

A Freirean approach to family life education: Conducting a graduate institute in Jamaica

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Abstract

This paper discusses an international, intensive 10-day graduate institute called *A Freirean Approach to Family Life Education* conducted in Jamaica. Details on the coordination of the program and administration of the course are given, and then a brief overview of Jamaican families is provided. Emancipatory family life education is described, drawing on both Paulo Freire's work and Freirean-influenced work. Final sections of the paper describe the planning and experience of the institute. Issues of cultural divergence and convergence are explored, focusing on family diversity and sexual orientation. Pedagogical recommendations for educators involved in cross-cultural Freirean adult education are provided, including the importance of international educators being prepared to take a stand to support social justice.

A FREIREAN APPROACH TO FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION: TEACHING A GRADUATE INSTITUTE IN JAMAICA

“Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery; None but ourselves can free our mind.”

(Bob Marley, Redemption Song)

Adult education is a complex field wherein the perspectives of learners from diverse backgrounds can not only create dynamic learning environments, but also generate challenges in practice. When the sites of practice are international and cross-cultural, the challenges are intensified. The opportunities for international adult education have increased in recent years as globalization and technology have connected previously separated cultures. This connection has often resulted in valuable learning experiences as we learn about the world of others. Conversely, it also has resulted in the clash of cultures. However, if “international understanding is needed now more than ever” (Boucouvalas 2002: 23), then it is vital that we provide opportunities for cross-cultural experiences. One way that educators can initiate these experiences is by bringing together students from different countries to learn from and about each other, through distance courses or on-site courses (Gouthro 2004). Moreover, the work of Paulo Freire (1982, 1985, 1998; Freire and Faundez 1989), an international liberatory educator, can inform this process. Freire believed that the purpose of education is to involve students in addressing social issues that contribute to their and others’ marginalization, and his approach is often used in adult education.

This paper discusses our experiences with an international, intensive 10-day graduate institute called *A Freirean Approach to Family Life Education*, which took place in Jamaica in 2004. First, we describe the coordination of the program and administration of the course. In the

next section, we provide a brief overview of Jamaican families. Then, we discuss what it means to educate adults about family life from an emancipatory perspective, drawing on Freire's work and the work of others who have been influenced by his pedagogical approach. Our final sections describe our planning and experience of the institute. We explore issues of cultural divergence and convergence that arose within the teaching of this course, focusing on human rights issues regarding family diversity and sexual orientation. To conclude, we provide pedagogical recommendations for educators involved in cross-cultural Freirean adult education.

The Master of Education Program

Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU), in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, has delivered the Master of Education (Adult Education) degree (now known as Studies in Lifelong Learning) in Jamaica through cohorts since 1998 (see Plumb 2003 and Gouthro 2004 for other discussions about this programme). MSVU works with the Jamaican Council on Adult Education (JACAE) in Kingston, Jamaica, where the majority of the coursework is conducted. Typically, courses are delivered by professors who visit Jamaica twice a term. Course materials are forwarded at the beginning of the term for distribution by the site coordinator, with an effort made to select specific material references directly applicable to Jamaican and West Indian contexts. Professors then travel to Jamaica and teach at Jamaican Movement for the Advancement of Literacy (JAMAL) in Kingston for two full days, giving assignments and readings to be completed for the next visit at the end of the term, when another two days of classes are conducted. This format results in the same amount of contact time with students as courses that take place physically at MSVU.

Residential institutes (10-day, full credit courses) also typically occur every year, alternating in location from Jamaica to Canada, with student participation from both countries.

For the 2004 institute, a number of Jamaican students expressed the desire to learn more about family life education. Therefore, we chose this as our focus for the institute. The next section describes the sociohistorical context of Jamaican families, which may have contributed to students' desires for a family-themed course in adult education.

The Jamaican Family Context

Historically, Jamaica has had many variations in family forms (Barrow 1996; Miner 2003) and this variation continues in present times. For example, in addition to two-parent families, generations of many families have been and continue to be matrifocal (woman-headed households) in nature, with high rates of single parenting by mothers. Various common-law relationships also have existed, such as “extra-residential” or “visiting unions” in which couples do not live in the same household but rather one partner visits the other on a regular basis (Barrow 1996). Married individuals, too, may not live in the same household as their partner or children, but be connected in many ways as families. Despite this variation, however, Jamaican family life is patriarchal in nature. Although Jamaican women are increasingly in the paid labour force, their economic and personal lives are often subordinated to men and to cultural and racial issues (Gouthro 2004).

Early in the study of Jamaican families, British and American scholars criticised the variation found in Jamaican families (Barrow 1996). Influenced by structural functionalism, which assumed one family structure—a two-parent, married (heterosexual) family—necessary for the success of families and for society (Kingsbury and Scanzoni 1993), diverse family formations were seen as troublesome and were pinpointed as the root of society's problems. Within such a conceptual backdrop, any family structure other than the married heterosexual couple with children—or the “patriarchal nuclear family” (Miner 2003: 27)—was assumed to be

deviant in some way. For example, single parents and their children were not really “families”, and single parents were viewed as ineffective parents. The influence of such colonialist and Western views continues to be seen today.

One problem with this view of families is that blame is placed on “deviant” individuals and families for societal problems, with little focus toward larger, macro issues influencing family dynamics, development, and structure. Common-law relationships and matrifocal families, more common in working-class than middle- or upper-class Jamaican families, may actually be “culturally appropriate solutions” (Barrow 1996: 65) to societal problems of poverty and uncertainty, influenced by globalization, world politics, and other macro-level forces. Similarly, matrifocal families may be a response to historical influences of slavery, which viewed black men solely as “breeders” of future slaves rather than active family members (Barrow 1996).

On another note, gay- and lesbian-headed families are neither assumed to exist nor are they recognized. Homosexuality is illegal in Jamaica, and many people openly discriminate against gay men and lesbian women, whether in couples, families, or alone. In fact, “sexuality-based oppression in Jamaica is institutionalized throughout the legal system, health and social welfare institutions, popular media and culture” (White and Carr 2005: 3). For example, although reggae music may be viewed as having an emancipatory element (as a result of Bob Marley’s legacy), some modern reggae songs also include anti-gay messages promoting violence against non-heterosexual individuals (White and Carr 2005). Moreover, a strong fundamentalist Christian culture supports human rights violations against homosexual people (Hron 2003; White and Carr 2005). Gay and lesbian advocacy groups do exist (i.e., J-FLAG), but cannot openly advertise their services (Hill 2001).

We were aware of the potential for these beliefs to continue to be internalized by many Jamaicans in today's culture. Thus, we saw a benefit in providing opportunities for students to reflect on how their perspectives about family life had emerged, and we knew that a traditional educational approach (i.e., lectures) would not achieve such a goal. As a result, we felt that a Freirean approach to family life education would be particularly relevant for the spring institute.

A Freirean Approach to Family Life Education

Family life education (FLE) is an interdisciplinary field of practice designed to develop the strengths of individuals and families as they interact within multi-faceted environments (Arcus, Schvaneveldt and Moss 1993). The focus on the strengths and capacities of families is a distinguishing feature of the field. Families are neither viewed as deficient or in need of being "fixed", nor are instant solutions to problems provided. Rather, family life educators (FLEs) work collaboratively with group participants as they acquire the information, skills, or resources that will enrich and improve the quality of their individual and family lives in the long-term (Hughes 1994). The settings for FLE practice are varied. Media, grass-roots community development agencies, family resource centers, schools, and workplaces serve as venues for this work. Programmes are inclusive, respectful of diversity, and encourage mutual assistance and peer support. FLEs recognize that family members are shaped by their current situations, as well as other factors such as social role expectations, cultural norms, and personal and family histories. This acknowledgement of the interdependence between the micro-level, interactional character of family life and the broad, macro-level social context is based on an ecological perspective (Bogensneider 1996) guiding many FLE programs. Additionally, self-determination is a key organizing principle for practice. Program participants are not directed by an expert or a *sage on the stage* dispensing knowledge and information in an atmosphere of

authority-dependence (Shor 1993), but by a *guide on the side* who encourages participants to be active and involved facilitators of their own lives.

The overlapping emphases on interdependence between the micro- and macro-level contexts for family life, self-determination, and collaboration between educator and learner prominent within FLE practice and philosophy are consistent with aspects of Freirean pedagogy. In particular, critical thinking or “conscientization” (Freire 1985), a central theme inherent in Freire’s approach to education, is analogous with the ecological perspective fundamental to FLE. Conscientisation is a process through which the root causes of one’s social location are revealed. Indeed, in Jamaican culture, Bob Marley often sang about the need to be aware of such systemic forces (e.g., see quote at the start of our paper). Such conscientisation involves the analysis of the economic, political, cultural, social, and historical values that become crystallized over time, embedded in everyday life and which may reinforce oppression. This is not dissimilar from the acknowledgement of the social roles, cultural norms, and historical antecedents discussed within FLE circles as powerful forces that shape and inform family life, or from various adult educators’ calls for more attention to be given to social justice issues, human rights, globalization, and environmental concerns (e.g., Gouthro 2000).

Freire conceptualized conscientisation as a process facilitating active participation by learners in transforming the underlying social structures that often invisibly affect their lives, particularly when those structures entrench systemic oppression. Through praxis, or the “interaction between reflection and action” (Wallerstein 1987: 34), Freire believed that learners could take responsibility for changing the hegemonic systems that differentially affect access to power and privilege (Freire 1985, Freire and Faundez 1989). This focus on the political power of education distinguishes Freirean pedagogy from prevailing practice in FLE. As Morgaine (1992)

notes, with rare exception, critical or transformative FLE programmes are not commonly found. Similarly, researchers have also noted that adult education is problematic in its focus on an instrumental perspective (Gouthro 2000; Ramsay 2001), or what Freire (1982) would refer to as the “banking” method of education, in which teachers “deposit” knowledge into the “empty” minds of students.

It is well known that family relationships embody social ideologies that may constrain fulfillment. Moreover, as stated earlier, our preparatory reading and reflection revealed that certain social constructions of Jamaican family life were seen to have the potential to threaten social cohesion and individual and familial well-being, and we learned about the false consciousness that sustains the structural and oppressive basis of this society. This background reading further supported the planning and implementation of a Freirean-themed Jamaican institute.

The 2004 Jamaican Spring Institute¹

The 2004 Jamaican spring institute was organized by the first author, Nancy Taber, from the adult education programme, and team taught with two professors, Áine Humble and Deborah Norris, from the Family Studies and Gerontology (FSGN) department at the same university. Forty-six students attended the course - 41 Jamaicans and 5 Canadians. Students were predominantly female, with only 2 male students represented in the group. Our total group numbered 53 people, including faculty and 4 family members who accompanied students. Most students stayed in residence at the rural Jamaican college at which the course was taught.

As educators, there is a contradiction in using a liberatory pedagogy such as Freire’s (1982, 1985; Freire and Faundez 1989) for planning and delivering a university course that is bounded by specific academic and bureaucratic requirements. We recognized that adult educators “enter this [planning] process marked by their location within larger systems of power

and privilege that have shaped their experiences. . . . and their actions are both enabled and constrained by their place in these systems” (Cervero and Wilson 2001: 11). Our power as planners derived from the fact that we were university professors, were responsible for developing the course, and would be grading students’ work and assessing their learning. Furthermore, reflecting on our “positionality”, we identified ourselves as white middle-class women from a Western country teaching in a developing country (Gouthro 2004). We did what we could to decrease our perceived power by giving students control over certain aspects of the course, such as directly involving Jamaican practicum students in course planning, being conscious of the need to respect both Canadian and Jamaican cultures while working from a social justice framework, using Freirean pedagogy for course delivery, and designing assessments that actively engaged students in their own learning.

Our incorporation of Freire’s work into family life education was based on his comment that “the only way anyone has of applying in their situation any of the propositions I have made is precisely by redoing what I have done, that is, by not following me. In order to follow me it is essential not to follow me!” (Freire and Faundez 1989: 30). Thus, we drew not only on Freire’s work (1982, 1985, 1998; Freire and Faundez 1989), but also on others who have used Freire in various contexts, such as Fiore and Elsasser’s (1987) use of liberatory methods in a Bahamian literacy class where the women students challenged their roles in marriage, Lewis’s (1995) use of praxis in family studies, Shor’s (1993) discussion of Freire’s critical pedagogy, and Wallerstein’s (1987) use of Freire’s problem-posing education in English as a Second Language classes. These works provided a rich foundation for our course content, and we added to it with theory that was complementary to the above mentioned authors, although they were not explicitly related to Freirean education.

The planning and administration of the institute from a distance was a concern for us. Despite having the assistance of a JACAE site coordinator, there were many logistical considerations associated with organizing an intensive 10-day institute. However, we were greatly assisted by two of our Jamaican students. One of the requirements of the adult education degree is a *Practicum in Adult Education*, in which students can apply what they have learned by volunteering in the community or with an organization involved in adult education. Two students approached us and suggested that they assist in the planning of the institute for their practicum. Their dedicated efforts helped ensure that the institute ran smoothly, students in residence felt welcomed, and field trips to Jamaican community organizations were relevant. Their work was of great benefit to the institute and to the first author. An added benefit, and relevant to the topic of Freirean education, was that the host students had significant opportunity to participate in shaping the course.

It was important to us that we did not work from a colonizing intention of imposing our views on family life education practice in Jamaica, although we did recognize that our emphasis on social justice would likely challenge some of their beliefs, as it does in Canada. In an effort to learn more about the Jamaican perspective on family life and educational practice, we reviewed relevant research and other materials in preparation for this course (as discussed previously). The first author also was teaching *Jamaican Historical Perspectives* to a Jamaican cohort at the same time as the institute was being planned. Regardless, we recognised that we were not experts on Jamaican life. It was partly due to this concern that we engaged the practicum students and chose a Freirean approach to the course. Moreover, although we chose the content (of which a significant portion was from Jamaican perspectives), we wanted to ensure that it and our methods respected the experience and background of the students, giving them the opportunity to

co-construct the course as it progressed. This made our emphasis on Freire ideal and our course title became *A Freirean Approach to Family Life Education*. We understood that in order to be consistent with Freirean principles, students would need to experience and personalise the theory themselves, instead of simply reading or hearing it through banking methods (Freire 1982). A portion of our course description illustrated this aim:

A Freirean approach will be taken to explore this concept that is critical, liberatory, problem-posing, learner-centred, reflective, and experiential. Concepts such as power relations, individual empowerment to affect societal change, sensitivity to diversity and plurality, conflict resolution, and interpersonal skills will be linked to family life education, providing a comprehensive examination of our own praxis and furthering understanding of how the family affects wider society. Students will be encouraged to develop their own practice in order to help individuals and families, in a rapidly changing world, (a) enhance the quality of their lives, (b) anticipate and prepare for familial change, (c) develop their potentials, and (d) positively impact society.

We thought deliberately about our teaching strategies, as past adult education initiatives in the Caribbean have been criticized for their method of delivery. For example, Ramsay (2001) said that adult learners are:

likely to be subjected to boring, long-winded lectures at the end of which, if they are lucky, they may be able to ask a few questions. They seldom have opportunities to be creative; to share information or discuss their ideas in small groups; to engage in interactive exercises; or to reflect on their own experiences as workers or potential workers (24-25).

In response to these criticisms, and also congruent with a Freirean approach to learning, we implemented an active, multifaceted course designed to allow students to become directly involved in their own learning. We divided the entire course into mini-workshops of 3 to 6 hours. We introduced each workshop with mini-lectures (in plenary with all students and professors or with smaller groups), and then gave students guiding discussion questions for small group work. Faculty and students collaborated on developing ground rules regarding respectful communication. We then had smaller groups of students rotate between professors, who each took a different approach to certain topics. This gave students a chance to interact with different faculty in different student groups, and allowed them to move physically between the various campus sites where we taught (e.g., multi-purpose chapel, open-air classroom). As well, one day of the course was dedicated to visiting community organizations that were involved in FLE.

Assignments were designed so students could personally interact with course material, moving from assigned theoretical readings to writing a theoretical paper, conducting and analyzing an interview with a family life educator to integrate theory with practice, and keeping a personal learning journal to use as a foundation for a final reflective paper. The last day of the course was set aside for student group presentations. These presentations invited students to choose a topic that they wished to explore in-depth and share with the class, and gave students a chance to creatively engage with the course material. Finally, we included a general participation mark as we wanted students to know that their participation was welcomed and appreciated, as well as vital to their learning.

Family Diversity: Learning through Cultural Divergence and Convergence

The learning that occurred in the institute went far beyond the syllabus. We learned about Freirean pedagogy and about family life education and we learned about ourselves as professors,

students, individuals, and societal members. Faculty and students personally connected with the course content, which was embedded with Jamaican and Canadian societal perspectives. We also enhanced our pedagogical understanding through both cultural divergence and convergence.

From our perspective, the main divergence that arose was related to notions of how families were perceived, valued, and accepted. We experienced a strong backlash with respect to issues of family diversity, most specifically with regard to gay- and lesbian-headed families. Although this was a FLE course, we had not included issues about gay men and lesbian women in the course outline as content. Our reasons for this were due to time considerations and because diverse views of family life already permeated the readings. Moreover, this course was intended to discuss *pedagogy*, not specific family forms. We also realised that much of this content directly contrasted Jamaican views previously described (i.e., Barrow 1996; Hron 2003; Miner 2003; White and Carr 2005). However, as FLEs, we had an ethical obligation to talk about all families. Thus, acceptance of and teaching about family diversity was key in all our content. As well, a Freirean educational perspective pays careful attention to marginalized groups and provides opportunities for individuals to question the ways in which ideologies have been perpetuated. We welcomed the opportunity to begin a dialogue about issues of family diversity, but our aim was only to ask students to start questioning their assumptions, as compared to asking them to radically alter their beliefs, as a Freirean perspective (1982) does not involve imposing one's views on others in a transmissive way.

Thus, we did not specifically introduce the topic of gay- and lesbian-headed families ourselves, thinking it might be better to allow this issue to emerge from the students themselves. Rather than impose our thoughts on the students, we allowed opportunities for students to share their views, in large and small group discussions, feeling that this would be a less instrumental

way of approaching the topic, and congruent with a non-banking Freirean method (1982, 1985, 1998). However, because Freire also contests marginalization, we also challenged students' views when necessary. In retrospect, we could have included material about sexual orientation in our syllabus and readings. In this way, we would have established from the start that gay- and lesbian-headed families were valid family forms. Our decision not to forefront sexual orientation issues (as we did with gender issues, for example) may have inadvertently signaled to the students that we did not view these particular family structures and theoretical perspectives as important enough to include.

We were surprised at the vehemence with which some students vocally opposed gay men, lesbian women, and their families. In particular, two Canadian students felt verbally attacked when they were challenged for their beliefs that gay men and lesbian women should be accepted as community members and as parents. One of us openly confronted students one morning when a Jamaican student said that homosexual individuals were pedophiles while other Jamaican students nodded in agreement. In another instance, a different instructor was questioned regarding her personal beliefs about homosexuality. We have since learned that we are not the only educators who have had difficulty contesting Jamaica's official (and commonly adopted) stance against homosexuality. In particular, sexual orientation emerged as a major site of struggle for adult educators at the 6th World Assembly of the International Council for Adult Education, held in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, in August 2001 (Hill 2001).

Change takes time to occur, but we did open up a forum to begin discussing this issue, and it is important to have divergent voices heard. In this case, the divergent voices supported gay- and lesbian-headed families. Voices against these families were loud, but interestingly, seemed to be in the minority. Once the discussion had begun, many other students (Canadian and

Jamaican) showed support for gay men, lesbian woman, and their families. This also occurred with respect to single-parent families, where one Jamaican student, a single-mother herself, stated that she had always felt that her family was deficient until this course gave her the opportunity to challenge her (and society's) preconceptions of how a family is defined. The students created a space where it was acceptable to defend the rights of "alternative families". Although we do not think that those who strongly disagreed with this view of social justice necessarily changed their views, we do think that it was extremely important that they engaged in the conversation and that they heard other people's divergent voices. As Salmon Rushdie, author of *The Satanic Verses*, once said, "[a thought] can be disagreed with vehemently, vigorously, even violently, but it cannot be unthought" (Duff-Brown 2005: paragraph 31).

Educators need to move beyond nonparticipatory approaches (Ramsay 2001), yet engaging in dialogue is often fraught with uncertainty. Discussions based on culture and diversity "can be deeply contentious, and they are not easily resolved. Moreover, hatred, divisiveness, fear, and anger can rise to the surface when educators and learners engage in. . . debates around freedom, respect, and accommodation" (Grace, Gouthro and Mojab 2003: 59). Even though such discussions are often difficult, they are vital to learning about issues of social justice and human rights and to creating a foundation from which to contest marginalisation.

The cultural divergence also resulted in cultural convergence, although it was not a linear process. As students and faculty participating in a cross-cultural experience, we shared our ideas and concerns in and out of the class, with discussions continuing past class time, during meal hours, and we also shared our respective food and traditions at a Cultural Night. Students also made strong connections with one another, with relationships continuing over the distance even a year later. We were engaged in learning that there are many ways to see the world at a visceral

level, instead of simply a superficial one. Our mutual engagement began with our initial planning of the institute, when we involved practicum students in our planning, chose Freirean content and methods, included Jamaican and Canadian perspectives, invited students to share their own expertise and experiences to co-construct meaning, included social events, and created assignments that were more focused on student learning itself than on our evaluation of it.

Pedagogical Recommendations

It was challenging to develop an institute in Canada that we would deliver in Jamaica, and using a Freirean approach was also not without its difficulties. We faced a number of issues, but we believe that our most significant learning emerged around our pedagogy. In this section, we offer several recommendations for other adult educators' consideration.

1. Consider the possibility of conducting an intensive, multi-day, cross-cultural institute where students and faculty live and learn in residence together. Although we recognise that it can be difficult for students to be separated from their families and everyday responsibilities, it can also provide the opportunity for an intense learning experience that goes far beyond classroom time. Learning and life were connected instead of separated, and provided the opportunity for students to forge deeper connections with each other than what is typically possible in formal education. Individuals need to feel connected to each other to explore embedded societal issues more deeply and to experience issues as a visceral level, and an intensive institute facilitated this process. As well, being separated from other everyday responsibilities may be particularly helpful for female students, who may have more personal and familial demands than male students (Gouthro 2004), although leaving families behind for 10 days is not without difficulties either.

2. Involve students in course development at the outset. This can result in students developing a keen sense of ownership of the course. Moreover, it can help to ensure that course content and activities are relevant to the students' lives, key to a Freirean approach.
3. Collaborate with other educators. Team teaching can help students learn from different points of view, teaching styles, and content expertise. Furthermore, professors have the opportunity to learn from each others' strengths, and can use each other as sounding boards at the end of each day.
4. Strive to establish ground rules for respectful communication with participants at the beginning of the course. Ensuring these are followed may become more difficult when students discuss highly charged issues. Although we encouraged students to discuss matters amongst themselves and work through any difficult issues or disagreements, it was also necessary to occasionally step in to correct erroneous, harmful comments. Educators may want to consider how they will deal with such issues if they arise. For example, as discussions between students grew heated, we realized that we should have stepped in to remind students of the original rules set at the beginning of the course.
5. Perhaps most importantly, international educators must be prepared to take a stand to support social justice, at home and when in a different country. We must respect cultures **and** challenge cultural assumptions that support oppression of certain groups. As Freire (1985) states, "there are no neutral educators" (180). If we do not work actively against oppression, then we are supporting it. Given that Jamaica is the most homophobic Caribbean country (Williams 2000, cited in White and Carr 2005), educators going to Jamaica should have a clear understanding of how this may play out in their classrooms and learning environments. Hill (2001) provides an important overview of this issue. Various internet

sources may be helpful such as *the National Consortium of Directors of LGBT Resources in Higher Education* (<http://www.lgbtcampus.org/index.html>) and *Rainbow SIG* (special interest group) (<http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay/index.html>), a section of *NAFSA: Association of International Educators*.

Conclusion

The Freirean approach we took in developing and delivering the institute was a unique experience for many students, but was well received by them. Not only did it energise students to try these methods in their own work as educators, but it also invited them to challenge their assumptions and work for acceptance in their communities. They mentioned that the learning experience was inspiring, and that they were eager to use a Freirean approach in their own work.

The design of the residential institute (in content, pedagogy, and location, for instance) itself supported our learning. We believe that to truly learn together, we must begin by spending extended time in discussion, sitting in circles under trees, and sharing food, culture, and tradition. This is neither a universal remedy nor a simplification, but perhaps this is how we learned the most.

As educators, our own insight was sharpened by the opportunities to dialogue with our students as co-learners, and as educators intent on imparting an emancipatory consciousness within our classrooms, we were inspired by their example. Our experience with the cultural divergence was one of the most central lessons we brought away from the institute. Although we went to Jamaica expecting gay and lesbian issues to be a sensitive topic, we were unprepared for how contentious it became. We realized that we should have done more homework on this issue in order to be better prepared to deal with human rights issues in Jamaica. As Gouthro (2004)

stated, distance educators must constantly evaluate the appropriateness of their teaching methods.

Although there can be concern about “marketing” Western programs to other countries, international educational programs can provide vital opportunities to broaden students’ awarenesses (Gouthro 2004). Hron (2003) notes that persuasion regarding human rights issues in Jamaica must include external sources (other countries), and suggests that public health and business venues can be part of this external pressure. Adult education is not listed as a possibility, yet our field is beginning to realize it can play a very important role with regard to this issue. As Hill (2001) notes, the international adult education community has a vital responsibility to respond to human rights transgressions regarding sexual orientation and gender identities.

Note:

¹ We include a discussion of our planning and delivery of the institute because, as Freire (1998) stated, teachers inhabit “the dialectical tensions between theory and practice” (7). The theory we drew on interacted with our practice, and further informed our own understandings of Freirean pedagogy, family life education, adult education, and social justice issues.

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