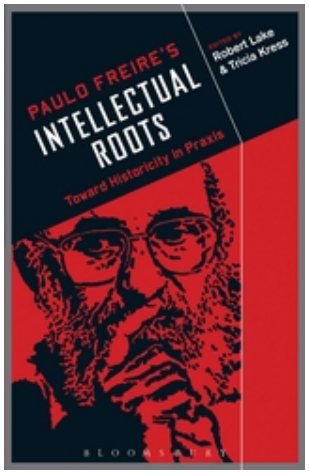

Paulo Freire's Intellectual Roots: Toward Historicity in Praxis

Lake, Robert; and Kress, Tricia, eds.
Bloomsbury Publishing Inc. , 2013

Book Review

Tags: Freire | historicity in praxis | pedagogy of the oppressed

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Best known for his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York, N.Y.: Herder, 1970), Paulo Freire (1921-1997) criticized a "banking model" of education − the deposit of knowledge possessed by the teacher into the vacant minds of students. Education should enable students to discover the knowledge they need to become free participants of their society, Freire argued, but the banking model reinforced subordination and acquiescence. Beginning in the 1950s in his native Brazil, before exile made him internationally important, Freire spent his career developing a vision of teaching as a dialogical encounter between teacher(s) and student(s): both have knowledge, and teachers cannot know what and how to teach their students for freedom unless they submit to be taught by the students, too. Freire reflected on this experience and vision at length in the first chapter of *Pedagogy of Hope* (New York, N.Y.: Continuum, 1993), and a nice feature of the present volume is the inclusion of that chapter as an epilogue.

This volume corrects a distorted perception of Freire's thought. Too often, Freire's dialogic approach is taken in an anti-intellectualistic way to mean that the teacher has no particularly privileged knowledge to impart; consequently, the deep meaning of Freire's pedagogy as a critical praxis by which students can appropriate the knowledge of privilege to liberate themselves is lost. This point is central to the introduction by Stanley Aronowitz, "Paulo Freire's Pedagogy: Not Mainly a Teaching Method." In addition, the prologue by Henry Giroux and the afterword by Peter McLaren provide orientation to the spirit and urgency of Freire's work. McLaren puts well the necessity of a volume such as this by stating, "Without a careful reading of Freire's intellectual roots, one can only witness the collision [between dreams of a better future and the supposed reality of the present situation] without understanding the

systems of intelligibility that make such a collision inevitable and without understanding the possibilities of sublating such a collision in order to bring about alternative futures linked to the sustainability of the planet and humanity as a whole" (235-36).

Thirteen writers contribute ten essays on thinkers, movements, and concepts crucial to Freire's philosophy. They cover Hegel, Marx, Gramsci, Habermas, Buber, Fromm, Latin American liberation theology, praxis, *conscientizaçao* ("conscientization"), and oppression. With one serious exception, the authors manage to balance two important purposes: to introduce their subject in the subject's own right for readers familiar with Freire but not with intellectual history, and to focus on illuminating in Freire's work their subject's influence. Some authors even carry out a valuable third task of criticizing and reconstructing Freire's ideas so as to extend his thought. Especially noteworthy in this regard are Raymond Morrow in the Habermas chapter, and Sandy Grande, who, in the chapter on oppression, turns Freire's idea to confront the dispossession of indigenous peoples.

Although this is a useful volume, the significance of "historicity in praxis" could have been explicated more forthrightly to knit the entire collection together. Some unevenness means there is still room to improve on our appreciation of Freire's thoughtworld. Still, this collection is an important contribution to scholarship and teaching practice.

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