

First Freire: Early Writings in Social Justice Education by Carlos Alberto Torres. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2014. 177 pp. ISBN-13 978-0807755334.

A former student and collaborator of Paulo Freire, Professor Carlos Alberto Torres is also the founder of the Paulo Freire Institute in São Paulo. In *First Freire* (2014) Torres sets out to examine Freire's early scholarship (1950s-1970s), and to describe the intellectual landscape of Latin American liberation pedagogues in the 1960s and 1970s. He delivers not only an advanced intellectual account, but also an intimately personal reflection on the origins, formation, and voyage of the Freirean theoretical framework. Torres has built on Freire's problem posing approach by adding to the Freirean framework insights from macro level critical theories. This has resulted in a distinctive theoretical framework in which Torres engages the political economy of education from a comparative international perspective.

I find it interesting to note the variety of labels attributed to Paulo Freire. While previously referred to mainly as an educationalist of the Third World (cf. Torres, 2009, p. 153), today Freire is hailed as a *cultural theorist* (Archung, 2014, p. 543). As noted by Torres, he is one of those classic thinkers in education whose scholarship transcends easy classifications and his context of origin (p. 103). Freire was not radical enough for some of the intellectuals of the left in the 1970s, nor did he appeal to the political right (ibid.). Instead, he remained committed to his primary focus on the relationship of education to social transformation and democracy (ibid.).

Freire and Torres share the experience of forced exile. For both, it was brought on by their academic and political work in furthering literacy among the poor. Subsequently, both scholars oriented their research towards an international engagement. Freire did significant educational work in the field of adult literacy in his country of origin, Brazil, but also in Chile, in Guinea Bissau and Mozambique. In the first chapter of *First Freire*, Torres succinctly overviews Freire's scholarship, relating the shifts in focus over time to Freire's engagement in different parts of the world. Central themes to Freire's scholarship and literacy training methods are discussed over the eleven subsequent chapters. Each of the chapters elaborates on different aspects of Freirean thought and practice.

Education for Freire had a very clear goal: it was to contribute to the democratization of culture (p. 101). Torres elaborates on this point by defining progressive education as transformative social justice learning (p. 110). Other central themes discussed in the book include: the political nature of education, critical social theory, the centrality of lived experience, social change (pp. 61-66), the colonizer – colonized relationship of cultural invasion (p. 5), education as the

practice of freedom (pp. 43-60), the methodology of thematic investigation (pp. 84-96), and conscientization (pp. 67-73).

An important part of *First Freire* focuses on the historical context and the role that Freire's literacy program in Angicos, Brazil in 1962-1963 played in forming his continued approaches. In chapter 10, Torres discusses this together with a helpful chronological overview of the political events leading up to Freire's exile. In chapter 11, Torres proposes an agenda for how to build on Freire's legacy in order to realize the dream of educating highly technically qualified, politically committed and loving teachers (pp. 121-122). In my reading, chapter 11 comes across as a kind of road map to this end, with recommendations for the practicing teacher and for the educational researcher. These recommendations include schema for Freirean research projects and a guiding set of virtues, namely: *tolerance*; *curiosity*; *ethics of freedom*; the *principle of hope*; a *secular spirituality of love*, and most importantly *dialogue* (pp. 129-131).

Revealing societal relationships of power, questioning societal problems and the effort to engage the perspective of participants is inherent to the inquiry proposed by both Freire and Torres. Both have engaged a project of connecting theories of power and resources with an alternative approach that is amenable for practitioners. The Freirean theoretical framework builds on Marxian theory. Concrete actions in the form of labor are in the Marxian framework a key both for understanding and for changing social and economic conditions and the reproduction of inequalities. Torres elaborates on the relationship of Freirean theory and method to the Marxian legacy. This helps to highlight theoretical tangents and the influential role that the writings of Marxists Antonio Gramsci and Franz Fanon played for Latin American liberation pedagogues in the 1960s and 1970s (pp. 36-38, pp. 65-66, 104).

Another aspect of the Freirean theoretical framework is Pragmatism. Freire's theoretical framework is pragmatic in the sense that it goes beyond providing an anti-authoritarian way to think about knowledge-production. Namely, by proposing a set of principles for reflective practice. Torres links Freire to a theoretical genealogy of pragmatists, including foundational sociologist Max Weber (p. xxii, pp. 86-87) and the prominent U.S. educational theorist John Dewey (p. 106). In this vein, Torres highlights a meaningful analogue for Freire's dialogue in theories presented by Jürgen Habermas. Habermas in particular discussed the central role of communication for understanding the formation of societal structures, and sustainable ways of working with conflicts of interest between individuals and the social polity (pp. 28, 75, 106, 108).

Torres' elaboration of connections of the original Freirean framework to scholarly discourses is not limited to the Marxian and Pragmatist traditions. He illustrates how Freire's work draws on classical sociology, classical philosophy,

psychoanalysis, and existentialism. In doing so, he illuminates the historical and theoretical underpinnings of progressive education in Latin American social movements.

Torres provides a wide intellectual genealogy, encompassing a host of discourses reflected in the Freirean approach, including *existentialism* (Heidegger, Fanon, Memmi), *phenomenology* (Husserl, Vygotsky, Ricoeur), *psychoanalysis* (Freud), *anthropology* (Suárez-Orozco), *philosophy* (Hegel, Gadamer), *theology* (Concatti), and *political science* (O'Donnell). By deploying such a range of theorists across disciplines, he produces an interdisciplinary perspective in which education is understood as a political institution, and in which the critical relationship of education and democracy is underscored.

The theoretical and methodological approaches discussed by Torres in *First Freire* shed light on the origin of the thought of Paulo Freire. This book advances a discourse that bridges critical theory with concrete suggestions for how to further theory, inquiry, and practice. Finally, Torres provides a valuable elaboration on the Freirean legacy for continued discussions on the role of education in a democracy.

References

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Reviewer

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