

Paolo Freire (ed) with James W. Fraser, Donaldo Macedo, Tanya Mckinnon and William T. Stokes, *Mentoring the Mentor: A Critical Dialogue with Paulo Freire*, New York, Peter Lang Publishing, 334 pp, 1997, ISBN (pbk) 0-8204-3798-0.

We all know publication dates can be misleading, but this is probably one of Paulo Freire's final books, albeit one he edited with others. I also suspect that most readers will understand it to be one of his final books. I begin with these comments because I think it is a pity that this is the case, even though the final chapter, Chapter 16, by Freire, is, in my opinion, one of the most important pieces he has written. I will return to this point and explain my main reasons later.

I am not going to detail each chapter; I will make general comments about what I consider the 'unfortunate' chapters. I will be a bit more specific about the few excellent, very good or very interesting chapters. Then I shall explain why I think Freire's chapter, 'A Response', is so important.

Chapter One, by Donaldo Macedo, is, in my opinion, very good, especially because he comes very close to saying explicitly that Freire's approach or philosophy (the terms I prefer) applies to all levels and sites of educational and political practice, ie. those practices which aim to serve the purpose of preparing people to collectively create a just and more humane world.

Chapter Two, by Marilyn Frankenstein, which is about learning and teaching mathematics in mutuality, is very interesting. I wish I had a copy of it long ago for learning colleagues (students) to read, at least those who felt there were just some abstract areas in which the educator could not engage in critical pedagogy. Of course, I tried to share my thoughts that I did not think this was right; I wish I had my Marilyn Frankenstein to help my support my thoughts.

Michelle Fine's letter to Freire, Chapter Five, is very moving. It is so very intellectually and emotionally sincere. In the future, I would like to see a more in depth article from her, especially one which deals with the educator's and the learners', i.e. the learning/teaching groups', response to 'reading the world'.

Chapter Ten, by William Stokes, on teacher education, was better than many of the chapters, but it did not go far enough or deep enough to indicate what was his actual understanding of Freire's philosophy is.

James W. Fraser's Chapter, 'Love and History in the Work of Paulo Freire', Chapter Nine, is, in my opinion, excellent. I thought he was the only contributor (except Freire, of course) who expressed himself in a manner that indicated to

someone like me that here was another person who fully embraced intellectually, philosophically, and emotionally or spiritually Freire's philosophical approach to education/ politics/ life.

I also think Asgedet Stefanos' chapter on 'African Woman and Revolutionary Change...', Chapter Twelve, is excellent. The chapter is extremely interesting and indicates how Freire's philosophy can be embraced by researcher, the scholar, who seeks to educate.

The other chapters, I found in general, disappointing. A few did contain useful information on multiculturalism, anti-racism and feminism. But these nine chapters indicated little or no understanding of Freire. In fact, and I shall not name the authors, I thought some of the attempts to discuss Freire indicated a total lack of understanding. I was so shocked by this tendency that I turned to my Oxford English Dictionary to look up the meaning of mentor. I had to be certain my understanding was correct and it was.

Being a citizen of the U.S.A. (absent from there since 1973), I feel I can make the observation that Americans, i.e. those from the U.S.A., frequently alter the meaning of a word to suit the purpose of some current trend or practice.

According to my dictionary, a mentor is an 'experienced and trusted adviser'. Of course, Freire always has listened carefully and with humility to any criticism. When he 'problematizes' these, he does so very gently and with great care and love for the person to whom he is responding. I often have thought his 'challenge' has not been heard. What I am getting at here is that this book is mis-titled. With the exceptions I have noted, few of these authors have expressed themselves in such a way that indicates an understanding of Freire which would place them in a position to 'mentor the mentor'; a dialogue with Freire, of course, but you cannot mentor someone whose ideas you do not understand. This is my understanding. Basically many of the authors of the 'unfortunate' chapters do not understand Freire's meaning of oppression in either ontological or epistemological terms. Perhaps they do understand Freire; however this is not indicated in these chapters.

So, why do I think Freire's 'A Response', Chapter Sixteen, is so excellent and important? Space does not permit me to engage in a full discussion of explanation; you will just have to read the chapter. However, I shall state my main reason. For years, I have wondered why Freire is more direct or explicit in his problematising or challenging; I know through my own experience that one can be, without sacrificing care, commitment and love. I realise that my concern often arose from his 'dialogue books', often edited by the other person after hours of taping. Perhaps the challenge was there but never made it into print. I loved Freire's response because it was as direct and explicit as I think he could ever be. I read

his response first, i.e. before the other chapters, in October 1997, and honestly, I wept with joy. At long last, he had written the type of response I had wished for – for so long. Then I read the rest of the book. As I have said, with the exceptions I have cited, I now see what drove him to write Chapter Sixteen in the way he did. The motivation does not matter; I just am very happy he finally did it and so much more in response.

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