Towards alternative lifelong learning(s):what Freire can still teach us

También en Català

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I am hopeful, not out of mere stubbornness, but out of an existential, concrete imperative (Freire, 1999, p.8)

Introduction

In the first edition of the *Rizoma Freireano*, McLaren and Jaramillo (2008) contributed an article calling for 'alternative globalizations'. In this paper, the authors firmly reject the inevitability of a global neoliberal capitalism, which has come to dominate our understandings of the nature of globalization, and instead put forward the alternative ideals of 'critical globalization studies' and 'critical globalization pedagogy'. By using the term '*alternative*' the authors reframe the word 'globalization' and reappropriate it to some extent rather than endorsing a binary understanding of a pre-destined and already-defined concept, which would have occurred had they relied on the term '*anti*'. Furthermore, by pluralizing "globalization", McLaren and Jaramillo dispute the notion that there is a one-size-fits-all monolithic 'alternative'.

Lifelong learning, like globalization, has become a hegemonic discourse (Fairclough, 2006). The prevailing discourse of lifelong learning, I argue, has been intrinsically linked to the dominant discourse of globalization. Indeed, the assumptions underpinning the *purposes* of lifelong learning are inextricably coupled with the 'strong globalization' thesis (e.g. Bhagwati, 2004; Friedman, 2000, 2005; Greider, 1997) which maintains that the neoliberal capitalism that underpins globalization—which essentially has led to "viewing… the world through an economic prism" (Saul, 2005, p.97)— is generally unavoidable. In following from this assumption, lifelong learning, too, is also seen as necessary precisely because of globalization. In this article, I examine governing conceptualizations of the nature and purposes of lifelong learning and how they link to a prevailing hegemonic

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globalization. I highlight and subsequently question these largely taken-for-granted assumptions of lifelong learning. Yet, while I hesitate to put forth an ‘alternative vision’ of lifelong learning, I do adhere to McLaren and Jaramillo’s contention that suggesting some alternatives is preferable to remaining at the level of critique.? In my endeavour to examine the idea of ‘alternative lifelong learnings’, I draw on Freire to consider the process of exploring possible alternatives that could arise in place of the current ascendant concept of lifelong learning. Nice!

In what follows, I discuss what I call ‘the dominant lifelong learning imperative’ and its link to the ‘dominant globalization thesis’. I then put forward an imperative for alternative lifelong learnings. In drawing on Freire, I argue for the reappropriation of ‘lifelong learning’ into a frame of collective humanization, where the purpose of learning becomes developing understanding and compassion for ourselves and others. In some ways, this article can be seen as continuing the conversation started by Mclaren & Jaramillo (2008) on what we want our world to be and on the role education and learning can play in this vision.

The Dominant Lifelong Learning Imperative

The term “lifelong learning” has come to dominate discussions on the education and learning of adults. Despite talk of ‘cradle-to-grave’ learning, which often accompanies the lifelong learning discourse, what ‘lifelong’ generally refers to is the age range between the end of formal schooling (e.g. around 18 or 21 [2]) and death. As with globalization, there are competing discourses of lifelong learning. However, I maintain that there is a *dominating* discourse of what counts as ‘valuable’ lifelong learning and also surrounding the reasons for and aims of lifelong learning. Moreover, the nature, rationale and purposes all link to globalization in some sense.

The Development of Lifelong Learning…

Globalization has always been linked to the promoted purposes of lifelong learning. It can be argued that the *general* concern for promoting learning beyond compulsory schooling started in the early 1970s. At this time, UNESCO published the ‘Faure report’ (1972) where ‘lifelong education’ was put forward as a way to cope with the modernisation process, economic uncertainty, and technological change and advancements. From this report, we already see the link between ‘globalization’ and ‘lifelong education’ (later to become ‘lifelong learning’). This report, as well as many other reports, articles and books released in the 1970s on

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lifelong education, coincided with the dissolution of the Bretton Woods agreement on currency (and the subsequent floating of national currencies), high unemployment, and the beginning of a widespread loss of faith in Keynesian economics and in the viability of the welfare state. While it can be argued that 'social inclusion' and prevention of social dislocation dominated the purposes of lifelong learning as understood by UNESCO (see also Delors, 1996), and also by the OECD up until the 1970s (Rubenson, UNESCO OECD), the changing economy can be seen as the catalyst for lifelong learning and the wind that has propelled the idea to prominence in governments and transnational organizations (such as the OECD and even the World Bank).

Since the 1970s, lifelong learning has arguably been further intertwined with the economic sphere. The 'knowledge economy', which can also be seen as a dominant discourse accompanying globalization, has become the main imperative for promoting lifelong learning at present. Innovation, creativity and flexibility drive the knowledge economy so the discourse maintains, in OECD [3] countries at least. Jobs are said to have moved towards post-Fordist models of production and education is promoted as a way to ease workers' transition into this model—through institutional flexibility and productivity; flexible workers; flexible spaces and places; and flexible knowledge (see Fenwick, 2003). In short, due to the increasingly global nature of capitalism (and ensuing competition this brings), as well as technological advances—which arise from and contribute to globalization—there is an alleged need for workers to 'upskill'. In other words, with the growing complexity of technologies, as well as the growing pool of global mobile qualified workers, lifelong learning is assumed an imperative. 'Training for the new economy' and 'adapting to the changing society', thus have become the dual central purposes of lifelong learning (Reich, 1992; Martin, 2003). In short, society can be seen as having shifted primarily due to advances associated with global neo-liberal capitalism: e.g., the growth and development of ICTs; migration from 'poor' to 'rich' countries (enabled by technologies and driven by increasing wealth disparity resulting from the intensification of global capitalism); and waning welfare protection for a country's most vulnerable citizens etc.

Neo-liberal Meets Third Way Capitalism

There is ample evidence that the focus on 'lifelong learning as saviour to globalization' has been most pronounced after, what I am terming, neoliberalism's most exaggerated phase (from the 1980s – 2000), and under centre-left

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governments in Western democracies in particular. Indeed, while Margaret Thatcher did not promote lifelong learning in any real meaningful sense, Tony Blair based his entire platform on the importance of continual education and 'upskilling'. In fact, Blair is quoted as saying "education is the best economic policy we have" (quoted in Martin, 2003) and his Secretary of State, Blunkett, has also claimed that "learning is the key to prosperity…[and] an economic imperative"…(Secretary of State quoted in Hyland, 2002, p.247). This shift towards 'lifelong learning' can be understood as part-and-parcel of a move towards Third Way (Giddens, 1999; 2003) policy or 'inclusive liberalism' (Craig & Porter, 2003; 2006). Renowned sociologist Anthony Giddens put forward the idea of the 'Third Way' (1999), of striking a balance between the welfare state and neo-liberalism, in trying to temper some of the deleterious effects of a globalization based on global capitalism (see also Giddens, 2000; Huttons & Giddens, 2000). Lifelong learning, in this frame, then, assumes an almost redemptive quality in the face of such a reality. Likewise, Craig and Porter (2003; 2006) and others (e.g.Walker, forthcoming) have observed that multi-national organizations (such as the World Bank and the OECD) are beginning to focus on including all stakeholders and partners in order to address social and economic exclusion that has resulted from a global neoliberal capitalism. Inclusion, thus, has become central. To ensure inclusion, lifelong learning has consequently been issued as a clarion call, as medicine for social dislocation (Walker, forthcoming). Lifelong learning is fundamentally promoted as a remedy against our obsolescence and exclusion from economic and social life. While Third Way or inclusive liberal politics can partially be seen as a reaction to neoliberalism, they arguably adhere to the underlying supposition of global neo-liberal capitalism as inevitable (Bastow & Martin, 2003; Callinicos, 2001). The reactive reforms these policies propose, therefore, can be seen as unimaginative and short-sighted measures rather than fundamental challenges to a globalization consisting of a global neoliberal capitalism. In the current frame, lifelong learning becomes a way to help citizens adapt to an already-existent world; it has been given no real role in reimagining an entirely different world order where the free market or corporate profits no longer remain an unexamined 'good'.

Some Examples of the Dominant Lifelong Learning Imperative: A Focus on the OECD

The OECD has been critical in influencing national policy trends in lifelong learning ever since the late 1980s (or early 1990s) (Rubenson, OECD & hegemony). It has, in Rubenson's opinion, achieved hegemony. By propagating political discourse

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through policy reports on general and country-specific developments in lifelong learning, and issuing particular educational recommendations, the OECD is definitely helping to set the global agenda in education reform (Walker, forthcoming; Papadopolous, 1994; Dostal, 2004). In adhering to an inclusive liberal or Third Way interpretation of lifelong learning, recent OECD documents approach lifelong learning from the dual perspectives of "lifelong learning for the economy', on the one hand, and "lifelong learning for adaptation to society", on the other (Walker, forthcoming). According to the OECD, benefits of learning include: "make[ing] humans more efficient workers as well as better-informed citizens" (OECD, 2002, p.26), "increased productivity, job satisfaction, community participation, economic growth, a reduction in unemployment, better health, social development" (OECD, 2001, 2002, 2003, quoted in Walker, forthcoming), and the "development of democratic values and improvement of skills to participate in the economy" (OECD 2003, p.10). Lifelong learning is essentially promoted as an "adaptation tool". A successful lifelong learner, thus, will be someone who is flexible, adaptable and who develops transferable skills (OECD, 2005).

Adaptation to an existing world order as the 'lifelong learning imperative' is reinforced in documents like *Rethinking Human Capital* (OECD, 2002) where a 'lifelong learner' in the context of global neoliberal capitalism is one who can improve her firm's and country's productivity; one who has "better decision-making skills, an awareness of opportunities" (p.128) and who is "conscientious, extroverted and agreeable" (p.123). As Walker has claimed, the OECD lifelong learning imperative, within the context of the Third Way or inclusive liberalism, "on the one hand champions the individual in terms of their 'rights' and 'autonomy', and on the other single[s them] out for their responsibilities" (forthcoming). It is the purpose of governments and already self-proclaimed lifelong learners, in this case, to show "adults how skills can open the door to their world" (OECD, 2003, p.175), and to convey to them "the value of learning" (p.194).

Critiques of the Dominant Lifelong Learning Imperative

In 1996, James Mezirow wrote a short article in which he accused the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE) of "[neglecting] the social action focus inherent in the mission and tradition of adult education" (p.1). He writes,

All evidence points to abandonment of significant social goals…[a] failure of our

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historic promise to serve as a means of realizing democracy's full potential and the decline of a once idealistic movement to a collective free market mentality with a vested interest in serving only those who can afford to pay and in maintaining the social status (p.2).

Critiques of the hegemonic lifelong learning project continue (e.g. Bagnall, 2000; Boshier, 2004; Fenwick, 2003; Field, 2000; Hyland, 2002; Martin, 2001, 2003; Rubenson, 2004; Rubenson & Walker, 2006). Progressive and critical educators assert that by taking the neoliberal globalized order as given, lifelong learning has not only been promoted to help citizens adapt to such an order, but in fact that this move has been accompanied by adult educators and administrators internalising the 'free-market ethic' and offering for-profit and for-the-economy courses and programmes. As adult education morphed into a lifelong learning focused on adaptation to 'workplace' or 'community' in a world 'that is', critical educators yearn for times' past exemplified by Antigonish (Selman et al, 1998), Folk Schools (Kohl, 1991) and the Highlander Center (Adams & Horton, 1998). There appear to be tensions between the 'old' traditional adult education—though heavily idealised, of course—and the present, entrepreneurial lifelong learning (Boshier, 2004). Even the term 'adult education' has fallen out of fashion in favour of 'lifelong learning'. And, even those programmes which utilize the term 'adult education' may have little in common with the social justice-oriented programmes of, say, the Highlander Center. It is fair to state that the principles of democracy, community and social justice were key to adult education's foundation. Humanism, progressivism and radicalism historically informed much of adult education (Terry, 2001), in terms of the 'content' and the 'purpose'. Lifelong learning, however, is much more individualised and it has tended to be philosophically rooted in a more radical liberal individualism (Boshier, 2004). Learning, in OECD or government documents, is portrayed as an individual responsibility (see Rubenson & Walker, 2006; Walker, forthcoming). Indeed, 'learning', unlike 'education', individualises; it does not connote infrastructure or even educators. This makes it cheaper. As has happened in many countries, there has been a withdrawal of financial support for learning and voluntary activity, resulting in more people needing to pay for adult education themselves—unless they are deemed as 'requiring' adult education or training. There is a tension between the idea of education being either an individual privilege that one must pay for, and it being obligatory, which has happened in many welfare-to-work programmes like those in the U.S, New Zealand or Canada.

Many left-leaning educators now feel 'stuck' between critiquing the dominant frame

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of ‘lifelong learning’ through nostalgic pleas to a broader conception of adult education, or assisting their students to adapt to a world ‘that is’, whether they endorse this world or not. Imagining a ‘world that could be’ seems to be something that has taken a back seat, perhaps due to post-modern aversions to, and wariness towards, ‘grand narratives’ (see Hill et al, 2002). While it is not possible, or responsible, to derive a singular *alternative* lifelong learning from Freire’s work, it is useful to return to Freirean educational philosophy and pedagogy in thinking about *alternatives*. What Freire offers us is a way to think beyond already existing frames in our commitment to new frames. A lifelong learning premised on either individual adaptation—whether it be for economic or social purposes—or mere resistance was not and cannot be part of Freire’s vision for lifelong learning.

An Imperative of Alternative Lifelong Learning(s)

I contend that an imperative of lifelong learning remains. Just as Mclaren and Jaramillo (2008) have attempted to appropriate the word ‘globalization’, likewise I am taking up the phrase ‘lifelong learning’ with all its warts and connotations linked to its dominant interpretation. I believe that alternative lifelong learnings are, therefore, necessary. While a suspicion of ‘global neoliberal capitalism as globalization’ may drive progressive and critical educators to reject the dominant lifelong learning imperative, the need for change still haunts us—and, I argue, lifelong learning offers us a possibility to enact change and to directly challenge the dominant globalization myth.

‘Globalization as global neoliberal capitalism’ has generally been the system to which lifelong learning is supposed to help us to adapt. It is fair to state that this ‘globalization’ has been tested, as of late, with the recent economic crisis plaguing the U.S which is reverberating throughout the entire world. The ideology, though, that underpins neoliberalism, has been internalised by some to such a large extent that even in the face of such an evident economic meltdown, faith in Chicago Boys’ ideals continues. Harry Binswanger, a philosophy teacher at the Ayn Rand Institute of New York City, for example, feels that the current economic crisis is rooted in “a loss of respect for greed and selfishness through government action in passing laws that thwart greed” (quoted in Scowen, 2008, para. 11). He goes beyond stating that an amoral economy is predestined (which is the espoused discourse of free-market capitalism) and, in fact, remarks that selfishness is a virtue, something to live up to. Within this frame, the problems with the sub-prime mortgage crisis are evidence for Binswanger that companies “were not concerned with their self-interest. The fact

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they went bankrupt shows they were not greedy enough" (Scowen, para.14). The 'myth' of neoliberal globalization is that it is an amoral system; the idea that the market reflects human desires and cannot be judged as 'right' and 'wrong'. In reality, however, global neoliberal capitalism has been actively predicated on greed and *im*morality and inequality of access. The market does not decide; the strong and powerful decide. In the name of 'small government', government and governance has actually increased (Rose, 1999; Brodie, 2004); in the name of 'free markets' the state has actively intervened so to promote a "market society" (Slater and Tonkiss, 2001; MacEwan, 1999); and, while social services are no longer a 'right' to be demanded, a greater responsibility from citizens is expected (Olssen, O'Neill, & Codd, 2004).

This system, as discussed above, that has largely enshrined human greed and dehumanisation, *does* make lifelong learning an imperative. But what types of lifelong learning do we need? Obviously, enabling citizens to adapt to a world premised on an ideological assumption of 'greed is good' is something all critical educators would agree would be misguided and even pernicious. In many ways, alternative lifelong learnings are linked to alternative globalizations. Hardt and Negri (2001), for example, are critical of the capitalist "empire", enshrined under globalization, as a site of production and reproduction. However, they see unprecedented spaces and opportunities for the free movement and abolishment of nation-states, placing faith in the new global social movements. Beck and Lau (2005), in another example, state that there are opportunities for a radicalized democracy through the weakening of national borders and the depoliticising of national politics. While I will not outline alternative visions in detail, I do draw on Freire in exploring further and alternative directions in lifelong learning.

Freire: Imagining Alternatives

…dreaming is not only a necessary political act, it is an integral part of the historico-social manner of being a person (Freire, 1999, p.91)

A lifelong learning premised on adapting to an oppressive system of globalization shares many commonalities with the philosophy underlying Freire's notion of 'banking education', which seeks to maintain inequality and the status quo. Banking education, which can be understood as treating students like unknowing objects into which information is to be deposited, is a necrophilial education (Freire, 2000)

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which favours ‘the oppressors’ in society and quashes hope, creativity and potential for change in favour of preserving the existing order. One can criticize Freire for using dichotomizing language of ‘oppressed’ and ‘oppressor’. Clearly, life is more nuanced and I would venture that for those of us living in the West, we can often identify with both ‘oppressed’ and ‘oppressor’ role. However, I think it is a misinterpretation of Freire to focus on individual people as oppressors. What is clear from Freire’s experiences and writings is that he was dealing with people who were acting as oppressors due to an unquestioned oppressive system. Oppressive structures led people to dominate others, to justify their dehumanization of the other, such as the rich Brazilian *latifundistas* in the 1960s and 1970s to whom Freire refers in his work. For the oppressors, Freire writes, “money is the measure of all things, and profit the primary goal…what is worthwhile is to have more—always more—even at the cost of the oppressed having less or having nothing” (2000, p.58). While *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was first published over 40 years ago and was written about a particular context, these words still ring true. Arguably, “having more” is at the heart of a global neoliberal capitalism which, claims Freire writing shortly before his death, is buttressed by an “inherent ideology that informs, shapes and maintains an ethic of greed” (Freire, 1997, p.313). Freire sharply reproves “…the neo-liberal pragmatic discourse, according to which we must ‘accommodate’ to the facts as given—as if they could be given in no other way, as if we had no duty to fight…” (1999, p.90). Instead, he exhorts us to “say no to the neo-liberalism we are witnessing…informed by the ethics of the market, an ethics in which a minority makes most profits against the lives of the majority” (Freire & Macedo, 2002, quoted in Freire, 2000, p.26) The imperative for alternatives is clear; under hegemonic neoliberal globalization “those who cannot compete, die” (*ibid*).

While vast numbers of books, articles and papers have been written on the flaws and, indeed, necrophilial tendencies of a hegemonic oppressive globalization, proclamations of doom have accompanied such arguments or a self-righteous smugness expressed in response to globalization’s failings; “I told you so” is echoed across university departments of sociology as the economic meltdown continues, for example. However, envisioning alternative lifelong learnings requires us to dream and, above all else, to embrace hope and a love of life instead of inevitability or ‘death’. What Freire offers us, above all else, is a sense of hope: “there is a hope, however timid, on the street corners, a hope in each and everyone of us” (1999, p.8); hope, for Freire, that emanates from a teleological position that we are to be more fully human. In this, Freire was an optimist; while structures and practices may encourage necrophilial behaviour, such as neo-liberalism, our sense of love

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and of wonder for the world, could win out. Continual oppression for Freire, therefore, was not an inevitability (Freire, 1999; 2000). Freire has faith in humanity's potential to transform oppressive structures, through appealing to our moral selves and to a problem-posing education. He believes in the inquisitive nature of humankind and the willingness humans have to probe and problematise that which they encounter (Freire, 2000). It is fair to conclude that Freire's ultimate philosophical position was that our ontological vocation is to become more fully human (Freire, 1999; 2000; Freire & Macedo, 1987). Our existence is one in which we must work towards liberation for all human-kind through love and awareness.

A lifelong learning that responds to the contemporary world would be one where educators and learners were committed to Freire's notion of praxis: reflecting and acting on the world in order to transform it (Freire, 2000). Our reading and understanding would lead us to action. If we draw on Freire, alternative visions of lifelong learning would place liberation at the core. As the Hegelian master/slave dialectic suggests, however, liberation—and therefore meaningful change—can only arise when the slave realises that the master is dependent on the slave. Only once the slave has problematised his or her situation can s/he ever be truly liberated. It is not just that the slave would be aware of his suffering—which he most probably is—but that he would recognise how the master needs the slave. There is, as Fanon (1963) writes, a connivance of the oppressed with the oppressor, and only once this is recognised can liberation be possible. Similarly, Freire asserts that "only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong enough to free both" (Freire, 2000, p.44); only when "[we] become masters of [our] own thinking" (p.124) can we liberate ourselves. Putting forth alternative lifelong learnings, thus, requires us, as learners, to challenge our subservient position to the 'market as master', to the 'master' globalization discourse as given and inevitable; and, ultimately, to challenge the 'lifelong learning as prison sentence' mentality. Under a global neoliberal capitalism, lifelong learning is conceived as something—for better or for worse—that we must engage in; as a chore and responsibility rather than a liberating opportunity. Countering a psychology of oppression (Gadotti & Torres, n.d), and confronting the 'master discourses' of both globalization and lifelong learning would become the point of departure in conceiving alternative lifelong learnings.

A problem-posing alternative

In imagining alternatives to a death-embracing lifelong learning or globalization, a

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position of problem-posing should be adopted. Freire writes,

In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world, *with which* and *in which* they find themselves'; they come to the world not as a static reality but a reality in process, in transformation (1999, p.83)

As I have argued, the imperative of lifelong learning has been conceptualised as an inevitability to a particular globalization. Ironically, while the very nature of globalization is 'change' and 'process', its *direction* towards increasing free markets and wealth inequality has been seen as relatively 'fixed'. For Freire, problem-posing education was the opposite of banking education or a laissez-faire education (with no instruction or direction). He explains, "problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality…striv[ing] for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality" (2000, p.81). A problem-posing approach would immediately lead us to question the premise of the imperative: if lifelong learning is the answer, what is the question? Furthermore, what type of answer are we giving to the particular question? We would become immediately sceptical of the premise of there being *one* answer. There cannot be, in Freire's view, an externally imposed singular answer. Moreover, as Jean Anyon (2005) has candidly noted, education cannot entirely fix what it did not break. In the face of unchanging public policy, lifelong learning cannot 'right the wrongs' of globalization. A prescribed lifelong learning programme to aid in the integration of immigrants into the workforce, for example, without a fundamental questioning and re-visiting of the policies, history and context in which this learning is taking place is not a problem-posing education, nor is it able to work towards the liberation of the oppressed and oppressor. A consideration of the historical, social, political and cultural context is key to an alternative vision of lifelong learning. Furthermore, adopting a problem-posing approach would lead us to think dialectically in a way in which we would be "open to further questions, and to the possibility—indeed probability—of current assumptions being revised, repudiated or overturned" (Roberts, 1998, p.98). Problem-posing is not the same as 'problem-solving'; but by taking the 'problem' as the point from which to interrogate reality, we can begin to think about how to effect change for the further humanization of others.

What is essential in conceptualizing lifelong learning(s) through a Freirean lens is to acknowledge the primacy of the collective. While the concept of learning has been

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individualised in the dominant discourse, it need not be so. Learning, I submit, is collective; it does not exist purely on the individual plane. Formulating alternative lifelong learnings, hence, would also be considered a learning endeavour for society rather than for atomised individuals. Part of this would mean positioning all teaching and learning on a dialogical approach where we rely on others for developing our understanding of the world. Freire notes, "…none of us possesses the truth. It is to be found in the 'becoming' of dialogue…" (1973, p.219). Freire places a relationship of respect at the centre of his conception of dialogue, which he views as "an I-Thou relationship, and thus necessarily a relationship between two Subjects" (p.89). Furthermore, not only is the learning/education process considered a collaborative journey between two or more people, but, perhaps even more important, the move towards *conscientization*, which Roberts describes as the "reflective component of praxis" (1996, p.188), that results from and accompanies critical learning, "…cannot remain on the level of the individual"(Freire, 1973, pp.146-147). Learning is fundamentally connected to the world and to Freire's primary vision of humanization. Therefore, dialogue and learning must necessarily "involve a love of the world and of other human beings" (Roberts, 1998, p.106). On a related point, our learning must also serve more than ourselves; we do not engage in lifelong learning to solely secure our own inclusion in the workplace or help us to adapt to society. Freire and Shor pose this question: "in favour of whom or what do we use our technical competence?" (Freire, 1987, p.212). If we are not asking ourselves for whom and for what we, or others, are engaging in lifelong learning, we cannot even start to imagine alternative lifelong learnings, let alone an alternative society.

Imagining utopia through lifelong learning(s)

In *Pedagogy of Hope,* his sequel to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Freire writes,

…whenever the future is considered as a pregiven—whether this be as the pure, mechanical repetition of the present, or simply because if 'it is what it has to be'—there is no room for utopia, nor therefore for the dream, the option, the decision, or expectancy in the struggle, which is the only way hope exists. There is no room for education. Only for training (1999, p.91)

It is fair to conclude that 'training' is, indeed, what the hegemonic discourse of lifelong learning has generally become. This is not to say that there is a 'quick fix' to

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supplant such a constraining discourse with more liberating ones. The present situation in which we find ourselves in is what Freire referred to as a “limit situation” (Freire, 2000). The current dominant discourses of lifelong learning and globalization make it difficult for us to collectively dream of alternatives. Yet, as Freire explains, “it is not the limit situations in and of themselves which create a climate of hopelessness, but rather how they are perceived by women and men at a given historical moment: whether they appear as fetters or as insurmountable barriers.” (2000, p.80). According to Freire, the first step to overcoming, or at least mitigating, such barriers is by truly understanding the ways in which they work and wield power over those who have less power in society. In examining barriers to alternative lifelong learnings it is important to consider how such perceived ‘barriers’ are ‘enablers’ for others. Who do the dominant discourses serve? I concur here with Mclaren & Jaramillo (2008) that a critical global pedagogy becomes necessary—one that is rooted in the tradition of critical pedagogy as developed by Freire (e.g. Freire & Macedo, 1987), Shor (e.g. 1992), Giroux & Aronowitz (1985) and, Mclaren (e.g. 2000), among others.

The discourse of critical pedagogy has been co-opted in the dominant lifelong learning paradigm. In *Beyond rhetoric: adult learning policies and practices*, for example, the OECD calls for the “transformation of the individual rather than the regurgitation of information” (OECD, 2003, p.163). Language of transformation, context-specific and student-centred pedagogy permeates most writing on lifelong learning. Yet, this is, as Mclaren and Jaramillo (2008) explain, a watered-down individualised pedagogy. There are current examples of lifelong learning programmes that are located within a critical pedagogical tradition. For example, Literacy Aotearoa [4], the largest association of adult community literacy programmes in Aotearoa/New Zealand embodies—or at least seeks to embody—a liberating education, placing the socio-cultural importance of the learner at the centre and the learner decides what s/he wants to learn and why. Most importantly, as a *kaupapa Maori* (Maori ideology) organisation history, culture, politics and self-determination are central. Both learners and educators are working within a frame of seeking to understand how literacy relates to the bi-cultural nature of New Zealand/Aotearoa, forged through the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1846. Included in the material that instructors learn, in the education programme for literacy educators, is material on the history of colonialism in the country, the debates around Maori *tino rangatiratanga*, or self-determination, and around the links between colonisation and current issues of globalisation. Both instructors and learners are encouraged to think about broader issues of access to knowledge,

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inequality and the relationship between past and present when thinking about the future. Furthermore, literacy is clearly treated as *situated* (Street, 2005) and considered as potentially transformative, to the individual learners, educators and society as a whole. While the organization works within a 'limit situation' of increasing demands for standardisation, assessment, accountability and much lower levels of financial support for community literacy than workplace programmes, they have committed themselves, at least partially, to what Mclaren & Jaramillo (2008) term a critical globalization pedagogy.

Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this article was to continue the dialogue, in the *Rizoma Freireano*, initiated by Mclaren & Jaramillo (2008), on what critical pedagogy—Freirean pedagogy and philosophy in particular—might contribute to our discussions on the purposes and nature of learning and education today. Lifelong learning, like many other hegemonic discourses around education and learning, has been interwoven with a hegemonic discourse of globalization. Advancing alternatives to such a restricted and deterministic discourse within a Freirean frame requires us to adopt a position of hope. Our critiques of, and general outrage in the face of current limit situations is necessary; yet so is our commitment to 'another way of being'. I conclude this article by again returning to Freire in thinking about how we might formulate both alternative lifelong learnings and globalizations,

there is no authentic utopia apart from the tension between the denunciation of a present becoming more and more intolerable, and the annunciation, announcement, of a future to be created, built—politically, aesthetically, and ethically (Freire, 1999, p.91)

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Notes

[1] Ponderosa Annex G

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[2] Depending on whether a person goes on to post-secondary education.

[3] Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. The term is generally used to refer to the ‘rich countries’ of the world, although this is not strictly true since both Mexico and Turkey, OECD members, would not be considered as belonging to the ‘rich countries’ club’.

[4] See http://www.literacy.org.nz/ and related websites for further information.

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