

English

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Interview Questions for Paulo Freire

1. Colin Lankshear

Professor Lankshear of New Zealand uses your literacy approach to criticize a model of functional literacy developed by the Adult Performance Level team at the University of Texas. In situating his critique, he discloses a symmetry between your notion that humans have an ontological vocation and Aristotle's argument that the ultimate good for human beings consists in them performing well their human function. For Aristotle, this unique human function consists in the best and most noble exercise of reason. He sees the form of Aristotle's argument—not the content—as being similar to your notion that humans have an ontological vocation; and that for you this is the basis for a practical ethic which is our exercise of praxis, of transforming reality in accordance with our reflection upon that reality. *What is your reaction?*

2. Marilyn Frankenstein and Arthur Powell describe ethnomathematics as a means of correcting the ethnocentric historical and anthropological biases that plague Western conceptions of mathematic knowledge. Their work is designed to use the ideas of non-literate, non-Western peoples to combat racist notions concerning manifestations of those ideas. The history of conventional Western mathematics has hidden the mathematical notions of people. Mathematics is like a language and must respect the culture and linguistic background of students. Frankenstein and Powell comment on a study of the mathematical knowledge of Brazilian children who worked in their parents marketplace which reported that math performance when embedded in real-life contexts was superior to that in school-type word problems. Any comments on this?

3. Peter Leonard:

Peter Leonard notes the rather profound effect your work had on the construction of a critical social work practice in Britain, especially in conjunction with Gramsci's work. He notes that the emphasis which your work and Gramsci's work gave to the voluntarist side of Marxism, as distinct from its more fatalistic, determinist side, really helped to encourage struggle towards a mass socialist politics. In particular, your work had a profound impact on developing new kinds of social work relationships, one which did not reproduce the class, gender and ethnic hierarchies of the dominant social order. In his personal recollections of the Warwick School, Leonard maintains that feminist criticisms of "male Marxism" ---its objectification, economism, workerism, and commitment to monolithic party organizations as the vehicles for revolutionary change---resonated with your work. Do you feel that one of the problems with Marxism, particularly its European variants, has been its fatalistic, deterministic, "male" side?

4. Peter Findlay:

Peter Findlay uses your work to discuss the role of new social movements, particularly their development in the context of Canada. He invokes two dilemmas: on the subjective side, there are pressures against confronting the seamless cultural hegemony of late capitalist society. There is the danger of "critical consciousness" degenerating into "personal growth techniques" robbed of their transformative intent. On the objective side, there is the problem of finding constituencies and agencies, and effecting large-scale social change. While the modes of domination in Latin America are harsher than those which exist in Canada, the project of liberation remains the same. How do you see your work applying to

struggles for freedom in North America, specifically as it might support the growth of new social movements?

5. Ian Lister:

Ian Lister discusses your work in relation to that of Bernard Crick's work on political literacy. More specifically, he relates your work to the British Program for Political Education, which tried to introduce political literacy education into English secondary schools, especially as it focused on the development of political skills which could help people become political actors; this pertained to the development of issue-based groups. He talks about research done in Milltown in the north of England, work with the Milltown branch of the ~~Anti~~-Nazi League which aimed at opposing the resurgence of facism and support for the National Front and for the British Movement. What this research did for Lister was to confirm your belief that political action is acquired and developed through practice. But issue-based groups themselves were not-enough. Lister discovered that programs of political education through group-action projects need to have not only a coherent pedagogy but also a system of observation and evaluation—otherwise liberation pedagogy could be reduced to hopeful intentions and acts of faith. Lister was met with objections to his program for political education through group-action projects. Opponents told him that political knowledge was too complicated for immature minds, political education would lead to horrible, unforeseen consequences; most people choose the culture of silence over political life; schools cannot be sites of liberation since by definition they serve the state. Even Ivan Illich argued that schools were dangerous and that school-based political programs could be dangerous. Lister, however, feels that political education is "the art of the possible". Quite remarkably in the short

span of three years, the term "political <sup>literacy</sup> ~~legitimacy~~" received support from the Educational Ministry. Yet there did develop serious concerns for Lister. For instance, he felt that a political literacy program that is issue-based can become a "curriculum of social pathology" which contains lots of lamentation and little celebration. In fact, such a program could run the risk of confirming fears and sense of impotence. Lister poses one concern directly for your work, Paulo, as well as for political educators in Britain. In stressing the importance of process--particularly the application of skills to issues, they had undervalued the importance of knowledge content--including contextual knowledge about institutions and the law. Goal rich and content poor pedagogy can be highly problematic. The key issue for the future, in Britain, is the debate over the meaning of citizenship appropriate to modern, multicultural society in an interdependent world. How do you feel about the issue of content, Paulo? And also, do you have any ideas of what the concept of citizenship should be in this interdependent, postmodern world?

6. Marquerite and Michael Rivage-Seul

Peggy and Mike <sup>Rivage -</sup> ~~Seul~~ discuss the Philosophy for Children movement in North America in its dialogue with a Freirian circle of theoretician-practitioners in Sao Paulo. The Philosophy for Children group employs an approach to critical thinking and analytic teaching which uses fictional models of an ideal community where characters are presented as relating to one another in ways which evoke creative possibilities such as care, openness, co-operation, and sensitivity. She is particularly interested in P4C's peace education project which was implemented in Guatemala. Peggy and Mike, however, suggest that even

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P4C = Peace for Children

though P4C assigned a high priority to moral imagination, critical thinking without your conscientizacao in its full sense can unwittingly serve the interests of political repression rather than of democracy.

They compare the Guatemalan peace project with material used by Freirian popular educators in Sao Paulo, in order to substantiate their thesis. On the surface, Philosophy for Children made improvements; discussion replaced rote learning; students were called by name, rather than by number, as is customary of teacher/student relationships in the Guatemalan context. There also was a higher post-test score on reasoning skills, and instruments used to measure democratic behavior showed this was improving, also. Peggy and Mike criticize the poverty of moral imagination in this pilot program--a poverty that lends critical thinking to the service of anti-democratic interests. The concept of imagination is too "future-oriented" and leaves the genesis of the economic, social and political framework from which it originates uncritically endorsed! Democracy is regarded as drafting a constitution and holding elections and avoiding military coups. Democracy is treated as a cognitive problem--as reasoning about issues. This ignores the Guatemalan's own critique of what presents itself as democracy in Latin America in general and Guatemala in particular. The term "democracy" is treated unproblematically, as if it's meaning were self-evident, as if in Guatemala there were no struggle between the government and the armed opposition about what democracy should mean! This is a positivistic understanding of moral imagination and runs against your concept of conscientiazcao. Democracy in P4C is "mythified". Peggy and Mike compare your term conscientizacao to Franz Hinkelammert's term, "transcendental imagination". They conclude that the P4C program lacks a "structural perception" of democracy. Since U.S. books and texts were

used, Mike and Peggy argue P4C represent the extension of imperialism by explaining the world in terms of the colonizer. It also transmits an ideology of dependency and accomodation since the texts used present the experiences of well-nourished U.S. children! Peggy and Mike maintain that the P4C pilot does not use extensive codification experience using "limit situations".

Mike and Peggy cite Adolfo Perez Esquivel, charging that North Americans need to understand three ideas fundamental to Third World critical thought about democracy. First is the notion of "formal democracy", the second is what Esquivel terms "real democracy" and what you call "fundamental democratization". The third is the connection between democratization and social justice. For North Americans, democracy resides in the Nation's "sovereign center". The Third World notion of Esquivel presumes a different understanding of political power. Here power is invested in the school, the church, the family, corporations, means of communication, and labor unions where people have a chance to exercise control over their own lives. Power is not with bourgeise professional politicians but with mass organizations with direct representation. Ordinary citizens assume center stage— and the least well off economically <sup>are</sup> ~~is~~ given priority.

Given the psychological boost to North American-style democracy in the collapse of Eastern Europe, what dangers do you see in the importing of this version of democracy to the Third World, specifically places such as Guatemala?

7. Kathleen Weiler:

Kathleen Weiler addresses the important concept of feminist pedagogy. While <sup>like</sup> ~~is~~ Freirian pedagogy, feminist pedagogy is based on the

assumptions of the power of consciousness raising, the existence of oppression, the possibility of ending it, and the desire for social transformation, it has also revealed the shortcomings that emerge in the attempt to enact a pedagogy that assumes a universal experience and abstract goals. Like Freirian pedagogy, feminist pedagogy is grounded in a vision of social change; and, like Freirian pedagogy, it rests on truth claims

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~~the~~ primacy of experience; ~~and~~ consciousness that ~~is~~ grounded in historically-situated social change movements. Feminist pedagogy has raised 3 areas of concern that are useful in considering the way Freirian pedagogy can be enriched and expanded. According to Weiler, these are: the role and authority of the teacher; the epistemological question of the source of knowledge and truth claims in personal experience and feeling; the third involves the question of difference. Weiler feels, for instance, that you have failed to address the various forms of power held by teachers ~~depending on~~ <sup>related to</sup> their race, gender, and the historical and institutional setting in which they work. In the Freirian account, they

Unlike Freirian pedagogy,

are transparent. In the actual practice of feminist pedagogy, the central issues of difference, positionality, and the need to recognize the implications of subjectivity or identity for teachers and students is

In most teaching settings,

central. The source of the teacher's authority as a "woman" who can call upon a common woman's knowledge is called into question, while at the same time the feminist teacher is "given" authority by virtue of her role within the hierarchial structure of the university. Underlying both feminist and early feminist pedagogy in the university is a reliance on experience and feeling as fundamental and an assumption of a common experience as the basis for political analysis and action. Yet, women of color, lesbians, and others of the dispossessed challenge the claims of a unitary woman's experience. Postmodernist theory has also challenged the

essentialism of cultural feminism. Therefore, there is now an emphasis in feminist pedagogy for a stress on difference. There is also a need to question the authority of the intellectual. While feminists may, in fact, accept their authority as intellectuals, they try to help students to recognize their own power.

Weiler claims that the feminist exploration of authority is much richer than the concept of authority you address in your formulation of the teacher and student as two "knowers", or in your assertion that the liberatory teacher should acknowledge authority but not authoritarianism. Feminists address more directly the contradictions between goals of the collectivity and hierarchies of knowledge, and also the power of subject positions. What African American teachers have accomplished, claims Weiler, is to ground pedagogy in experience is a materialist way in order to reveal the overlapping forms of oppression lived by women of color in the United States.

Weiler claims that in settings in which students come from differing positions of privilege or oppression, the sharing of experience raises conflicts rather than builds solidarity. Weiler claims that you set out the goals of liberation and social and political transformation as universal claims, without exploring your own privileged position or existing conflicts among oppressed groups themselves. She claims your thought is based within a tradition of Western modernism and is based on a belief of transcendent and universal truth. However, feminist theory, postmodernist thought, and writings of women of color challenge these universal claims. They challenge the use of such universal terms as oppression and liberation without locating these claims in a concrete historical or social context. Coalitions need to be developed out of the partial knowledges of women's own constructed identities. How do you respond to this feminist critique of your work?



8. Peter McLaren and Tomaz da Silva

Peter McLaren and Tomaz da Silva work to inform the development of what ~~we~~ <sup>they</sup> call "a politics of remembering". They stress the importance of narratives or stories in guiding the struggle for liberation. The question of narrative is linked to the concept of memory in two ways: first, it draws on the concept of "dangerous memory"; which employs a category of remembering to both describe and critique specific histories of oppression and human suffering often forgotten or repressed by the dominant culture. This means giving voice to the subjugated knowledges of oppressed peoples by providing structures that allow the oppressed to speak for themselves. This means for teachers a deeper identification with the victimized. Second, the concept of critical remembering seeks to restore our relation to the past, not by discovering the past but for entering a dialogue with the past. This form of remembering needs to break through unconscious repression. McLaren and da Silva use post-structuralist thought to further refine their concept of postmodern redemptive remembering. Like the feminists of which Kathleen Weiler speaks, McLaren and da Silva, stress the incompleteness and uncertainty of all historical remembering while stressing the heterogeneity of social, cultural, institutional, ethnic, and gendered contexts. For instance, they point out that a black female engages in a mode of memory that is formed out of discourses and social practices which are different than those of a white male, and so on. Yet, McLaren and da Silva suggest this attention to historical context and subjectivity is <sup>already</sup> present in your work, although not perhaps expressed in terms used by post-structuralist or feminist theorists. The problem, they argue, results in the concept of experience. They suggest that experience is often privileged over

by many teachers who think they are using a Freirian approach.

theory McLaren and da Silva write that experience is never transparent to itself and always occurs within particular social and cultural forms that have been produced within specific relations of power ~~within specific relations of power~~ and regimes of discourse. It is the task of critical pedagogy to provide students with the discursive and conceptual means to understand the ideological dimensions of their experiences and relate these to the material and symbolic structures of power that operate in the larger context of social life. The stress, therefore, is the language and conceptual categories used to make sense and interpret such experience.

The other issue McLaren and da Silva address has to do with opposition to your work in Brazil, such as by Vanilda Paiva, Dermeval Saviani and Jose Carlos Libaneo. <sup>In particular,</sup> They criticize Saviani's attempt to separate politics and education, and his rejection of your idea that education is always a political act. They also criticize his failure to make a sociological analysis of the connections between knowledge, education, and power. In Saviani's view, school is presumably safeguarded against political conflicts because of the disinterested engagement of the participants of the educational encounter in the search for truth. Education becomes a place located aside and above social life. However, McLaren and da Silva argue that to limit politics to a specific site means to accept weak liberal assumptions about the nature of power. This runs against <sup>the work of</sup> the thrust of Gramsci, who is one of the prime influences on Saviani's thought. Saviani also has no theory of the state which helps us to understand schooling as both an object of political struggle and a place for political struggle. Saviani's theories are ultimately disempowering. There is a very positivistic flavor to Saviani's notions of "context", "systematized knowledge" and

"socialization of knowledge" which ignores the conflictual, socially constructed nature of knowledge.

McLaren and da Silva go on to cite some current problems dealing with First World capitalist exploitation of the Third World and how this has affected education in Brazil. What are your comments?

9. Alicia de Alba and Edgar Gonzalez

Alicia de Alba and Edgar Gonzalez discuss your work in relation to Latin American pedagogical-political thought. They mention the work of Jose Vasconcelos of Mexico, Jose Carlos Mariategui of Peru, Julio Antonio Melba of Cuba, Farabundo Marti of El Salvador, and Augusto Cesar Sandino of Nicaragua. Can you discuss your intellectual relationship to <sup>these</sup> Latin American thinkers? They also discuss the subordination of Mexican Indian languages to that of Spanish and raise the question: "How can education contribute a general vision of the global society without lessening indigenous forms <sup>of constructing</sup> ~~concerning~~ reality and their particular and specific interests as indigenous groups?" They also raise the issue of education refugees from Guatemala who are settled in three states in the Southeast of Mexico. The peasants from Guatemala have been acquiring Spanish as a means to communicate their linguistic heterogeneity of origin. At the same time Spanish is serving as a cohesive element which distinguishes them from those who only speak one of the Mayances languages. Another issue they raise is that a pedagogy of liberation must place as much stress on understanding the culture of the oppressor as on the culture of the oppressed if true dialogic education is to take place. What are your comments on these issues?

10. What are your reactions to the ways in which Giroux has interpreted and extended some of your ideas in his work on critical pedagogy?