

Fall 1997

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Recommended Citation

Serpa, Maria de Lourdes B. and Serpa, Caetano Valadão (1997) "Book Review: *Pedagogia da Autonomia: Saberes necessários à prática educativa* - English," *Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism, and Practice*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 2 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/jppp/vol1/iss2/4>

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Book Review: *Pedagogia da Autonomia: Saberes necessários à prática educativa*

Maria de Lourdes B. Serpa and Caetano Valadão Serpa

Paulo Freire (1997) *Pedagogia da Autonomia: Saberes necessários à prática educativa*. São Paulo, Brasil: Paz e Terra (Coleção Leitura), 5.5x 4.5 inches, 165 pages.

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...uma pedagogia da autonomia tem de estar centrada em experiências estimuladoras da decisão e da responsabilidade, vale dizer em experiência respeitadoras da liberdade (p. 121)

A pedagogy of liberation has to be centered in stimulating experiences of decision making and responsibility, in experiences which are respectful of freedom (p 121)

Introduction

Pedagogy has been a fundamental cornerstone of Professor Paulo Freire's life's work, starting with the *Pedagogy of Oppressed* (1972) to the *Pedagogy of the City* (1992), to *Pedagogy of Hope* (1995) and finally his latest masterpiece - *A Pedagogia da Autonomia* (1997) - which has not yet been published in English. This review is based on the reading of the Portuguese original text.

Professor Freire's in his latest book *Pedagogia da Autonomia* challenges us to think about what teachers need to know and be able to do in teaching and learning, when the focus is on education for equity, transformation and inclusion of ALL individuals. Paulo Freire does not excuse illiteracy or school failure by blaming the parents or their low socioeconomic status. Education and its possibilities for betterment of humanity have been central in Freirian thinking about human liberation and inclusion of all members of society for many decades.

School reform, restructuring of schools, raising test scores are topics of great debate in today's educational circles. Why? On the one hand, we have the best materials that money can buy, the most advanced use of technology, incredible buildings, superb education laws that entitle every child to a free and appropriate education. On the other hand, we still have quite a large number of students who are not yet making it in the American classroom. So many are still dropping out or 'pushed out' of school while others are maintaining a mediocre achievement. What are we to do? How can this be turned around?

President Clinton has acknowledged this issue, and in his 1997 state of the union address, he made Education his number one priority for the second mandate. In *A Call to Action For American Education*, published by the US Department of Education, President Clinton articulated his plan of action for American Education. However, teacher education was only briefly highlighted, and without appropriately educated teachers, for a diverse society, learning outcomes will not change, no matter how many tests are administered.

In my sixteen years of experience in teacher preparation, I have had the opportunity and the privilege of working with many wonderful teachers 'in the making'. Some are gifted, but I have observed first hand, that the majority become great teachers because of their professional preparation, just as with a doctor or a lawyer with excellent and relevant training. Paulo Freire points out that "formar" (to prepare) teachers is much more than training in the use of skills. The "formação" (formation) of teachers in learning how to teach is of paramount importance. Just knowing the content it is not enough.

With the changes in U.S. society and in school demographics, with the focus on living in democratic society, there is a pressing need for the teaching profession to be well educated in how to teach ALL students. A system is needed where nobody is considered 'at risk' for school failure just because the system has not been responsive enough in providing teachers with the professional development skills required to transform passive learners into active & reflective thinkers/problem solvers with compassion and respect for the rights and feelings of others.

Professor Freire provides us with a framework of principles that inform the professional practice of teachers engaged in teaching and learning anywhere. He clearly articulates a total of twenty seven 'saberes' (principles) clustered around three major chapters reflecting three pillar concepts central to the teaching profession : (1) there is no teaching without learning, (2) to teach is not to transfer knowledge and (3) the process of education is only a human endeavor.

There Is No Teaching Without Learning: This is a profound concept in which Paulo Freire clearly challenges us to think about the nature of the interaction of teaching with learning on a dynamic and ongoing dialogic process. One does not happen without the other. He insists that dialogue demands respect for the learner and his/her reading of the World.

Professor Freire points out that education which focuses on the interaction of teaching and learning demands the following principles: methodological rigor, research; respect for the personal knowledge of each student; critical thinking; aesthetics and ethics; do what you say, risk taking and acceptance of the new while rejecting any form of discrimination; critical reflection about educational practice; and recognition of the

assumption of cultural identity.

He condemns fatalistic ideas which accept the immobilizing ideology which states that "Reality is what it is and what can we do?" With the capacity to make choices that transform the student's realities from fixed and hopeless, to hopeful and full of possibilities, Freire's approach to education is a most serious and profound commitment to what educators can learn together with their students. It grows out of his direct experience with oppressed people in a process of struggle for personal liberation. It is essential a "expulsão do opressor de dentro do oprimido" (the expulsion of the oppressor from inside the oppressed).

This is a book that invites all of us to profound reflection about our educational practices with self examination in favor of the universal ethics as well as the personal 'autonomia' (independence). Without these two elements there no true teaching and learning for Freire.

Teaching Is Not The Transference Of Knowledge: Learning for Paulo Freire is a 'constructivist 'process owned by the learner and facilitated by the teacher in interaction with the student which includes respect for the student and his her view of the world. He rejects the notion of education as 'banking'. (Editors' note: the banking model refers to education understood to be merely the transfer of pre-existing knowledge from teachers to students; in a sense teachers make 'deposits' into the relatively empty accounts of the students; these deposits take the form of 'cultural capital' which when accumulated confer the privileges of traditional education). Therefore, teaching is much more than knowing about a subject here and now, but reaching and transforming the beyond . Teaching demands an educational practice that according to Professor Freire respects the following principles: (1) to be aware that learning never ends, (2) to be aware of the conditioning of learners (3) to respect the freedom of the learner, (4) to use common sense, (5) to have humility, tolerance and advocate for the rights of the learners, (6) to be in touch with reality

(7) to have joy and hope, (8) to have the conviction that change is possible (9) to foster curiosity.

Given the focus and the challenge of successful education for ALL, it is one of the reasons why we consider Professor Paulo Freire's recent book *Pedagogia da Autonomia: saberes necessários à prática educativa*, a timely document of huge proportions for truly respectful inclusive schooling. It articulates clearly the principles of educational practices which liberate and respect the lives of every student. Furthermore, it gives teachers the thinking tools to provide their students with a sense of possibilities in self development and control over their own lives.

Pedagogia da Autonomia is a magnificent book, small in size, but huge in wisdom and a sense of purpose full of hope and optimism for making education work for all children

and adults. This book is a tremendous contribution to teaching as a major profession, and it should be a required reading in all teacher education programs throughout the world. It sheds new light to the issue of effective teacher formation in a very optimistic, insightful and practical way. It is a gift to humanity in their quest for dignity, respect and equity through education of individuals who are poor or who are oppressed in and out of school. This book offers real possibilities for change in schools and in teacher preparation, as well as professional development.