



FROM FREIRE'S THEORY TO KNOWING PRACTICE

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Abstract

This article responds to questions about the relationship between Freire, Development Education (DE) and Global Learning, and theorisation of practice. It draws on research exploring these questions through the perspectives of practitioners based in Development Education Centres (DECs) in England. Whilst findings support wider evidence of increasing alignment between aims, theory and practice, they also highlight tensions. These resonate with questions raised about how far Freire's ideas remain too implicit and lacking 'internal' critique by practitioners about the implications of these ideas for practice. However, by revisiting data and wider literature on practitioner experience and knowledge *with* participants, it was possible to draw in insights pointing to what practitioners do as embodied and 'knowing practice'. This presents another lens on the theory-practice relationship, and the ways practitioners translate Freire's ideas in and through practice. It also acts as a call to practitioners to (re)engage with Freire through more attention to *praxis*.

Keywords: *Global Learning; Embodied; Knowing Practice.*

Introduction

Calls for education to respond to complex global challenges² suggest growing interest in rethinking the neoliberal model which has come to dominate formal contexts for learning in many countries. Whilst some of these calls appear new, behind them lies a long history of attempts to reshape education as a vehicle for societal transformation. Described variably as 'issue-based' or 'adjectival' educations, they draw on a rich history of radical ideas and grassroots activism (Hicks, 2008: 2; Dillon, 2017: 40). In the case of Development

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² <https://www.bigeducationconversation.org/>; <https://www.teachthefuture.uk/>.

Education (DE), it is the work of Paulo Freire that has been seen to be particularly influential³ (Heater, 1980; McCollum, 1996; Bourn, 2015).

Freire's influence on DE can be traced back to his grassroots work with 'illiterate peasants' in rural communities in Brazil (McCloskey, forthcoming). Coinciding with the 'lived experiences' of individuals and organisations returning from aid and development work in different contexts, it was the ideas Freire published about education and pedagogy that were taken up by DE practitioners (Bourn, 2015). However, whilst Freire's work remains a key reference point in literature on DE, questions have been raised about how far it was ever really possible to translate Freire's ideas from their origins in empowering marginalised communities in Brazil to global North contexts (McCollum, 1996). Related to these, are concerns about lack of clear theorisation of DE practice which has allowed Freire's ideas to remain both implicit and vulnerable to more hegemonic agendas, thus diluting Freire's radical potential.

This article responds to the questions raised in relation to DE and Freire, and the broader issue of theorisation of practice. It does this by drawing on research with practitioners in Development Education Centres (DECs) in England and begins by setting out the context for research. This includes questions raised in an earlier analysis of DECs, as well as ongoing critique about conceptual and theory-practice issues. What follows is a summarised discussion of findings, focused specifically on practitioners' engagement with Freire. These are located in a 'middle ground' that both supports evidence of more explicit alignment between aims, theory and practice than earlier critique suggested *and* recognises that tensions persist. The discussion then turns to findings that what practitioners know and do resonates with concepts of embodied and knowing practice. This presents an alternative lens on understanding the theory-practice relationship from practitioners' perspectives, including Freire's contribution. It also opens up possibilities for practitioners to (re)engage with Freire and the concept of praxis.

Research Context and Findings

That Freire remains a key touchstone for those involved in delivering DE and Global Learning⁴ (the term to be used hereon in), is supported by references to his significance in the literature (Heater, 1980; Brown, 2013; McCloskey, 2016). They highlight the influence of a number of key concepts developed by Freire. Underpinning these is the concept of 'banking education', which has been influential on practitioners' attempts to shift teachers towards more learner-centred approaches (Freire, 1970:46). In turn, these approaches are informed by the concept of 'dialogue' as 'the encounter of those addressed to the common task of learning and acting'. For Freire, this would allow for 'praxis' as the interaction between reflection and action, and conscientization⁵ or 'critical consciousness' of 'social, political and economic contradictions' (ibid: 63, 60, 9). The concepts of dialogue, praxis and conscientization are seen to influence Global Learning as a form of critical pedagogy (Brown, 2013; Blackmore, 2014).

³ This recognises that Freire has also been an important theoretical influence on other educations, especially Peace Education (Heater, 1980).

⁴ The term currently used by DECs in England (notwithstanding debates about this).

⁵ *Conscientização* is the term in Freire's original Portuguese.

However, questions have also been raised about how far Freire's ideas could be translated into the kind of contexts where Global Learning is increasingly located. These questions were explored specifically in relation to DECs through McCollum's (1996) critical analysis of the theory and practice of DE in England in the 1990s. Seeking to address what she saw as ongoing marginalisation of DE, she found that because it had evolved largely *through* practice, there had been insufficient attention to theorisation and a lack of 'internal critique' about conceptual, theoretical and political issues, and their implications for practice (McCollum, 1996: 54). She was concerned in particular with the 'assumed' influence of Freire and the failure to engage with the challenges posed by attempting to translate his ideas into the constraining context of schools (ibid: 35). For McCollum, this was also reflective of a wider tension between a liberal humanist emphasis on empowering individuals and a more critical emphasis on transforming power relations, represented by Freire's idea of 'critical intervention' in reality (Freire, 1972, in McCollum, 1996: 74).

Whilst McCollum's research now stands at some distance, questions persist in the literature which resonate with her concerns. For some, weak conceptualisation has continued to undermine the potential for Global Learning to make a distinctive contribution to education and social change (Marshall, 2005; Bourn, 2015). For others, concerns about conceptual matters focus on challenging the interplay of 'technical-economic', liberal humanist and other hegemonic agendas in Global Learning discourse (Andreotti, 2006; Marshall, 2011: 412; Dillon, 2017). These meet with concerns that attempting to find traction with increasingly neoliberal development and education agendas, has resulted in conceptual confusion and loss of criticality (Mannion et al, 2011; Khoo and McCloskey, 2015; Dillon, 2018).

Running through these critiques are questions more specifically about the relationship between theory and practice, and Freire's influence in particular. These echo McCollum's concerns about his 'assumed' influence and the implications of meeting with mainstream contexts. For instance, Dillon (2017: 98) points to the risk of 'superficial 'game playing'' in introducing participatory approaches into schools without engaging with Freire's call for critical analysis of power. These questions form part of wider debates between those arguing for Global Learning as a 'constructivist' approach which adapts to 'the particular pedagogical perspectives being addressed', and those more concerned with transforming the dominant neoliberal paradigm (Bourn, 2011, and Selby and Kagawa, 2011, in Khoo and McCloskey, 2015: 4). Dovetailing here are questions about the kind of change practitioners are seeking and how far Freire's emphasis on 'liberating action' remains central to practice (Skinner and Baillie Smith, 2015; McCloskey, 2016: 111).

Building on these debates, attempts have been made to develop Global Learning as a more coherent, distinct and ethically informed approach (Andreotti, 2007 in Baillie Smith, 2013; Marshall, 2011; Bourn, 2015). Responding to concerns about lack of theorisation and practitioners' perceptions that theory is too disconnected from practice, they have resulted in frameworks and tools developed to translate theoretical concepts for practice contexts (Andreotti, 2006; Blackmore, 2014). Notwithstanding these attempts, there continues to be a lack of attention to practitioner perspectives in research broadly and, more specifically, with regard to questions about the theory-practice relationship and Freire's influence (Skinner and Baillie Smith, 2015; Blackmore, 2014). Since McCollum's research, only a very small number of studies have explored practitioner perspectives, experience and application of theory to practice. Whilst overlapping in scope, they

tend to focus either on exploring practitioner perspectives, experience and conceptual 'ideals', or analysing and clarifying the potential of Global Learning as critical pedagogy (Marshall, 2005: 79; Ellis, 2013; Brown, 2013; Blackmore, 2014; Skinner and Baillie Smith, 2015; Dillon, 2017; Coelho et al, 2018). Of these, a smaller number focus on Global Learning practitioners exclusively and McCollum's study remains one of the most in-depth explorations of the theory-practice relationship in the context of organisations like DEC's.

Using McCollum's study as a key departure point, the research explored here aimed to provide an up-to-date analysis of how practitioners in DEC's in England conceptualise Global Learning and understand the relationship between theory and practice. It sought to respond to McCollum's findings, ongoing debates about the theory-practice relationship and the absence of practitioner voices and experiences in Global Learning research (Skinner and Baillie Smith, 2015). Further to this was the fact that I am also a DEC practitioner who consciously and deliberately identified with participants and their concerns (Denzin, 1989, Mies, 1993, Haig, 1999, De Laine, 2000, in Cohen et al, 2011). I saw this research as an opportunity to empower DEC's in the face of more dominant agendas, contexts and critiques shaping their work (Charmaz, 2017).

Keen to integrate research aims into the research methodology, I drew on Hense and McFerran's (2016) ideas for Critical Ground Theory (CGT). This allowed for an approach which could pay close attention to the data and capturing participants' realities, whilst recognising that all meaning to be made of these is still socially constructed (Oliver, 2011). It also combines with a participatory paradigm to encourage a process of 'collaborative reflexivity' with participants (Hense and McFerran, 2016). This was facilitated through a series of face to face and online focus groups with twenty-two practitioners from thirteen DEC's located across England. By following up with the same participants in online groups I was able to share early findings and insights from literature, promoting a process in keeping with praxis and conscientization.

Global Learning as Freirean-inspired Process?

Early analysis of the data showed that practitioners largely conceptualised Global Learning as a 'process-orientated' means of enabling change in individual understanding, skills and dispositions, informed by moral and political values and aims (Rajacic et al, 2010, in Coelho et al, 2018: 42). Alongside this, practitioners conceptualised Global Learning as an holistic domain, consisting of multiple interconnections and interdependence. These understandings aligned closely with Global Learning approaches and outcomes identified in wider literature (Fricke and Gathercole, 2015; Coelho et al, 2018). In particular, they aligned with suggestions that, for some, Global Learning is increasingly about open-ended processes of promoting critical thinking, reflection and a commitment to action, rather than action being a given (Skinner and Baillie Smith, 2015).

When it came to the relationship between practice and theory, participants highlighted Freire's influence on activities, methods and resources used in practice. This included references to activities such as '*decoding*'⁶ and '*ranking*' images and statements, and resources incorporating activities designed to shift

⁶ Extracts from participants' responses in focus groups.

teacher 'attitudes and practices' towards more learner centred approaches (Freire, 1970: 46; Oxfam, 2015). It also included references to '*innovative methodologies*' and Freirean inspired programmes like Training for Transformation (Hope and Timmel, 1999). More implicit in participants' responses was Freire's influence on the process and outcomes these activities and methods were designed to facilitate. There was an emphasis on processes linking critical thinking with '*raising awareness*', '*talking together*' and '*actually doing something in practice*'. As such, these could be said to reflect the kind of 'radical interaction' between reflection and action Freire (1970: 60) emphasised in his concept of praxis. However, as the dialogue in Figure 1 below illustrates, there was ambivalence between participants about the relationship between these processes and aims, and the extent to which outcomes should be open-ended.

Participant 1: *but consciousness to me doesn't say enough either, that's not challenging, that's knowing. Is it being aware that systems are unequal? That phrase doesn't imply to me I'm actively doing something about it.*

Participant 2: *there's a knowing and a doing, and part of the wisdom is when to know when to do as well isn't it and choosing not to do is also a statement.*

Participant 3: *Is there somewhere in the middle, some sort of bridge between the knowing and the doing. Because you know what you were saying about, and I agree that the not rushing into, but knowing that some action may be required somewhere down the line.*

Figure 1- Dialogue between three participants.

That participants emphasised Global Learning as a process in keeping with Freire's praxis, is supported by definitions and analyses of Global Learning in policy and research. These point to a process which aligns critical thinking and consciousness, and reflective learning and action (Brown, 2013; Bourn, 2015; McCloskey, forthcoming). For example, Brown's (2013: 291) comparative study of Development Education in non-formal contexts in Spain and the UK found a 'clear message' that it is a process linked to a pedagogy that emphasises critical thinking. Brown supports this analysis with a theoretical framework heavily informed by Freire. Moreover, she concludes that her findings point to evidence of more explicit alignment between aims, theory and 'understanding of critical pedagogies' than suggested by McCollum's research some years previously (ibid: 286-287). Brown's analysis is supported by other attempts to develop pedagogical frameworks which connect critical thinking, dialogue, reflection and concepts like 'responsible being and action' (Bourn, 2015; Blackmore, 2014: 34). These also resonate with the process explored in the dialogue in Figure 1.

Notwithstanding the findings on Freire's ongoing influence and the potential for more explicit alignment between theory and practice, both the dialogue in Figure 1 and wider focus group discussions exposed some of the ambiguity and tensions identified by McCollum and later critique. In common with Dillon's (2017) analysis of the way practitioners talk about DE in the Republic of Ireland, there were many references to Freire's influence on activities, methods and resources, but less evidence of how this related to the idea of Global Learning as critical or radical education. This was despite the connections made by Brown and others, and to some extent participants in this study, between Freirean-inspired critical pedagogy and Global Learning practice. The risk of superficial engagement was reinforced by a sense that Freire's ideas tended to

be more implicit when it came to practitioners' aims. This is reflected in the response below, raising questions again about the relationship between aims, processes and outcomes, and how far practitioners saw change in terms of *'actively doing something about it'*. Tensions between practitioners' motivations and more hegemonic agendas also raised questions about the extent to which they are reflecting on the implications of implementing Freire's ideas in practice.

and we all start from a shared belief and it's that fundamental unspoken belief. It's a political position that maybe we don't articulate but we start from that position, that's the theory, whether that's Marxist whether that's Paulo Freire, and maybe we don't even know what our positions are, but I think we start out with that and we then use methods and, implicitly, we are seeking positive social change.

Where this participant seeks to make clear the *'political position'* and the influence of Marxism and Freire, the emphasis on *'implicitly... seeking positive social change'* suggests a lack of clarity of aims found across focus groups. Coupled with the finding that practitioners mainly engaged with Freire through connecting his ideas to activities, methods and techniques, it appeared to support concerns about lack of reflection on Freire's assumed influence. It was not that participants did not engage with some of the implications of Freire's ideas. For example, there was acknowledgement that *'if we were to take Paulo Freire's statement that education is never neutral,... you have to decide which side you're on'*. However, ambivalence or confusion arose where participants attempted to wrestle out their motivations from policy objectives such as *'poverty reduction'* and concerns about indoctrination. This resulted in a tendency to invoke use of facilitation and participatory methods as if these were neutral or *'a priori techniques'* which could operate around tensions (Giroux, 2010: 716). As will be suggested, it also risked conflation of aims and methods with agendas dominating schools.

The tensions outlined above were brought into focus by an emphasis on use of Philosophy for Children (P4C). Pioneered as a *'community of enquiry'* pedagogy, P4C aims to promote philosophical thinking in a way which goes far beyond generalised thinking skills (Murriss, 2008: 669). That participants emphasised P4C is reflected in references in the literature to its use in supporting Global Learning as a pedagogical process aimed at promoting critical thinking (Brown, 2013; Bourn, 2015). This was somewhat diluted by the way participants loosely related P4C to different theoretical influences which shared *'common strands'* with Freire. Furthermore, P4C's growing use by DEC's and schools highlights its compatibility with agendas aimed at skills for *'attainment'*, as well as the *'soft skills'* noted below (SAPERRE). The risk here is that practitioners become complicit with promoting instrumentalised critical thinking (Murriss, 2008; Marshall, 2011). It also raises questions again about how far methods like P4C are focused on individual rather than wider societal change.

we are looking at impact in terms of critical thinking and global awareness, how it improves attainment and achievement, but also confidence and leadership and all the soft skills.

In the discussion so far I have attempted to show how findings both supported arguments for more explicit alignment between aims, theory and practice, and reinforced tensions highlighted by McCollum and others. These include the possibility that practitioners may be at risk of engaging with Freire only so far as the level of 'methods, technique or process', leaving more radical ideas about societal change largely implicit (Allman, 1988, in McCollum, 1996). This conflated with tensions between motivations and other hegemonic agendas, resulting in the ambivalent use of methods like P4C and questions about what kind of change and outcomes are sought.

Alert to some of these tensions, Brown addressed concerns about the balance between indoctrination and relativism, by arguing that practitioners engage in 'fair minded critical thinking'. She also argues for the potential for wider societal transformation through 'catalytic individuals' who can spread their learning more widely (2013: 37, 44, 296). By contrast, Dillon's analysis of practitioner discourses, in Ireland, left her less optimistic about the level of criticality found in practitioner understandings. Alongside identifying a range of discursive positions between liberal-humanist, critical and post-critical, Dillon (2017: 261) identifies a prevailing 'discursive culture of restraint, which has historic and hegemonic influences'.

Locating my findings somewhere between Brown and Dillon, and seeking to provide another perspective on practitioner understandings of practice, I returned to the Critical Grounded Theory process of moving between participants, data analysis and literature. This led me to explore wider studies on practitioner experience and professional practice knowledge. It alerted me to concepts and theories of practice which offered another lens on how practitioners relate theory to practice.

Global Learning as Knowing Practice

In focus group dialogues there was a clear emphasis on understanding Global Learning as practice. This is perhaps not surprising given the assumption of a theory-practice divide in the research aims, the way DEC's work is represented in the literature and their current expressed aims to 'support and deliver global learning in schools and communities' (Heater, D, 1980; Bourn, 2015; CoDEC). For some participants, being '*grounded in practice*' related closely to Global Learning's intrinsic complexity and making this accessible for those they work with, especially teachers (Coelho et al, 2018). This combined with concerns about making it '*practically useful*' and '*doing something in practice*'. These concerns could, at times, appear anti-theoretical by framing theory as too 'elitist, abstract and excluding' on the one hand and practice as 'transparent, straightforward and procedural' on the other (Andreotti and de Souza, 2008: 30). They also contrasted with responses which suggested that the theory-practice relationship was more complex and '*symbiotic*', involving '*translating*' between theory and practice.

so the translation thing being quite important, the translating between the more theoretical research, and for teachers to be able to practically grasp things and engage with research more easily, because it's like being an intermediary.

Prompted to more comparison of data and literature by suggestions of a complex relationship between theory and practice, I encountered similar debates about a theory-practice divide in the context of teacher education. Ord and Nuttall (2016: 356) see this divide as a tension between future teachers calling for more practical or 'craft' knowledge to apply in practice and teacher educators' emphasis on theoretical or 'formal' knowledge as the foundation for critically reflective practice. They question unhelpful distinctions between 'knowing' and 'doing', and draw on theories of practice to argue that what future teachers in their study are seeking is an 'embodied' sense of understanding teaching through which to connect theory with practice (ibid: 361). This resonated with Skinner and Baillie Smith's (2015: 27) analysis of what 'Global Education' practitioners do as embodied practice; defined as 'shaped by the dynamically evolving knowledge, emotions, creativities and coping strategies of the practitioners themselves'. It resonated with participants when shared as interim findings in online focus groups suggesting that, like Ord and Nuttall's future teachers, DEC practitioners might be seeking an embodied sense of what they do in connecting theory to practice.

as you go on the more you realise the theory behind what you're doing, it becomes more and more relevant because you're actually experiencing it.

Moreover, exploring wider literature through Ord and Nuttall's study also drew my attention to Kemmis' (2005) work on theorising practice and further insights into practice knowledge through his concept of 'knowing practice'. Exploring wider literature through Ord and Nuttall's study also drew my attention to Kemmis' (2005) work on theorising practice and further insights into practice knowledge through his concept of 'knowing practice'. In an early iteration of his ideas⁷, Kemmis drew on Aristotle's distinction between practical, technical and theoretical reasoning, to emphasise the role of practical reasoning in understanding how practitioners think in the course of 'doing' a practice. Defining practical reasoning in terms of 'practical wisdom and knowledge', 'praxis' and 'doing-action', Kemmis argued that practical reasoning involves practitioners' drawing on existing resources of professional practice knowledge *and* a highly reflexive process of 'searching for saliences' and ideas from their whole life experience. It means taking account of 'intentions, interests, meanings, understandings and values' and likely consequences of their actions, revealed through the 'action and interaction' of their practice (Kemmis, 2005:1-2).

Kemmis develops his argument by drawing on wider theories of practice. Exploring other forms of embodied knowledge, he extrapolates from 'craft knowledge' to identify 'knowledge in the face of uncertainty' and a process through which practitioners engage in a process of practical reasoning, deliberation and 'exploratory action' (Higgs, Titchen and Neville, 2001, in Kemmis, 2005: 9-12). Again, and in keeping with the concept of searching for saliences, this means practitioners being alert to subjective and objective conditions, and being ready to adapt to the particular situation of their practice as it unfolds. It is through this process of 'being continuously attentive to what happens' that practitioners engage in what Kemmis (2005:13) came to define as 'knowing practice', combining:

⁷ The reference to 'early iteration' acknowledges developments in Kemmis' and colleagues work on theorising practice since the paper drawn on here.

the sense in which a person comes to know what a particular kind of practice is' and 'a sense that one knows what one is doing when one engages in practice, and reflexively becomes more knowing as one continues to practice.

Revisiting the data across focus groups in light of Kemmis' ideas, it was possible to see features of practical reasoning and the potential for knowing practice in the way some participants reflected on practice situations and implicitly connected theory to practice⁸. These features and potential are explored here with reference to the two responses below, selected partly for their focus on using P4C.

think about the example of P4C, it can be obviously extremely instrumental from a point of view of learning the skills that you need for the curriculum, but when you've got a group of teachers who've been doing it for a while I'm very explicit about the radical nature of and, even on Level 1, it feels to me that we quite often get to the point, we're quite clear and explicit, and the teachers see that and raise it themselves, about how transformational it potentially is in transforming society, not just giving some kids some skills. So it's kind of, you always feel like making a judgement about how much you reveal the radical nature of something and to whom.

And you know one of the things I've been grappling recently with recently is trying to use P4C and school linking and situations like that and actually finding ways of going beyond the liberal, the intercultural understanding, but get into this whole dialogue about the pedagogy of global social justice and recognizing colonialism... and yet it's a difficult, dangerous, uncomfortable subject and that's where I'm grappling, how do you bring these things to the attention of young people when the agenda from Department of Communities Local Government or whatever.

Both participants appear to have engaged in a highly reflexive process of 'thinking through' what might be done in the particular circumstances referred to (Kemmis, 2005:10). This supports Skinner and Baillie Smith's (2015) ideas about embodied practice as a dynamically evolving process involving creativities and coping strategies. It also reflects the features which Kemmis argued contributed to knowing practice. For instance, both participants are alert to subjective and objective conditions in deliberating on how to act and respond to the needs of specific groups. In the first response, this is seen in the way this participant refers to '*making a judgement about how much you reveal the radical nature of something and to whom*'. Further to this, is the way this participant demonstrates 'knowledge in the face of uncertainty' and 'exploratory action' in their openly reflexive approach to the nature and consequences of their practice as it unfolds.

The second response reveals similar features of embodied and knowing practice in the way this participant emphasises '*grappling*' with how to bring a '*difficult, dangerous, uncomfortable*' subject to the attention of young people. This response offers further evidence of the potential for knowing practice in 'searching for saliences' between P4C, '*school linking and situations like that*' and a '*pedagogy of global social justice*' that recognises colonialism. This suggests they are alert to theoretical debates on tensions,

⁸ These findings have been explored in more detail in Bullivant, A (2020).

between liberal-humanist, critical and post-critical perspectives, beyond what might be apparent outside of their reflection in a focus group.

Whilst neither of the two responses above makes explicit connections with Freire, I want to suggest that revisiting participants' responses through knowing practice offered another window into practice, its relationship with knowledge and how practitioners might engage with Freire. In the first instance, applying the concepts of embodied and knowing practice supported the suggestion by some participants that the relationship between theory and practice might be more complex and symbiotic than initially appeared; the concept of knowing practice similarly resonated with participants. This is reflected in the second participant above searching for saliences with theoretical ideas beyond liberal-humanist discourse. It reinforces Kemmis' (2017) assertion that practitioners are 'always doing more than they say they are doing, more than they know they are doing, so they are doing more than they know'. I suggest that, in addition to seeking an embodied sense of Freire's ideas through the methods they use, practitioners may also seek to translate his ideas in and through practice in ways they are not necessarily alert to.

Finding evidence that some practitioners engaged in embodied *and* knowing practice also offered insight into the way practitioners might engage with the implications of Freire's ideas and tensions with practice. The theoretical grounding for P4C lacked clarity in focus groups, but the first response above connects the possibility of critical pedagogy with P4C. This participant then goes further by exploring P4C's radical possibilities explicitly with teachers. Whilst questions remain about the relationship between aims, methods, outcomes and actions, this participant's response suggests potential for reflexive engagement with such questions through knowing practice.

(Re)Engaging with Freire Through Knowing Practice and Praxis

The starting point for the research explored here were questions raised in the literature on DE and Global Learning about matters of conceptualisation and the relationship between theory and practice. Exploring this question with practitioners based in DEC's in England confirmed that Freire remains a key touchstone for practice. It also supported evidence from recent studies of more explicit alignment between theory, critical pedagogy and practice than McCollum's earlier critique had suggested. At the same time, exploring Freire's contribution brought to light a number of tensions which resonated with McCollum's concerns and ongoing debates. These included lack of clarity about the relationship between aims, processes and outcomes, and tensions between practitioner motivations, other agendas and the risk of diluting more radical potential of methods like P4C.

Acknowledging these tensions and the questions they raise for practitioners, I located my findings between Brown's research and Dillon's less optimistic findings on criticality in practitioners' understandings. Whilst similarly concerned by evidence that practitioners may not be engaging with the implications of Freire's ideas and a potential theory-practice divide. I returned to the process of analysis and reflection on data *with* participants. By drawing on embodied practice and Kemmis' ideas, and sharing these in online focus groups, it was possible to see how some practitioners engage in a process of practical reasoning and knowing practice. This reframed the theory-practice divide suggested in the literature and in early findings in this

study. It supported evidence of a more symbiotic theory-practice relationship in some participants' responses and shifted the emphasis on theory to the 'happenstance' of practice, affording greater value to practical reasoning and knowing practice (Kemmis, 2017). This shift was important for opening up possibilities for rethinking how Freire's ideas might be embodied and translated through practice. It was also supported by a process of promoting collaborative reflexivity, tantamount to *praxis*, in focus groups.

This process and findings were important for empowering practitioners. They drew attention to the way in which practitioners are always doing more than they say or know and reinforced calls for researchers to engage with the voices and experiences of those 'doing the doing' (Skinner and Baillie Smith, 2015:8). At the same time, they alerted practitioners to new possibilities for theorising their practice. They should also alert practitioners to the need to re-engage more explicitly with Freire, and the tensions and theoretical debates around their practice, perhaps starting with more attention to *praxis*.

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