

BOOK REVIEWS

Paulo Freire's Politics and Pedagogy: reflections from Aotearoa-New Zealand

Edited by Peter Roberts

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When Paulo Freire died in 2 May 1979 scholars world wide paid tribute to him and his work. The papers in this edited collection emanate from Freire's visit to Auckland in 1974. They are either the products of a seminar at the University of Auckland, or reflections upon that seminar. Although the seminar in his honour was held at the University of Auckland it was the Church and Society Commission of the National Council of Churches (assisted by the State Department of Education) that brought Freire to Aotearoa/New Zealand. The collection is edited by Peter Roberts, a distinguished Freirean scholar from the University of Auckland, whose major book on Freire (Roberts (2000) has just been published. Roberts' edited collection which is published by Dunmore Press, *Paulo Freire, Politics and Pedagogy: reflections from Aotearoa-New Zealand*, is quite brief and very readable. As a commentary on, and exposition of Freire for New Zealand educationalists, it is highly recommended reading.

The contributors to Robert's volume, in addition to himself are: George Armstrong; Graeme Hinangaroa Smith, Kuni Jenkins, Roger Dale, Michael Peters and Brian Findsen of the University of Auckland; Betsan Martin and Megan Boler, formerly of the University of Auckland; and Stephen Stoer of the University of Porto, Portugal. Thus there are contributions by academics from feminist studies, Maori studies, theological studies, continuing education, sociologists and philosophers of education. This collection then offers reflections on Paulo Freire, not merely from New Zealand, but from a number of prominent and distinguished academics.

In his introduction Roberts lays the groundwork for the remainder of the collection noting that Freire's ideas have not only been interpreted and applied by educationalists but also by psychologists, counsellors, social workers, health professionals, theologians, development theorists, political activists, literacy specialists and scholars in womens' studies. His philosophy was inspired not only by marxism but also from the traditions of liberalism, existentialism, phenomenology, radical catholicism, and in his later work an interest in postmodernism. Yet his practical work in education was his main occupation. Roberts then provides a brief intellectual and personal history of his life and works.

George Armstrong notes that Freire was invited to New Zealand in 1974 as a member of the staff of the World Council of Churches based in Geneva. In part this was prompted, he says, by the churches' international concerns post World War II with issues of 'church and society'. 180 representatives from 40 organisations attended the conference to the disappointment of some who had expected the arrival of a Messiah to save them (p.27). Both Paulo and the participants had different expectations of the seminar, which seems not to have been unusual (p.29). Instead Paulo left an

enigmatic mark coming "as a cloud before many storms". For Freire, correctly I believe, we had our own problems which could not be solved in a weekend.

Freire's work has been influential upon Maori. Graham Hingangaroa Smith, in chapter 2, notes that Freire's appeal for indigenous peoples are in social transformation and liberation, and his close linking of theory and practice in his well known notion of praxis. Smith does not see the importance of Freire as lying in any linear progressive transformation from oppression to liberation through conscientisation to transformative practice, but rather as a circular and dynamic model where entry into 'this' process can be at any point. In other words the 'discovery' of Freire by Maori provided a theorisation of resistance practices in which they already involved, eg, Kura Kaupapa Maori.

In chapter three Kuni Jenkins and Betsan Martin take up the theological roots of Freire's work, "which academics mostly overlook when using his theoretical analyses" (p.43), against wider debates over the status of indigenous people in Aotearoa/New Zealand. They approached this from their wide experience in church politics and familiarity with liberation theology (p.43f.). They claim that whereas Freire aligns the church "with structures of oppression" (p.44) yet Freire - a devout Christian - was inspirational to Maori. They discuss this at two levels. First they discuss the views and reactions of those Maori who were present at the seminar and the various tidal waves, post Freire's visit, that were influenced to varying degrees by his views and presence. Their chapter provides an important historical document on his visit and actual influences.

Jenkins and Martin discussed the influence of Freire upon Maori women but Megan Boler devotes her chapter more explicitly to Freire's influence upon radical and feminist pedagogies. She is refreshingly critical of Freire on three 'absences' (p.61): first there is a lack of theoretical analysis of gender; second, "the heroisation of Freire masks the dominant masculine paradigm of change"; and that both have 'caused' the erasure of feminist pedagogies and consciousness raising. Harsh words indeed, but she argues this historically in a very interesting chapter.

In chapter 5 Brian Findsen turns to adult education. According to Findsen Freire's influence on adult education "has been especially cogent and long lasting" (p.71). Freire's contribution to the field is said to belong to the 'independent tradition', beyond "the comfortable liberal/ progressive domain" (p.72). The success of his ideas is attributed by Findsen to the greater potential for autonomy and human agency for adults in their decision making (p.72). Findsen documents his own personal 'journey' with Freire, outlines the significance of Freire for adult education and looks in detail at a particular application of Freirean principles to adult education - the Adult Learning Project at Edinburgh (pp.77-80). Findsen concludes that whilst he has tried to thoroughly integrate Freire's ideas into his working 'philosophy' he warns against any direct transferral of his ideas.

Next Stephan Stoer and Roger Dale look at "the explicit use of Freirean ideas in a revolutionary context in a semi-peripheral country: in Portuguese education between 1974 and 1976...(when) ...Freirean pedagogies were the norm rather than 'the alternative' " (p.84). They claim that "the word was being written, as it were, not merely interpreted, let alone applied or adapted" (ibid). In this interesting chapter they

provide: first, a brief history of the revolution in Portugal between 1974 and 1976; second, a discussion of two different alternative but Freirean approaches to radical education reform, before; finally, evaluating these experiences against the work of Freire. They conclude that "what Freire's work requires above all in practice is a process of self-critique: the constant reflexive *auto-conscientizacao* of the pedagogue".

Peter Roberts, in chapter 7, considers the work of Freire in relation to neoliberalism and the University. He considers Freire's works and ideas on the nature and purpose of the University with those which market neoliberals were and are promoting about the University. Clearly these are fundamentally antagonistic. He comments particularly upon the philosophical differences between Freire and New Zealand's neoliberal 'reformers'. Roberts provides a brief history of the application of the neoliberal reforms to the tertiary sector (pp 98-100) before turning to the Freirean alternative. Then he discusses: their ontological differences on the notion of the individual; their different concepts of 'freedom' particularly as this applies to the market; the technocratic moves to efficiency which override the complexities of education and learning; the commodification of education: and of course, pedagogy. Whilst Freire never published a comprehensive critique of neoliberalism (compare Michel Foucault and his planned work with Pierre Bourdieu), Roberts notes that Freire provides general guidelines for such a programme of critique. Roberts is, of course, well placed to pursue this programme fully.

Finally, in chapter 8, Michael Peters considers Freire in relation to the contested topic of postmodernism. His approach is two pronged; first he develops a postmodern critique of Freire's essentially *modernist* position; and, second, he considers the extent to which his works involve postmodernist tendencies. Peters develops an important theoretical critique of Freire by situating his work, at least *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in the Hegelian tradition. Thereby Peters opens Freire to the critique (based on Lyotard) that, like Habermas, his work seeks a socio-cultural unity. This has been attacked by the French poststructuralists, the heirs of Nietzsche (pp.114-6). However Peters does find postmodern tendencies in Freire's works (p.117): his emphases on textuality and subjectivity and, to some extent, his understanding of oppression and power. He notes also that Freire wished to defend progressive postmodernity but Peters concludes that Freire does not abandon classes and class inequalities thereby, presumably, retaining his earlier marxist tendencies. In this vein a former student of Freire, Paulo Ghiradelli, has referred to Freire as not merely marxist but as Stalinist (private conversation, April, 2000).

This collection of essays, based upon the earlier seminar and reflections upon it, is generally positive and sometimes laudatory, towards Freire. It probably could not have been otherwise. Exceptions would be the chapters by Megan Boler and Michael Peters which develop critiques of Freire from the bases of gender and postmodernism respectively. A further exception might have been in the area of adult education where, according to some writers Freire, in the postmodern condition, is perhaps passe (see, eg, Usher, et al., 1997). This being said this is an important book for New Zealand educators for it outlines an approach to education which critiques positivism and the recent technocratic efficiency approach to education, at all levels, in New Zealand.

References

- Roberts, Peter (2000) *Education, Literacy, and Humanization: Exploring the Work of Paulo Freire*. Westport, Conn.: Bergin & Garvey.
- Usher, Robin, Ian Bryant and Rennie Jackson, (1997) *Adult Education and the Postmodern Challenge: learning beyond the limits*, London and New York: Routledge.

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