Title: Revitalizing the Commons or An Individualized Approach to Planetary Citizenship: The Choice Before Us

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The Imperialistic Agenda of the Eco-Pedagogy of Moacir Gadotti

While attending the international conference on Lifelong Citizenship, Participatory Democracy, and Social Change that was sponsored by the Ontario Institute for the Study of Education, I learned that just before Paulo Freire’s untimely death he had, according to Moacir Gadotti, the Director of the Paulo Freire Institute in Brazil, turned his attention to putting down his first thoughts on the need for an eco-pedagogy. Gadotti went on to claim that Freire’s yet unpublished thoughts, when they are published, would be seen by environmental educators as making a major contribution to the formulation of an eco-pedagogy that has as its ultimate goal the creation of a “planetary consciousness.”

As Freire’s exact thoughts were not made available to the large audience, we had to rely upon Gadotti’s representation of Freire’s thinking of how to reconcile the ongoing project of emancipation with how to live in a more ecologically sustainable way. The assumption communicated to the audience was that Gadotti’s extrapolations merely represented an extension of Freire’s newly articulated guiding principles. Gadotti did not elaborate on the actual practice of an eco-pedagogy; rather his focus (and what he represented as Freire’s main focus) was on the big picture. That is, the way in which an eco-pedagogy is to transform the world’s diverse cultures into what he kept referring to as “citizens of a single nation.” In an earlier article that includes a more extended discussion of the global agenda of an eco-pedagogy, whose main points were reiterated in Gadotti’s presentation to an audience of over 400 students and professors from different countries, he wrote that the main goal of an eco-pedagogy is the development of the “planetary citizen” (2000, p. 8). His explanation of how this new form of citizen is to be achieved is based on the core assumptions and silences in Freire’s formulation of a pedagogy of the oppressed. Thus, the keystone premise of Freire’s theory of how humans are to achieve their highest potential, which is to engage in the continual renaming of the world that is to
follow from critical reflection (1974 edition, p. 76), also becomes the keystone that holds together Gadotti’s theory of the nature and goal of an eco-pedagogy. In the article “Pedagogy of the Earth and Culture of Sustainability,” Gadotti reiterates Freire's criticism of the “banking” approach to education by stating that “educating then, would not be as Emile Durkheim explained as the transmission of culture ‘from one generation to the next,’ but the grand journey of each individual in his interior universe and in the universe that surrounds him” (2000, p. 9). It is important to note that nowhere in Freire’s writings does one find a reference to the grand journal into the individual’s subjective universe as an empowering source of knowledge. But there is an even more serious problem with Gadotti’s assumption that the “transmission of culture from one generation to the next” can be avoided by the subjective explorations of the individual. I have put in italics Gadotti’s use of the masculine pronoun as his way of representing all of humankind, which is an example that demonstrates his failure to understand the many ways that cultural traditions are passed on at a taken-for-granted level of awareness.

Gadotti’s inability to emancipate himself from the many ways in which the languaging processes of his own culture are intergenerationally reproduced relates to a more serious problem; namely, the way in which his eco-pedagogy reproduces the Western assumptions that make it a pedagogy of Western imperialism. Following the Freirean inspired idea that culture should not be transmitted from one generation to the next, Gadotti states that “globalization in itself does not pose a problem, since it constitutes an unprecidented process of advancement in the history of humankind” (p. 9). There could not be clearer statement of how Gadotti understands the ultimate goal of a eco-pedagogy: namely, a global culture that will replace the diversity of the world’s cultures. But Gadotti is unwilling to examine the logic of the argument that an eco-pedagogy should emancipate individuals from the culture that is passed on and modified by each generation. That is, he is unwilling to consider the possibility that individuals, when relying upon their own construction of knowledge and values, might not lead to the planetary consciousness he envisions as averting ecological disaster. Nor is he willing to consider that many of the world’s cultures have already worked out how to live within the limits of their bioregions. It should also be pointed out that the Gadotti vision, to be achieved by teachers who function as
“transformative intellectuals,” vastly over estimates the willingness of people to reject all the traditions of their culture (such as the Muslim, Hindu, Quechua, Zapotec, Inuit, and so forth)—even if they could become aware of how their taken-for-granted cultural patterns influence their perceptions, ways of understanding relationships and norms that guide their moral reciprocity with the natural environment. This part of the theory that underlies the Gadotti’s eco-pedagogy is so naïve, uninformed by recent world events, and driven by a messianic ethnocentrism that it is surprising that he is already being looked to as a leading theorist on how education can contribute to saving the planet.

The language used in the talks given by Gadotti and Sandra Luciana Dalmagro (a women who works with the landless peasants of Brazil) highlighted the high-status political metaphors in the West: democracy, individualism, citizen, change. They both spoke about the importance of promoting decision-making by individuals who understand themselves as subjects who can create their own history. What they did not acknowledge is that the individuals who have been emancipated from the intergenerational knowledge of their culture would exercise “democratic” decision making at the same emotive level as the customer who makes a choice between the vast array of products in a shopping mall. Similarly, neither Gadotti nor Dalmagro recognized that the concept of a citizen goes back to the early Greeks, which represented a profound shift from allegiance to the family and the tribe to that of the state. But the Western agenda that is to free the peoples of the world from the supposed backwardness of their cultures is also to include, as Gadotti put it, promoting within each individual the desire, indeed, their responsibility for changing the world. Following Freire’s thinking, the primary purpose of an eco-pedagogy is to create the desire on the part of each generation to change the world of the previous generation.

Gadotti’s extension of what he represented as Freire’s core ideas on the nature of an eco-pedagogy overcomes the silence about the environmental crisis that has long been a hallmark of Freire’s writings—as well as that of his many followers. But the basic contradictions inherent in Freire’s thinking, such as equating emancipation with what amounts to indoctrination to a Western way of thinking, remain. As in the past, this and other contradictions went unnoticed by most of the audience that included professors who stood up to praise Gadotti for helping them recognize the importance of using Freirean
ideas in addressing environmental problems. Perhaps the most egregious contradiction, which also went unnoticed, is that the core assumptions underlying Gadotti’s extensions on what he kept referring to as Freire’s yet unpublished thoughts on an eco-pedagogy (the individual should be emancipated from the traditions of her/ his culture, the recognition that critical inquiry is the only source of empowering knowledge, that change leads to progress, etc.) are also the assumptions that the West’s industrial culture is based upon. Gadotti’s argument that globalization (that is, the development of a world monoculture) represents an advance in human history is also shared by such organizations as the World Trade Organizations and the neo-liberal politicians who want to transform every aspect of daily life (even the process of human reproduction) into a market opportunity. While Gadotti is very clear that his vision of a global culture is to be understood as standing in opposition to a global industrial culture, he does not understand that his ideal of the autonomous individual who has no intergenerationally acquired skills or knowledge of the culture’s patterns of mutual aid would be totally dependent upon the market to meet her/his daily needs. To cite one example, the individual who does not know what her/his culture understands about growing and preparing food, which is dependent upon a knowledge of the soil, weather conditions, recipes handed down over generations, and rejects learning from this intergenerational knowledge as though doing so were a critical pedagogy inspired civic virtue, is more likely to be dependent upon industrial processed food that is destructive of both the environment and human health. To make this point more directly: although Gadatti is highly critical of the globalization of a market oriented culture, his way of understanding the primary goal of an eco-pedagogy would have the effect of creating the very form of individualism that can most easily be exploited as a customer.

I agree with Gadotti that the ecological crisis is the paramount issue that faces all of humanity, but only wish that Freire had not ignored it during the many years when his intellectual leadership influenced several generations of professors of education who are now unable to recognize that resistance to globalization is not achieved by promoting the same values and assumptions that are the basis of the current project of remaking the world in the image of the West. The irony is that Gadotti’s recommendation that each individual should pursue her/ his own grand journey, which miraculously is to lead to
“planetary citizenship,” could have easily been written by the speech writer for President George W. Bush. Transforming the diverse cultures of the world in the image of Western culture is not only an extension of western colonization; it will further accelerate the overshooting of the life sustaining capacity of the Earth’s natural systems. This criticism should not be interpreted as saying that Gadotti supports President Bush’s foreign policies. The issue is more fundamental in that both President Bush and Gadotti take-for-granted a common set of Western assumptions that different political groups can use to justify their own ends. But the significance of the differences are minor compared to the imperialistic nature of the assumptions they share in common; which is the need for one nation (a global mono-culture) where individuals, in pursuit of making their own history, reject the intergenerational knowledge that, in many instances, is the basis for resisting the further expansion of the industrial culture.
Educating for Eco-Justice and the Revitalization of the Commons

There is another way to think about the direction that educational reform should take—one that strengthens the ability of the world’s diverse cultures to resist the environmentally destructive and cultural homogenizing forces that are now being globalized. This alternative approach to educational reform involves learning about (indeed, revitalizing) the traditions of the commons of these cultures that go back to the origins of humankind. Basically, the commons included what was available to all members of the culture: the water, air, woodlands, pastures, plants, animals, as well as other natural systems. The commons also included the symbolic aspects of the culture: narratives, knowledge of the cycles of natural systems, spoken and written symbol systems, craft knowledge, music, dances, moral norms and patterns of reciprocity, knowledge of the medicinal characteristics of plants, and so forth. The commons were and still are varied depending upon the characteristics of the bioregion. And the cultures that developed over hundreds, even thousands of years of place-based and tested experience also led to different traditions that became a taken-for-granted part of the commons. The key issue here is not to interpret this brief overview of the commons as representing all the symbolic aspects of the commons as free of injustice and environmental abuse.

If we were to trace the introduction of enclosure in different cultures we would find that in many instances it was based on unjust relationships and was the cause of impoverishment (from our perspective). In a few instances it led to major cultural achievements. Basically, enclosure involved transforming what was shared in common (that is, available to all members of the community) into what was privately owned, into a commodity, and into a monetized activity or relationship. For example, what was previously passed on through mentoring relationships and is now dispensed by experts represents the transition from the non-monetized and non-privatized nature of the commons to the monetized and privatized nature of the market. Enclosure takes many forms, but essentially it involves exclusion, disenfranchisement, and dispossession in ways that advantage some groups over others. It also reduces collective and local decision making about the rules that will govern the commons by shifting the power of decision making to individuals and
institutions that do not have to experience the consequences of their decisions. 
Thirdly, enclosure forces more aspects of daily life to come under the logic of a money 
economy—which marginalizes the practices of mutual exchange and barter 
relationships. It represents, in effect, the transition from work as an activity that is 
returned to viewing work as an activity that is paid.

In the contemporary world, the process of technological and economic 
globalization involves the further enclosure of the commons of both natural and 
cultural systems. The pressure to privatize water, land, forests, the gene lines of 
plants, animal and human blood, the minerals under the ground, and so forth, has 
increased dramatically in recent years. The enclosure of the symbolic aspects of the 
commons of different cultures is being driven by the same market forces. This 
includes the enclosure of education, first by the state, and now by private groups. It 
also includes health care, entertainment, sports, food, and even thought and 
communication which is now being mediated by computers and cell phones. The 
Western approaches to enclosure, driven by the merging of science, technology, and 
corporations, is contributing to the emergence of a planetary culture—a planetary 
culture that Gadotti gives legitimacy to by his failure to recognize the dangers of using 
the same language and relying upon the same cultural assumptions as the neo-liberal 
politicans and institutions he opposes.

The most recent expressions of enclosure involve the spread of genetically 
modified seeds that require the use of super powerful pesticides that kill-off the 
nearby birds, animals, wild plants, and the micro-organisms in the soil. To cite 
another example, the further automation of the process of work that further reduces 
the need for workers (which is an important form of enclosure) also continues the 
process of dispossessing workers of their craft knowledge and skill. As the 
intergenerational knowledge that sustained the commons for generations disappears 
under the pressure of the liberal ideology that promotes the progressive idea that 
individuals should construct their own knowledge by exploring the depths of their own 
interior universe more aspects of daily life will require participation in a money 
economy. In short, enclosure of the natural systems that sustained human
communities for centuries, and the political economy that determines the distribution of wealth within and among cultures, are major contributors to the poverty that is increasing around the world.

Understanding how educational reform can contribute to the revitalization of world’s commons is becoming more urgent as the automation of production reduces the need for workers—which is now being felt even in countries such as Mexico and China. The myth of unending progress and a rising material standard of living is fast being challenged even in Western countries where pension funds are diminishing, unemployment is rising, and local decision making about conserving the commons is being overruled by international treaties and institutions such as the World Trade Organization.

But the forces resisting the educational reforms that address the revitalization of the commons are both powerful and numerous. Public schools and universities, for example, continue to reinforce the mind set that underlies the globalization of industrial culture. The complicity of educators in resisting the revitalization of the commons can be seen in the way the professors and students listening to Gadotti applauded wildly when he finished his talk on how an eco-pedagogy contributes to the creation of a global culture of anomic individuals. Their receptivity to the Gadotti’s vision and representation of Freire’s last thoughts on the need for an eco-pedagogy was in no way extraordinary from the way most public school teachers and university professors think. The incessant quest for new ways of thinking, technologies, and values is a dominant characteristic of Western education—at all levels. The other high-status forms of knowledge promoted in Western educational institutions that denigrate the forms of knowledge and relationships that sustain the commons include the emphasis on the abstract and often formulaic knowledge of experts, the technologies that are based on Western science and are generally uninformed by a knowledge of the culture they are introduced into, and the authority of printed texts (and now computer mediated data). These aspects of the liberal mind-set are further sustained by ignoring the differences in the knowledge systems of different cultures, by relying upon an evolutionary explanatory framework that represents Western
cultures as more advanced and better adapted to survive than the indigenous cultures that live by ecologically informed practices. The hubris of Western thinkers, including prominent scientists such as E. O. Wilson, Francis Crick, and Stephen Hawking, is partly responsible for imposing upon the rest of the world the technologies that are both culturally and environmentally destructive.

The generations that have been educated to think in ways that support a consumer and technology dependent lifestyle lack the language that would enable them to name the non-monetized knowledge, activities, and relationships in their own communities. When limited in this way, they are unable to understand the importance of what remains of the commons—including the fact that the commons provides alternatives for the newly unemployed or under-employed to live productive and meaningful lives on much less money than previously thought. Unlike the monetized aspects of everyday life, the commons involves mutual support and patterns of reciprocity that will be even more needed as we move toward the global state of consciousness that accepts unemployment and poverty as the price that must be paid for technological progress.

There is another problem connected with the way Western educational institutions marginalize or are completely silent about the nature and importance of the commons—and the dangers that accompany the further enclosure of the commons. That is, ignorance of and indifference to the commons results in the collective failure to recognize when vital aspects of the commons are being enclosed—such as the current process of privatizing municipal water systems, the expansion in the corporate ownership of the airwaves, and in the further industrialization of human reproduction and the plants we rely upon for food. Ignorance of the need to protect the commons of other cultures, including their languages that encode their accumulated knowledge of sustainable practices within their bioregion, leads not only to the loss of cultural diversity in approaches to self-sufficiency but also to the loss of biodiversity itself.

The revitalization of the commons is important for reasons that go beyond the non-monetized mutual support systems that represent sites of resistance to the expansion of industrial culture. It is also important because the commons represent a
refuge for people who possess the skills that have been marginalized by the industrial culture, who find that work is no longer available due to automation and outsourcing, and who want to base their lives on meaningful social relationships and community enhancing activities. The revitalization of the commons can also be understood as having both a political and moral justification. That is, the non-consumer, non-enclosed aspects of the commons can be justified on the grounds that it contributes to eco-justice. And by extension, education that contributes to the revitalization of the commons can be understood as an eco-justice pedagogy that stands in sharp contrast to the romantic vision of Gadotti where each individual undertakes “the grand journey in his interior universe and in the universe that surrounds him.” Anyone comparing the eco-justice pedagogy being outlined here with the eco-pedagogy of Gadotti also needs to keep in mind his goal of fostering citizenship in a “single nation” that is to be based on a “planetary consciousness.” It is difficult to avoid interpreting his solution to the further degradation of the environment, and what he means by a “planetary consciousness, as anything other than a world monoculture based on Western values.

An eco-justice pedagogy will contribute in the following ways to resisting the further enclosure of what remains of the world’s commons, and to addressing the consequences of economic imperialism. First, by fostering a greater awareness of the toxic contamination that results from the industrial process, and how the disposal of the toxic waste is influenced by the culture’s social status system, it will give the issue of environmental racism as more central place in the curriculum. Second, by helping the students understand the nature of the commons and how they differ in terms of culture and bioregion, the forces of enclosure, the many adverse consequences of different forms of enclosure, an eco-justice pedagogy provides the knowledge necessary for the students’ communicative competence. Furthermore, these understandings will enable them to recognize that there are alternatives to being totally dependent upon a money economy that is increasingly characterized by the double bind where the cost of paying for the basic necessities of daily life continues to increase while the opportunities for work (even low paying ones) continue to disappear.
Third, by helping students recognize the community-centered alternatives to a life of near total dependency upon consumerism, and the environmental impact on Third World countries that results from the hyper-consumerism in the West, an eco-justice pedagogy contributes to reducing the domination of the South by the North. Fourth, by helping students to understand the ecological consequences of globalizing a consumer dependent lifestyle and by helping them to understand the consequences of losing many of the world’s ecologically informed knowledge systems, an eco-justice pedagogy helps to ensure that the prospects of future generations have not been diminished by a degraded environment. Fifth, by contributing to a less consumer dependent lifestyle, an eco-justice pedagogy contributes to the revitalization of local democracy and to what Vandana Shiva has referred to as earth democracy—that is, the right of natural systems to renew themselves.

If we consider the ideological differences between the Gadotti’s approach to an eco-pedagogy and an eco-justice pedagogy, we find that while Gadotti is critical of industrial culture, he nevertheless bases his prescriptions for reform on the same liberal assumptions that are used to justify economic globalization. That is, globalization for both the proponents of industrial culture and for Gadotti is viewed as the highest expression of human development. In addition, both the proponents of economic globalization and Gadotti agree that cultural differences should be replaced by a single way of knowing. And while they differ on the ends that are to be served by critical reflection; they also agree that intergenerational knowledge limits the ability of each individual to rename the world and to be free of the constraints of the patterns of reciprocity that characterize intergenerationally connected communities. The anomic form of individualism that can be more easily manipulated by the media turns out, upon close examination, to be identical to the individual who lives the self-centered life of exploring “his interior universe” and is both ignorant of and indifferent to the traditions of mutual support that are the source of food, shelter, political freedoms, and narratives that are the basis of the community’s moral codes (which may not always be in line with our moral priorities). To bring out another commonality between the proponents of globalizing the industrial/enclosure oriented culture and the planetary
culture being advocated by Gadotti: while Gadotti expresses deep concern about the
destruction of natural systems he shares the same indifference to what is the central
question that should be asked as the life-supporting systems that constitutes the
commons come under even greater assault. Namely, neither the proponents of
economic globalization nor Gadotti ask what needs to be conserved as the basis of
resisting the further degradation of the environment and the spread of poverty. This is
also a question that Freire and his followers never asked.

When the enclosure of the commons was not the result of a naked power grab, it
has been justified as contributing to social progress. The privatizing and monetizing of
the natural environment, the airways, health practices, gene lines, and so forth are
largely being justified in terms of the latter. A strong case can be made the
international trade agreements currently forcing people off the land are a mixture of
the two. Seldom has enclosure been justified on the grounds that it conserves what
contributes to the well-being of the human and natural community. The current efforts
of various conservation groups, such as the Nature Conservancy and the
Conservation Land Trust, to purchase land in order to return it to the public should not
be viewed as examples of enclosure, but rather as expanding the commons. With the
environment now undergoing changes that could not have been imagined a mere 30
years ago (the melting of the polar ice caps, the collapse of fisheries previously
thought to be inexhaustable, the spread of toxic chemicals in our bodies and through
the environment, etc.) it is now necessary to recognize that the language of liberalism
(progress, individualism, emancipation, development, global village and planetary
consciousness) excludes an alternative vocabulary that enables us to consider the
central concerns of environmentalists, Third World activists, and people in the West
whose lifestyles contribute to sustaining the commons. These latter groups are
cconcerned with “conserving” the diversity of species, cultural ways of knowing that
have been shaped by inhabiting a bioregion over hundreds even thousands of years,
and the intergenerational knowledge that has been the basis of community self-
sufficiency. These groups are now under intense pressure, as documented in Helena
Norberg-Hodge’s *Ancient Future: Learning from Ladakh* (1992), Frederique Apfel-
Marglin’s (with PRATEC) edited book, *The Spirit of Regeneration: Andean Culture Confronting Western Notions of Development* (1998) to adopt the Western model of development, which means to accept the enclosure of their traditions in exchange for Western technologies and consumer goods. The resistance to the Western model of development, as documented in Bonfil Batalla’s *Mexico Profundo* (1996) and which was the central focus of indigenous activists attending the recent conference on “American Profundo” in Mexico City, is also oriented toward conserving the traditions essential to cultural identity, self-sufficiency outside of the Western money economy, and to conserving natural systems.

The word “conserving” and the phrase “mindful conservatism” (Bowers, 2003) are not part of the vocabulary of Gadotti for achieving a more sustainable world. Indeed, when the word conservatism appears in the writings of both Gadotti and Freire, it is equated with the evils of capitalism. In his talk at the international conference Gadotti said there was no possibility of having a dialogue with the conservatives who run the transnational corporations. What he and the many followers of Freire who also identify corporations as conservative institutions fail to understand is that industrial culture is based on the values and assumptions of Classical Liberal thinkers such as John Locke, Adam Smith, and John Stuart Mill—and more recently on the re-emergence of Social Darwinist thinking that is sweeping through university departments. In its statement of guiding principles that appears on the web-site of the CATO Institute (which is the most influential liberal think-tank in America), the point is made that only in America is market-oriented liberalism interpreted as the highest expression of conservatism.

This market-oriented industrial culture is being given further legitimacy by scientists who are extending various interpretations of evolution in ways that explain which cultural memes meet the test of Darwinian fitness and thus are genetically driven to become the basis of a world monoculture. It is also important to recognize that both Gadotti and Freire (1974) also rely upon a theory of evolution to justify their vision of a global consciousness. But they are not alone. The transformative learning theories of Edmund O’Sullivan and William Doll, Jr., are also based on an
interpretation of evolution that incorporates the Western myth of linear progress. Aside from the fact that the process of natural selection is the basis of diversity, while the theory of transformative learning assumes the world-wide adoption of Western assumptions—and thus would lead to a world monoculture, there is another irony that is overlooked by proponents of transformative learning such as Gadotti, Freire, O'Sullivan, and Doll. While transformative learning is a vision to be realized in the future, the spread of the West’s industrial, consumer-oriented culture is the most transformative force in today’s world.

The failure of Gadotti to recognize the ideological roots of industrial culture, and how many of the liberal assumptions he shares in common with it—even as he criticizes its exploitive nature, explains why he does not recognize that critical reflection should also be used in the service of revitalizing the commons. While they equate critical reflection with individuals creating their own history, as both Gadotti and Freire put it in their separate writings (especially read Freire’s discussion on page 199, The Politics of Education), an eco-justice pedagogy is based on the recognition that conserving the commons, including earth democracy, is partly dependent upon the exercise of critical reflection. For example, an eco-justice pedagogy involves reliance upon critical reflection as part of the process of clarifying what is being overturned (enclosed) by the introduction of computers, the use of robots in the work place, the genetic engineering of plants and animals, the further merging of universities and corporate culture, the imperialism of the Western entertainment system, the increasing reliance on the industrialization of food, and the way current politicians create demons in order to create a Nazi-like state of compliance on the part of the public. In these examples, the outcome of critical reflection might lead to adopting new ways of doing things—which would mean that some traditions would be seen as in need of being changed, and in other instances critical reflection would lead to conserving traditions that are important to the community. But an eco-pedagogy is not based solely on critical reflection; it also recognizes that the viability of the commons also depends upon other ways of knowing and intergenerational renewal such as mentoring, the use of narratives, embodied learning, the multiple languaging processes that largely pass
on the taken-for-granted assumptions and behavioral patterns of the culture—which are often in need of being examined critically (such as the cultural assumptions that Gadotti takes for granted).

For readers who are uncomfortable with the word conservatism, and who are not aware that most groups who identify themselves as conservatives are actually in the liberal tradition of thinking, they might consider whether there are any aspects of their legal system, including Constitutional rights they would want to conserve. In terms of the United States, would they want to “conserve” the tradition of a trial by a jury of peers? Would they want to conserve the tradition of an independent judicial system, including an independent Supreme Court? Or would they consider the control of the Supreme Court by a political party the latest expression of progress? Would they want to conserve the gains made over the last century in the area of women’s rights and protections in the workplace—or would they be willing to let powerful interest groups transform these gains into a more “progressive” development such as the recent effort to eliminate overtime pay for workers. The latter effort was justified on the grounds that it would enable corporations to be more competitive—a progressive development in the eyes of liberal, free-market advocates. And on a more personal level, would the reader want to “conserve” the traditions of food preparation within their family and cultural group or is industrially processed food to be embraced as the latest expression of progress and the merging into a planetary consciousness?

An eco-justice pedagogy is based on the need to conserve cultural traditions that enable people to reduce their dependence on a money economy as well as the size of their ecological footprint. But it is unlikely that the practitioners of an eco-justice pedagogy will succeed in rectifying the use of our political vocabulary on their own. They need the help of other groups that are concerned about the loss of cultural and species diversity, and the growing threat of a global culture based on the Western idea of the autonomous, self-creating individual. Ideally, if public schools and universities would help students understand that the words “tradition” and “conservatism” are too complex to be reduced to the formulaic thinking that now passes for an empowering political discourse it might then be possible to recognize that the history of liberalism
co-evolved (I use the term deliberately) with the growth of the Industrial Revolution and that the hubris it is based upon accounts for its role in furthering Western imperialism. It might also be possible for students to understand the many forms of conservatism, and thus be able to discriminate between what is reactionary, what is the expression of “traditionalism” (that is, the mistaken belief that traditions should not change), and what is oriented to conserving the non-monetized forms of knowledge, relationships, and activities that represent sources of resistance to the further enclosure of the commons of different cultures.

The hubris of Western liberalism and the hubris that underlies the Gadotti’s approach to an eco-pedagogy should lead us to ask the question of when does a reform oriented educator cross the line by becoming an agent of cultural invasion. This question could be broadened to include any cultural outsider (the scientist, development specialist, missionary, etc.). Here, I shall focus on the differences between an eco-pedagogy and an eco-justice pedagogy.

A key characteristic of the eco-pedagogy advocated by Gadotti, and that corresponds to Freire’s vision of a world of constant change, is that it is based on a deficit model of culture. The deficit (backwardness, wrongly developed, lacking in adherence to Western values) is to be overcome as the teacher, as an agent of cultural transformation, reinforces the individual’s own determination of ideas and values (the journey into the “interior universe”) and reliance on critical reflection as the basis for membership as “planetary citizen.” That the members of Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, and thousands of indigenous cultures (many of the latter having already worked out a sustainable environmental ethic) will allow themselves to be transformed by eco-pedagogues to fit the Western Enlightenment ideal of the critically reflective, self-determining individual is totally unrealistic. The romantic perception of the Earth as “a single community” blinds Gadotti from recognizing that many non-Western cultures are already ecologically-centered, and that we should be learning from them about how to live in ways that sustain the commons. Gadotti’s blanket formula for changing other cultures to fit his ideal of a single form of consciousness, what he calls a “planetary consciousness,” indicates that he is blinded by his extreme
ethnocentrism (which he shares with Freire) and the hubris that leads him to dictate how the world’s cultures should reform themselves in order to save the planet.

The role of the eco-justice oriented educator is profoundly different. As the revitalization of the commons requires addressing all five aspects of eco-justice that have particular relevance for guiding educational reform, the teacher’s role becomes that of a mediator—and not a “transformative intellectual” as Henry Giroux put it. As a mediator between cultures, including the differences within Western culture, the educator’s responsibility is to help the different communities (and cultures) to understand the cultural transformations that are likely to result when Western technologies and systems of expert knowledge are adopted. Clarifying these potential transformations involves fostering a community-wide discussion of the assumptions that underlie Western approaches to development, and how the adoption of Western values and technologies will affect the commons as they know it. Mediating thus involves making explicit what lies behind the language of progress and modernization. The educator who made explicit for Quechua teachers the forms of cultural knowledge that cannot be digitized, as well as how adopting computers in schools involves both forms of enclosure and becoming dependent upon a money economy was acting as a mediator. Similarly, the educator who explains to Canadian bureaucrats why the Inuit, as a subsistence culture, need to possess rifles and why they do not want child-care centers, as well as help the Inuit elders understand the cultural assumptions of the bureaucrats, is playing the role of a cultural mediator. The decisions about their collective future is thus left to them to make.

An eco-justice pedagogy can only be effective in clarifying the nature of cultural domination as the educator learns from the community’s (culture’s) approaches to sustaining the commons. This mediating role also extends to the educational process within Western contexts. That is, the curricular focus would be on clarifying the ecological implications of different traditions such as the non-monetized traditions within the community and the industrial traditions of enclosure. While Gadotti’s proposal for an eco-pedagogy and an eco-justice pedagogy are based on similar concerns about the destruction of the Earth’s ecosystems, they represent profoundly
different approaches to understanding the role of education in resisting the further enclosure of the commons. Given Gadotti’s vision of how the world’s cultures should be transformed, it is clear that he have crossed the line—and is dedicated to promoting the aspects of Western imperialism that paves the way for the globalization of the industrial culture he rejects.

References


