooms. The shared assumptions can be seen by comparing the Freirean ideal of individuals who are totally free from the oppressive traditions of their communities (what he calls the “alienating daily routine that repeats itself” (1985, p. 199) with the form of individualism required by the Industrial Revolution. In writing about the early nineteenth century Luddite’s resistance to the destruction of their communities, Kirkpatrick Sale sums up the form of individualism required by the new industrial model of production and consumption in the following way:

All that ‘community’ implies—self-sufficiency, mutual aid, morality in the marketplace, stubborn tradition, regulation by custom, organic knowledge instead of mechanistic science—had to be steadily and systematically disrupted and displaced. All of the practices that kept the individual from becoming a consumer had to be done away with so that the cogs and wheels of an unfettered machine called ‘the economy’ could operate without interference, influenced merely by invisible hands and inevitable balances…. 1995, p. 38
If we refer back to various statements about the purpose of a liberal education we will find that emancipating individuals from “all that ‘community’ implies” has been a longstanding goal, one that is not unique to Freirean thinkers.

Freire’s ideas were formed initially in response to Third World situations where a history of colonialism had created great economic disparities and silenced all forms of resistance. That his philosophical anthropology, and the cultural assumptions that underlie it, now support the new forms of colonialism being resisted by many Third World cultures can be seen in Gerald Berthoud’s recent observation of what is being undermined by the western model of economic globalization. Especially noteworthy is that the first sentence in the following quotation, which is Berthoud’s summary of what is required by the Western model of economic development, could have been taken from any number of Freire’s writings—as well as the writings of his followers.

What must be universalized through development is a cultural complex centered around the notion that human life, if it is to be fully lived, cannot be constrained by limits of any kind. To produce such a result in traditional societies, for whom the supposedly primordial principle of boundless expansion in the technological and economic domains is generally alien, presupposes overcoming symbolic and moral ‘obstacles’, that is, ridding these societies of various inhibiting ideas and practices such as myths, ceremonies, rituals, mutual aid, networks of solidarity, and the like. 1992, p. 72

In effect, what the western approach to development needs to overturn are the same “symbolic and moral obstacles” that Freire and his followers view as sources of oppression.

The irony of how the Freirean approach to emancipation, even when it starts with decoding local cultural patterns, contributes to the current process of globalization becomes easier to recognize when we consider specific cultures that are attempting to regenerate their traditional symbolic foundations as sources of self-reliance, as well as sources of resistance to the latest wave of colonization that derives its legitimacy from the reductionism of western science and technology rather than from the other-worldly orientation of the church. These cultures of resistance—the Andean peasants working to recover their ancient system of agriculture, the Balinese who rejected the Green Revolution by returning to their temple ceremonies for regulating the allocation of water and the planting of rice crops, the grassroots efforts of the Zapotista to retain their traditional patterns of community rather than be subjugated by the modern political and economic systems of a centralized government, the indigenous farmers in India who rebelled against the industrial model of agriculture that was being carried to a new level of
exploitation by Monsanto’s genetically engineered “terminator” seed—all utilize their own culturally based approaches to critical reflection as a necessary part of their resistance. But they do not rely upon it as the only legitimate source of knowledge and authority. Rather, their mythopoetic narratives are the basis of their ceremonies, systems of moral reciprocity and mutual aid, patterns of intergenerational mentoring, use of technology, and ways of understanding human/Nature relationships. By making critical reflection the only legitimate approach to knowledge, and by framing this process in a way where each generation is to overturn what has survived from emancipatory efforts of the previous generation, the Freirean approach to emancipation undermines the deep symbolic foundations upon which these and other indigenous cultures are based.

This process of undermining the symbolic basis of resistance to the western cult of progress and autonomous individualism is hard to recognize because of the “God-words” invoked by Freire and his followers to legitimize their mission. Words and phrases such as “emancipation,” “freedom,” “dialogue,” “liberation,” “transformation rather than transmission,” critical inquiry rather than a banking model of education,” are difficult to question without appearing as a reactionary thinker. These “God-words” are further immunized from serious questioning by the fact that some traditional cultures carry on practices that do not fit widely held standards of social justice, such as the “honor” killings practiced in some Middle East cultures, the continuation of caste systems that still lock people into horrific forms of existence, and the practices of gender discrimination—to cite a few examples. And there are many situations where previous processes of colonization make the limited use of the language of emancipation a valid approach to empowerment—limited in the sense that specific traditions of oppression are the focus of emancipation. This qualification brings out an important distinction; namely, that Freire’s language of emancipation is based on the western assumptions that underlie his philosophic anthropology, which leads to viewing all traditions as oppressive in nature.

The double bind inherent in the thinking of Freire and his followers is that while an emancipatory pedagogy may raise awareness in ways that enable people to recognize changes that need to be made, it cannot be the basis of community—which requires multiple forms of knowledge and relationships that are not always dependent upon the critical reflection and the perspective of the individual. Freire may have viewed himself as changing in ways not fully grasped by his followers. But I think that he retained to the end a core set of assumptions or meta-cognitive schemata (what I have described elsewhere as root metaphors, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2001). These include the following: a human centered view of human/Nature relationships, thinking of change as linear and inherently progressive in
nature, representing critical inquiry and thus the autonomous individual as the only legitimate source of agency and moral authority. And most important of all, assuming that the view of reality based on these assumptions should replace the “realities” constituted by other cultural epistemologies. It is important to reiterate the connection between these assumptions and the form of consciousness required by the Industrial Revolution—and, by extension, the cultural mediating characteristics of computers. These assumptions included thinking that change is constant and the surest sign of progress, that individuals should be emancipated from cultural traditions and networks of mutual support, that this is a human-centered world, and that differences in cultural ways of knowing need to be replaced by a universal mindset that makes individual self-determination the highest form of existence.

There are several other important connections between the cultural assumptions that are the basis of Freire’s thinking and the assumptions upon which the Industrial Revolution was based. And just as these assumptions continue to undermine cultural diversity and self-sufficient communities in the name of globalization, they continue to be reproduced in the thinking of Freire’s followers. The effect is that their proposals for educational reform, if put into practice, would further undermine community by emphasizing that only new ideas that have survived the process of critical inquiry should be the basis of daily life. In effect, they would be experimental ideas in that they have not been tested in the life of the community. The view of progress that Freire and his followers share in common with today’s proponents of economic and technological globalization involves the rejection of what makes communities more than a collection of critically reflective individuals who, in lacking what can only be learned within communities, are dependent upon consumerism.

While using different legitimating metaphors, both Freire and the proponents of the Industrial Revolution were against all traditions. The irony is that the quest to overturn traditions in order to create dependency upon new technologies and to expand markets, as well as the Freirean formula of equating all traditions with oppression and thus impediments to living full, self-determining lives, are expressions of a western tradition that Edward Shils calls an “antitradition tradition” (1981. pp. 235-239). Freire’s claim, for example, that “to speak a true word is to transform the world” (1974, p. 75) is itself part of the western philosophical tradition that holds that rational thought does not have to be held accountable for the diversity of cultural patterns or the importance of these patterns in people’s lives.

Traditions are as complex and varied as the world’s cultures. If the next generation of educational reformers are going to understand why a more complex understanding of the nature of tradition is important to non-colonizing approaches to multi-cultural education, as well as recognize the
alternatives to the consumer-oriented culture that is trashing the environment, professors in graduate schools of education will need to expand the list of required reading to include Shils’ book, Tradition (1981). This book does not represent what many formulaic thinkers, in encountering the word “tradition,” will conclude is another expression of reactionary thinking. Rather, it is a description of the many cultural patterns and practices that are repeated over four generations or cohorts, and an explanation of why these everyday patterns and practices should be called traditions. It is also a book that clarifies how traditions should be understood, including how some traditions were wrongly constituted in the first place, how some traditions change too slowly while others disappear before we fully understand their importance in our lives, how they change from without and from within, and the many misconceptions that surround the nature of tradition—including the two extremes. One extreme and incorrect view of tradition is that it does not change, while the other view, which is equally incorrect, is that people can live better lives if they are free of all traditions. The importance of Shils’ book is that it provides us with a more complex way of understanding the continuities in cultural experience without essentializing them. It also provides a basis for understanding the differences between cultural groups such as the Taliban, which had an extremely reactionary approach to tradition, and other cultures that are recovering the attenuated traditions necessary for resisting western pressures to adopt a modern, progressive form of consciousness. The adequacy of a Freirean understanding of multiple dimensions of tradition, especially how traditions can be the basis for resisting colonization, can be more fully considered by students if the following are added to the required reading list: Grassroots Post-Modernism: Remaking the Soil of Cultures (1998), by Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash; The Spirit of Regeneration: Andean Culture Confronting Western Notions of Development (1998), edited by Frederique Apffel-Marglin with PRATEC; Global Ecology: A New Arena of Political Conflict (1993), edited by Wolfgang Sachs. The nature of wisdom refined over generations of collective experience, to cite another aspect of tradition that cannot easily be reconciled with Freire’s Enlightenment assumptions, can be found in such books as Rupert Ross’ Returning to the Teaching: Exploring Aboriginal Justice (1996), and in Keith Basso’s Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache (1996).

Another assumption that Freire and his followers share with the proponents of the consumer and technology dependent lifestyle now being globalized by the modern heirs of William Cartwright and Henry Ford is that human progress can be understood without consideration of its impact on the environment. Indeed, the collective silence in the writing of Freire and his followers about the
environmental crisis is really quite astonishing. Freire does not mention it at all, and the only reference I have seen by critical pedagogy theorists is McLaren’s inclusion of the word “environment” in a list of current problems. That Freire and his followers have not acknowledged what has become such a dominant concern of people around the world that even CEO’s of major corporations are beginning to rethink their priorities can be accounted for by the way in which their language creates a double bind. The source of the double bind, and thus their silence, is in the way their basic assumptions underlie the industrial form of culture that is a major contributor to the ecological crisis. The consequence is that just as tradition has to be treated in a formulaic manner in order to preserve the conceptual consistency of the Freirean language of emancipation, the language that most accurately describes the essential challenge of the environmental movement also has to be dealt with in formulaic fashion.

Environmentalists concerned with reversing the present decline in the viability of natural systems speak of the need to preserve species, to conserve wilderness, and to restore habitat. These metaphors cannot be reconciled with the language of liberalism and the cult of progress. Nor can the metaphors that describe the characteristics of ecologically sustainable cultures, and that enable us to address eco-justice issues, be reconciled with assumptions underlying the world view of liberalism and the Freirean view of emancipation, as I will explain later. The recovery of the environment and community are essentially conserving activities—which is not to be identified with how Freire and his followers think of conservatism. They ignore the many forms of conservatism-- including temperamental conservatism, cultural conservatism (which takes as many forms as there are languages), and philosophical conservatism—by equating conservatism with capitalism and globalization. This aspect of their formulaic thinking reproduces the popular mistake of confusing conservatism with what is in fact Classical Liberalism-- which is based on assumptions they share. To restate the double bind inherent in Freirean thinking, if they were to recognize the cultural roots of the ecological crisis they would have to engage in a process of reconceptualization that could only be carried through by their ceasing to be Freirean theorists. And too many reputations would be threatened for them to acknowledge that their emancipatory pedagogy is based on earlier metaphorical constructions that did not take account of the fact that the fate of humans is dependent upon the viability of natural systems.

The social justice issues of class, race, and gender that are now the focus of attention of Freire’s followers, and which received increasing attention during Freire’s last years, should not be treated as separate from the cultural changes that will be required if we are to limit our adverse impact on the environment in ways that allow ecosystems to recover. Defining social justice in terms of gaining equal
participation in the consumer, technology dependent lifestyle represents a pre-ecological way of thinking. Reforming public schools and universities in ways that contribute to eco-justice should now be the main focus of attention; and the issues of class, race, and gender should be understood within the context of this more inclusive challenge. In providing an overview of the different dimensions of eco-justice, and the curricular reforms necessary to achieving it, I will at the same time be extending my critique of the core assumptions Freire, even in his later years, took for granted.

Defining eco-justice in ways that take account of the environmental impact of our increasingly technological and consumer driven culture, as well as differences in cultures resisting this juggernaut, is a daunting task. As a starting point, four aspects of eco-justice stand out as having particular importance for how we think of educational reform. These include: (1) eco-racism, which involves minority and marginalized cultural groups who are exposed to toxic chemicals in their workplace and neighborhoods; (2) the need to reduce the hyper consumerism of the middle class while raising the material standard of living for the millions of children and adults in Third World countries who experience poverty in their daily lives; (3) conserving the traditions of non-commodified knowledge, skills, and relationships within minority cultures, as well as regenerating the more attenuated non-commodified traditions within the middle class; (4) ensuring that the lives of unborn generations will not be diminished by a degraded environment.

Addressing these issues will require developing a critical understanding of the connections between the high-status knowledge acquired in our educational institutions and the relentless drive to create new technologies and markets. This will involve understanding how the metaphorical nature of language frames current ways of thinking in terms of earlier expressions of cultural intelligence that equated change with progress, that represented humans as able to control and now re-engineer the genetic basis of life, and that universalized the ideal of the autonomous individual. It will also involve a critical understanding of the Janus face of science, particularly science’s role in the expansion of the Industrial Revolution as well as how its current usefulness is being compromised by its increasing integration into corporate culture.

Curriculum reforms should also take account of the myth currently given new life by the promoters of computers that represent abstract knowledge, such as that found in print, as more reliable and culturally advanced than oral forms of encoding and communicating. This myth, along with its supporting assumptions, has resulted in viewing cultures that are more ecologically centered as too primitive to learn from. Overlooked in the current rush to replace as much of face-to-face
communication and accountability as possible with computer mediated communication is that this technology reproduces the mind set and thus form of subjectivity described in the quotation taken from Kirkpatrick Sale’s book. Computers can only process explicit and decontextualized forms of knowledge. In addition, they reinforce the myth that language is a conduit through which people pass their ideas and objective information. In addition, computers reinforce a subjective experience of temporality where the past and future become a matter of subjective judgment and perspective. The realities—the contextual and tacit nature of most of our cultural knowledge, the metaphorical nature of language that encodes and carries forward earlier culturally specific ways of knowing, and the traditions we are dependent upon and that can easily disappear, such as what has happened to our traditional sense of privacy rights—are being further undermined in ways that have important eco-justice implications. While Hans Moravec announces that computers represent the transition to the post-biological phase of evolution (1988, p. 4) and Sherry Turkle sees in internet experiences the possibility of thinking of ourselves as “fluid, emergent, decentralized, multiplicitous, flexible, and ever in process (1995, pp. 263-264) the reality is that computers are a colonizing technology that undermine intergenerational knowledge that is the basis of cultural diversity. It is important to note that while Freire and his followers have been deeply critical of capitalism, they have ignored the role of computers in creating a world monoculture based on the more environmentally destructive characteristics of the western mind set. Some of his followers have even suggested that computers can be part of the emancipatory process.

A whole paper could be written on curriculum reforms that address the causes and effects of eco-racism. While not meaning to diminish the importance of eco-racism, I want to turn to another area of curriculum reform that highlights a fundamental weakness in the Freirean/critical pedagogy way of thinking. That is, I want to focus the discussion of curriculum reform on the forms of knowledge that critical inquiry may help us understand as important, including why they have been marginalized, but that are based on profoundly different relationships and forms of authority. These reforms relate directly to the need to reverse the cultural patterns that contribute to the community and environmentally destructive cycle of increasing dependence upon consumerism that leads to the need to work longer hours--often at two jobs, and that reduces the amount of time for parenting and community involvement, while returning more waste and toxic materials to the environment—including the neighborhoods of politically and economically marginalized groups. The amount of waste produced by the American middle class is staggering. According to Paul Hawkin, Amory and L. Hunter Lovins, “industry moves, mines, extracts, shovels, burns, pumps, and disposes of 4 million pounds of material in order to provide
one average middle-class family’s needs for a year (1999, p. 51). The changes resulting from the more than 80,000 synthetic chemicals introduced into the environment in recent years that support this lifestyle, as well as the rapid rate of global warming that has resulted in 40 percent of the polar ice cap melting away, are equally staggering.

It is in what universities have relegated to the category of low-status knowledge, and in what the emancipatory educational theorists have labeled variously as the “transmission’ and “banking” model of education, that we find the forms of knowledge and relationships that represent alternatives to a consumer dependent lifestyle. These forms of knowledge and relationships also contribute to the vitality of community; that is, the whole range of interactions and skills that have not been commodified, These include the myths (or what I prefer to call the mythopoetic narratives), ceremonies, rituals, patterns of mutual aid, and networks of solidarity that Berthoud refers to as sources of resistance to the cult of progress and the form of self-centered individualism this cult requires.

Low-status knowledge also includes the communal craft and agricultural knowledge that William Morris, a leading nineteenth century British socialist, viewed as the alternative to the dehumanizing effects of liberal/industrial thinking. Personal skills and talents expressed in communal activities ranging from growing, preparing, and sharing food (which Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Sari Prakash say are at the “heart of community and communion” 1998, p. 53), to musical performances, healing, and repairing the material forms of culture that have become worn but are still useful, are all dependent upon the sharing of intergenerational knowledge. In such areas as gardening, wood working, playing or making an instrument, we can see how this knowledge is carried forward through mentoring relationships that involve more than the transferring of information. Mentoring also involves passing on wisdom about relationships, the importance of doing something well by mastering what has been done before—and adding to it through one’s personal talent and insight—all aspects of character development that have an important influence on the formation of self identity and moral reciprocity within the community.

In summarizing the essential characteristics of low-status knowledge, I want to acknowledge that in some communities these patterns may be based on rigid, even reactionary thinking—and that long held prejudices and special interests may be sources of social injustice. Having acknowledged what I take to be already a widely held understanding, but which I feel compelled to restate in order not to be seen as romanticizing low-status knowledge, I want to summarize its essential characteristics—which will be expressed in culturally diverse ways. Low-status knowledge and relationships are primarily
dependent upon face-to-face communication, and thus are contextually grounded and involve interpersonal accountability that we do not find in print based communication. Low-status knowledge and relationships also involve intergenerational accountability that is fundamentally different from high-status knowledge which is abstract and theory based, experimental, and non-accountable in terms of communities—and non-western cultures. Low-status knowledge is largely passed on as the fund of tacit knowledge that has been tested and refined over generations. In addition, it often it encodes the intergenerational experience of living in one place over many generations. Most importantly, in being non-commodified it has a smaller ecological footprint than the high-status knowledge that enables the individual to participate in the culture of hyper-consumerism.

Educational reforms that address eco-justice issues ranging from contaminated environments, undermining traditions of moral reciprocity and self-reliance, and jeopardizing the prospects of future generations, will need to combine a critical and comparative cultural understanding of the historical roots and current manifestations of high-status knowledge with the more difficult task of helping students recognize and participate in the non-commodified aspects of community life. Suggesting that the curriculum should introduce students to the many expressions of non-commodified knowledge and relationships within their neighborhoods, as well as the non-commodified traditions carried forward by other cultural groups still intergenerationally connected to traditions that have survived the pressures of assimilation is a daunting challenge. It is not that these forms of knowledge and relationships are difficult to understand in the same way that abstract theories are difficult to grasp. Rather, the difficulty lies in not being able to recognize the patterns we take for granted—and which our high-status education creates a prejudice against taking seriously. How many of us can identify the non-commodified relationships, activities, skills, and knowledge that are part of our daily routines? Or to ask the reverse question, how many of us can give an account of the daily patterns that have been commodified? And do we understand the environmentally and communally destructive consequences of the products and expert systems that we depend upon?

A starting point, which can begin in the early grades and be carried on through graduate school in ways that bring the historical and cultural epistemology issues into the foreground, is to do a survey of the non-commodified activities and relationships within the students’ neighborhood. This survey can then be extended to a consideration of the non-commodified traditions still carried on by groups who identify themselves with a distinct cultural legacy that is the basis of their experience of community. An eco-justice oriented curriculum also needs to connect students with the networks of mutual aid, and to
help them develop personal talents that contribute to community and which can serve as the basis of their taking on the responsibility of mentoring the next generation.

After students obtain an understanding of the range of non-commodified aspects of daily life, which will be fewer in mainstream culture and more widespread and varied in minority ethnic groups who have been economically marginalized, students then need to consider the short and long term consequences of extending the commodification process into more areas of daily life. This will involve learning how different cultural forces contribute to this process. For instance, as students progress through the educational process, they need to consider the cultural mediating characteristics of technology, the way in which technologies undermine important traditions and create new forms of dependency, contribute to the loss of personal skills, influence patterns of thinking, and the political processes that will bring the introduction of new technologies and expert systems more under democratic control. Similar questions need to be asked about the increasing role that scientists play in undermining traditions of self-sufficiency within communities and in contributing to a global monoculture of consumers. These are the forms of learning and participation upon which multicultural education should be centered. It could just as easily be called environmental education in the broadest sense of the phrase. However, eco-justice is the preferred phrase because it highlights the interconnections between viable, interdependent ecosystems and viable, interdependent communities—and that our future depends upon maintaining the widest possible diversity in cultural approaches to sustainable living.

In summary I want to emphasize what I see as the conceptual biases that prevent Freire and his followers from addressing eco-justice issues. These include: (1) His emphasis on viewing humans as possessing a universal essence ignores how this represents an Enlightenment way of thinking that does not take account of cultural differences in ways of knowing and subjectivity; (2) His view of the nature of change ignores the different ways in which cultures interpret the past and its relationship to the present and future; (3) By recognizing critical reflection as the only genuine source of knowledge, which is one of the chief characteristics of a print-based form of consciousness, Freire delegitimates other forms of knowledge and intergenerational communication that are often the basis of mutually supportive communities; (4) The anthropocentric nature of his pedagogy, while largely unnoticed by western thinkers, further undermines cultures that have developed complex systems of interspecies communication and moral reciprocity with the natural world.
Until graduate programs in education are revised in ways that recognize that Freire’s assumptions are shared by proponents of globalization, and that these assumptions undermine local knowledge that is the basis of resisting this colonizing process, the rhetoric of emancipation will continue to contribute to the double binds that make our future increasingly problematic.

References


CP of Freire like critical theory tries to transform oppressed people and to save them from being objects of education to subjects of their own autonomy and emancipation. In this view, students should act in a way that enables them to transform their societies which is best achieved through emancipatory education. Gadotti (1994) also notes that pedagogy is of major interest for Freire by which he seeks to change the structure of an oppressive society. Critical pedagogy in Kanpolâ€™s (1998) terms rests on the belief that every citizen deserves an education which involves understanding the schooling structure by the teacher that would not permit education to ensue. Freire (1970) distinguishes between banking education and problem posing education. Freire then outlines the likely criticisms his book will face. Furthermore, his audience should be radicals- people that see the world as changing and fluid, and he admits his argument will most likely be missing things. Basing his method of finding freedom on the poor and middle classâ€™s experience with education, Freire states that his ideas are rooted in reality- not purely theoretical. Freire utilizes chapter 1 to explain why this pedagogy is necessary. Describing humankindâ€™s central problem as affirming oneâ€™s identity as human, Freire states that everyone strives for this, but oppression i