

Book Review

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Freirean Echoes is an edited collection of speeches given at a critical pedagogy conference in 2015 hosted by the Paulo Freire Democratic Project at Chapman University, Orange, California, USA. The book is structured to evoke new conversations on critical issues in education, with each section centered on an original speech by an established scholar with two additional authors bringing renewed discussions, hence “echoes”. The book is dialectical text designed to be accessible for scholars, educators, community workers, and practitioners to search out contradictions and question existing forms of knowledge. As Freire (2000) reminds us “[a]uthentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about *reality*, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication (p. 77). The themes across this collection of speeches serve not only as a tribute to Freire’s life work, but delve into less familiar Freirean concepts, like untested-feasibility. At the end of every section, there are questions and activities to encourage readers to reflect on the relationship between oppressive systems and ways to build a better society. At the time I worked on this book review, I was teaching a graduate critical perspectives course and I found myself fervently underlining words, phrases, and ideas in the editors’ introduction to share with my students. It was a stark reminder that critical pedagogy begins with asking questions and having dialogue about how knowledge gets constructed the way it does, and why some lives are more legitimized than others.

Section One, Maria Araújo “Nita” Freire reflects on her late husband’s concept of untested-feasibility, a Freirean concept that encourages others to act, foster epistemological curiosity, and pursue sites of possible transformation. She frames the concept of untested-feasibility as an invitation to see the world in a more human way, a space that is unfinished, filled with “multiple wishes, desires, needs, wants, reason, creation, and, above all, a spirit of justice” (p. 7). Nita Freire eloquently speaks of Paulo having untested-feasibility over the course of his life: “an embodied being; a thinking being; a person who acts

in the world with love” (p. 9). Later, Anaida Colón-Muñoz and Edgar Orejel expand on the concept of untested-feasibility and examine our collective struggles as a society faced with gender and racial inequities, the inhumane treatment of refugees and the degradation of our planet. Anaida Colón-Muñoz explicitly reflects on the impact COVID-19 has had on our daily lives, including the impact on industry. However, she does not interrogate how the concept of untested-feasibility falls flat in light of the pandemic. We need to confront how the pandemic has stifled our collective community and ask ourselves what it will take to get back to living in more human world? We have spent cumulative days working in isolation, responding to digital messages, and coordinating online meetings with minimal opportunities to collaborate. The pandemic has exposed what happens when the hubs of daily personal interaction are missing and there are no informal relationships anymore. It would have been useful to explore this aspect given the section focuses on building a more humane and utopian world.

Section Two focuses on Tom Wilson’s contributions to the field of critical pedagogy. Wilson, who passed away on December 28, 2018, was a close friend of Paulo Freire and like Freire, had a strong desire to see the best in humanity. It commences with Wilson’s outline of the 2RA Method that challenges individuals to ask each other and ourselves why we think the way we do. The 2RA Method requires us to problematize knowledge and contest all forms of domination, oppression, discrimination, inequalities, and social injustices. Wilson explains the 2RA Method begins with participants engaging in three exercises wherein they Read, Reflect, and take Action on concepts explored within a body of text (i.e., words, messages, objects, feelings). The first step involves Reading (RD) the text closely for critical ideas followed by a Reflection (RF) of key ideas. The final step follows a Freirean problem-posing position where individuals are encouraged to take Action (AC) and create meaningful change. To ask: What is the problem? Why are things the way they are? What can be done to change things? How do we build a more socially just and better society? Wilson’s chapter is a highly practical guide for educators, practitioners, community workers, and students. Educators will appreciate Tom Wilson’s accounts of his own students’ experiences when grappling with the 2RA Method. For example, Tom Wilson shares a story where he invited his students to examine their traditional classroom structure (i.e., teacher directed, standard assessments) and co-construct the course syllabus. The students struggled with this activity and requested for Tom to resume his authority to which he responded, “Why do you need me to tell you what to do? The students realized through the process of the 2RA Method that they could revolutionize the classroom. I found the 2RA Method a productive critical pedagogical framework to engage in critical ideas with my students. I could additionally see it being used as an assessment tool to examine core themes within courses and how it might inform future professional practice.

Section Three takes quite a turn in relation to the accessibility of the text. While Peter McLaren’s speech on the spiritual reawakening of liberatory education is thought provoking his applications of Marxist humanism, revolutionary critical pedagogy, and Christian socialism are hard to grapple with at first glance. McLaren (2015) describes liberatory education as centered around the principles for social change and transformation based on raising critical consciousness and engagement with oppressive

forces-a vehicle for change. McLaren's liberatory ideas in the seventh chapter on breaking free from the capitalist marketplace that drives education led to some rich discussions with my graduate students on the worsening economic conditions around the world (e.g., housing crisis, food insecurity). They began to problematize the conditions of their own realities struggling to find affordable housing while trying to raise their children and pursue graduate school. Questions about what perpetuates economic injustices emerged. Peter Jandrić's subsequent chapter on the consequences of living in a posthuman world heightened our conversations in relation to work productivity during the pandemic. The concept of posthumanism has evolved exponentially since the pandemic where we have transgressed beyond the universal subject and examined more closely the connections people make to more than human (e.g., technology, spaces, objects, and nature) (Hickey-Moody & Page, 2016). Peter Jandrić's proposal to redevelop critical pedagogy to align with a human-technological world is timely and needed. It brings forward questions, such as: What happens to notions of belonging and community when we work from home? What is the future of school? Is it one where we see less human interaction and more technology? This idea of digital education replacing analog education and what happens to critical pedagogy in a digital era is worth future exploration.

Antonia Darder begins Section Four with a return to discussing the foundations of Freire's work and the importance for individuals to raise our level of radical consciousness. The two authors that follow, Monzo and White-Smith, elaborate on Freire's concept of radical consciousness and to stand with "those you oppress" (p. 137). Explicitly, the authors address the relevance of the dialectical process with recognition that we must attend to the oppressive conditions in which we live. I found chapters ten, eleven and twelve purposeful to explore with my graduate students where we collectively examined liberation, resistance and the tensions that emerge when navigating the social and material world. In this process, my students generated a series of questions addressing some of the pressures they have experienced in their own practice as child and youth practitioners. They questioned: Why are youth homeless? Why is education still teacher driven? Why is there large police presence in some schools? Why are young children frequently silenced? How do we build better communities? What does it mean to belong? This led to further discussions on the exploitation of women as low wage workers in early childhood education, including their experiences with xenophobia as new immigrants to Canada. One student in my class who recently immigrated from United States shared his fear of systemic and legitimized violence after his six-year-old daughter was subjected to routine shooting drills. This section was useful as it created a space to challenge the social and economic conditions before us. It brings us back to the roots of Freirean thought and the requirement to connect to the transformational praxis aspect of raising consciousness with a reminder that engagement in the world is not an individual process, but rather one that develops socially and in community.

The final section of this book begins with a speech written by Donaldo Macedo where he evokes readers, especially academics, to re-examine their roles when producing scholarship and to challenge "neoliberal intellectualism". He describes neoliberal intellectualism as the "work that claims to foster freedom" but

instead is driven by self-serving careerism with limited understandings of the hidden and not so hidden collective struggles within their communities. It is a call for intellectuals to return to Freire's work, to spend time in communities, and work with community members in the interest of "true liberation" (p. 146). This speech and the two subsequent chapters in this section evoked rich dialogue with my graduate class around the issues when working in a hierarchical capitalist system. Donaldo Macendo's example of a Manhattan restaurant asking diners to pay \$27,000 for a chocolate sundae while paying its workers who are predominantly women, Afro-Americans, and Latinos much less for a year of labor fueled discussions on exploitation of labor. Upon further reflection of this indignation, my students began to evaluate the social and economic relationships that affect their lives, and it was in the process of naming forms of power and control that led to them to be more critical about the necessity to challenge existing capitalist relations. Students examined their own communities and histories. One international student from Nigeria spoke about the exploitation of children as child brides and child bombers in his home country and his proactive struggle against these forms of dehumanization. Many students had emotional, visceral, and embodied reactions when naming forms of power and control. This section became a mediated tool to help prepare students to not only become critically literate, but to legitimate the experiences students bring to the classroom. It involves bringing theory into the streets and linking their struggles to larger national and international contexts.

This book provides a dialectical guide for scholars, educators, and practitioners to explore Freirean theories (i.e., untested-feasibility, dialectical theory, critical consciousness and liberatory education) and engage in self-reflective processes. To ask: What is my purpose? What does it mean to belong? To be in a privileged space? Where do I go from here? How do we become agents of transformation? Academics might find McLaren's chapter on liberatory education and Donald Macendo's discussion on neoliberal intellectualism a productive space to contemplate their own positionality when producing scholarship and to self-reflect on their interconnected relationship with community. For practitioners outside of academia, the reflection questions and activities are a useful guide to share their stories, to struggle together with the conditions they face and revitalize critical democracy in their practice. In addition, Tom Wilson's 2RA Method is a productive framework for community workers, teachers, practitioners, and academics to use to examine in their pedagogical practice. The book raises more questions than it does answers, yet this is needed more than ever. I would like to think that this book offered my graduate students a space to frame their own learnings and agency in the world. The transformation of education can only happen when individuals engage in active citizenship and challenge the social, political, and economic structures of power. As Freire (1997) states "aspire to become an association of truly serious and coherent people, those who work to shorten more and more distance between what they say and what they do" (p. 83). Engaging in critical ideas on education is an ongoing dialectical process; it is not one action, or conversation, but the intentionality to pursue a better world.

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