

## **Reflection on:**

### **Gandhi, Freire and Civics Education**

In May of 2016, I embarked on a study trip to Chihuahua Mexico with a group of OISE students and Professor Reva Joshee. Our collaborative work with our Mexican colleagues focused on Gandhi and Freire, and their impact on education internationally.

The bilingual presentation and conversation allowed me to process my learning by connecting it to the educational environment I knew best: Ontario secondary schools. I was curious to learn if the visions of Gandhi and Freire could be realized in Ontario's secondary curriculum. Within the program of secondary education there is only one mandatory course that addresses social justice explicitly: Civics. I began to consider how effective this Civics course could be, based upon policy. In the culminating paper for this course, I explored how the Civics curriculum was developed, and the role the course might play in either oppressing or liberating students.

A theme that runs through this paper, and much of my thinking, is the balance between the autonomy of the learner and that of the teacher. My detailed analysis of this example of Ontario curriculum policy supports a conclusion that “there is sufficient flexibility to allow either for exemplary instruction and learning that supports Gandhi and Freire’s principles, or for a teacher to be in compliance without actually having to be consciously aligning either Freire or Gandhi”. This flexibility, as demonstrated in this analysis, is also a theme that has emerged in the current Ontario: A Learning Province report, which examines assessment practice. Where educators are allowed to interpret policy broadly, the results are equally broad, and may not meet the intent of the policy.

Educational policy development in Ontario has been a very political process, and knowing that this course originated as part of Harris' Common Sense Revolution, needs to be considered when examining the results of my analysis. I did not address the political in my original writing, but it was a key component in our conversations with our Mexican colleagues, and it is a theme to which I have returned frequently in my reading and thinking.

Although the structure of this course would have provided me with rich data to write an empirical paper, my choice of a theoretical structure now seems to be one that I have been drawn to as an academic. Writing to make connections between theory, concept, and policy supports my learning and advances my thinking. I find it difficult to memorize facts, and learn best when new learning is connected to old learning, and when I have been able to articulate a framework of these connections that create a complete model to contain this new knowledge.

My lack of background in the social sciences has made much of my doctoral work more difficult, so the opportunity to deepen my understanding of Gandhi and Freire through the experiences and reflections in this course was welcome. The writing of this paper allowed me to make connections between the structures I am familiar with in my daily work as a Principal, and the frameworks that I hope informed the writers of the curriculum policies I am charged to support.

I am also interested in the process of curriculum review that takes place at the Ministry of Education level. It seems to be very technical in nature, addressing achievement in the form of marks and graduation rates, but ignoring more fundamental measures of success that Susan Drake would describe as the "being" that results from "knowing" and "doing". Gandhi and Freire, I believe, would rather see education as supporting "being" for all students, not just a passing mark on a course. However much educational policy might have been initially grounded

in the concepts espoused by Freire and Gandhi, it appears not to be explicitly addressed when policy is revised.

The design of this research would have been enhanced by the addition of interviews or surveys with those writing policy and with those enacting the policy in the classroom.

The analysis and communication of results as a colour-coded table was effective but not sufficient. Deeper analysis and summarization of the findings would have made this a more effective paper.

This paper was written at the conclusion of a course that focuses solely on the work of Friere and Gandhi. My writing would have been much stronger if I had delved more deeply into critical pedagogy, and connected my new learning to other theoretical frameworks.