



*Rethinking Freire: Globalization and the Environmental Crisis*. Bowers, C.A. and Frederique Apffel-Marglin, eds. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005. 204pp.

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*Rethinking Freire: Globalization and the Environmental Crisis* is comprised of eight chapters contributed by a variety of authors. The contributors are scholars and activists who employed Freire's pedagogy in various contexts and, in some cases, had worked with Freire himself. Over time, the contributors began questioning the appropriateness of Freire's pedagogy and began re-examining it and the assumptions underlying it. They do not seek to "fix" Freire's approach in a technical sense, but rather to question the philosophical underpinnings of the approach. The ideas discussed in this volume are numerous and complex. Therefore, I give only a general overview here; this is not an exhaustive discussion of the ideas in *Rethinking Freire*.

The authors collectively propose that there are several problems with Freire's pedagogical system. They suggest that the flaws rest in the foundations of the theory, pointing out that Freire was heavily influenced by Western, classical liberal thought rooted in the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution. This type of thinking, according to the authors, led to several philosophical biases in Freire's work: (1) The self is unitary and is the primary social agent; (2) change is linear and good, thus suggesting that "human progress can be understood without consideration of its impact on the environment" (p. 142); (3) progress is conceptualized as economic development and the growth of wealth; and, (4) hierarchies continue to be perpetuated and reinstated in Freire's work, despite the desire to ease oppression.

These ways of thinking about the world produced a variety of unintended outcomes when the contributors utilized Freire's approach with various indigenous populations. The authors assert that the notion of the self as a singular, unitary being is not compatible with some cultural groups' understandings of the world. Many of the cultural groups with whom the contributors worked value community and see the self as a plural being. Thus, a basic mismatch in worldview rendered the pedagogy ineffective. Freire understood the fundamental essence of humanity as engaging in "a continual world-changing process" (p. 137); the authors view this as a flawed notion and one way in which Freire's work devalues the knowledge and worldview of indigenous peoples.

The authors also question the silence in Freire's work about the environment. They assert that Freire had an anthropocentric view of the universe that conceived of humans in domination over nature or as separate from nature, rather than people and nature being interconnected and in communion. This way of thinking about humans and the environment exacerbates the environmental crisis and undervalues local, place-based knowledge. The environmental crisis is also perpetuated by viewing progress as the growth of wealth and monetized societies. Contributor Siddhartha states, for example, that "Freire was not able to see



that the dominant notion of progress and development contained within it the seeds of an unsustainable world. If, as a result of ‘liberation,’ the Indian poor eventually attained the standard of living of a middle-class American, the world would be that much nearer ecological collapse” (p. 87). Western thought about economic development (in which Freire is complicit) drives the environmental crisis and devalues ways of living that leave a smaller “environmental footprint” on the earth.

The fundamental and overarching flaw that the contributors see in Freire’s approach is that it replicates social hierarchies of different kinds. For example, one contributor critiques Freire’s limited discussion of tradition and local knowledge, viewing Freire as privileging “progress” over “tradition.” Other authors view Freire as privileging formal education over local knowledge. This is problematic as, in the authors’ view, education severs people from productive life in the community, turns people from agents into consumers and creates two classes of people—the privileged “knowledge capitalists” and the “destitute” or “uncredentialed” (p. 21). Additionally, the contributors take issue with Freire’s claim that literacy and critical reflection are the *only* ways to liberation and that intervention by an educator is needed. They argue that liberation efforts will only be successful if conceived of and implemented by the local community, not implemented by “rescuers” from outside the community.

These ideas, and many others, are discussed with depth and complexity in *Rethinking Freire*. One compelling aspect of the book is that the contributors are people who have used Freire’s pedagogy in a variety of contexts, which in this reader’s opinion, lent credibility to their critiques. Many of the authors adeptly combine discussions of personal experiences with their analyses.

While the ideas were compelling, it was a bit unclear whether the critique of Freire is a universal critique, suggesting that Freirean pedagogy is inappropriate for all oppressed groups (including those who are embedded in Western culture and ways of thinking) or if it is inappropriate only to certain cultural groups that are non-hierarchical, communal, and otherwise distinct. Additionally, the book does not present a coherent alternative for teachers and teacher educators. While editor C.A. Bowers presents several preliminary ideas and questions in the afterword, teachers may find themselves wondering just what it is they are meant to do, particularly if they are part of an educational system based on Western cultural paradigms.

Freire enthusiasts may feel antagonized when they begin reading this volume, as they, the followers of Freire’s “messianic” texts, are contrasted with “more thoughtful observers.” However, I encourage them to keep reading. Ultimately, *Rethinking Freire* enables one to think about Freire’s texts in a new way, question one’s own pedagogy, and analyze one’s own consumer nature and place in the world.



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