

Book and media reviews

Reinventing Freire: A political and childhood reading of education

Kohan, W. O. (2021). *Paulo Freire. A Philosophical Biography*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing. 277pp., £13.99 (paperback) ISBN: 978-1-3501-9598-1; £58.50 (hardcover) ISBN: 978-1-3501-9599-8; £12.59 (ebook) ISBN: 978-1-3501-9600-1; £12.59 (epub & mobi) ISBN: 978-1-3501-9601-8.

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Walter Omar Kohan invites the reader to rediscover Paulo Freire, in a lively account of Freire's philosophy, pedagogy, life, love, and hope. His book offers the reader an opportunity to think about new dimensions of Freire's work - for example, the connection with childhood. This is an unexplored link with Freire's pedagogical thoughts, one that challenges the reader to re-think the significance of childhood and ways of understanding education. Educators, practitioners, scholars, students, or any 'person' who is interested in equality, social justice, democracy, and non-hierarchical relations will find in this book an opportunity to 'put the world into question' and a new way of understanding Freire.

The book is a learning journey through five philosophical principles that provoke a pedagogy of questioning. Each principle raises questions; the author's intention is not to solve problems about what 'life', 'equality', 'love', 'errantry', and 'childhood' mean for Freire. Rather, the point of departure of this journey is a re-reading of Freire, and the destination is a new journey, full of questions, images, and transformation. Drawing on Freire's life, work, dialogues, and philosophical, political and pedagogical encounters, the book reflects on why Freire's work is still relevant. And it makes us think about what is happening in our societies

and education systems that makes it still necessary to find new ways of questioning power, oppressive relationships, lack of opportunities, and the hidden voices of minorities. In current education policies, discourses, and practices it is common to encounter pedagogic and education approaches that support critical thinking, attempt to give voices to minority groups, and care about inclusive principles and methods. But, in practice, is education transformative? What are the principles we take for granted, and how do they prevent education from becoming 'emancipatory', 'liberating' or 'transformative'?

Travelling back to a time when it was felt that education, emancipation and transformation were possible is one of the strengths of this book. Moreover, a dynamic approach to the concept of childhood is presented, a concept which questions how we think about childhood as a chronological time in life. This approach, which goes 'against' developmental discourses, offers new opportunities for education. Walter Omar Kohan writes in the introduction: 'I wish to contribute to thinking about a relevant problem for a philosophical education: how to understand that education is political, or more precisely, that the act of educating is a political act'. (p.11) Indeed, Kohan's contribution to a re-thinking of childhood that goes beyond a chronological time or developmental stage is a political act, in a Freirean way. It embraces a suspension of time that gives childhood a unique and lifelong voice to transform power relations and to transform educational practices. It appreciates the need to discover the world, the curiosity to understand the world, and the possibility of a new beginning of emancipatory opportunities and transformation.

Thinking about childhood as another experience of time and space brings a new understanding of the philosophical education of Freire, as well as facilitating a dialogical approach towards children. A childlike or childhood approach to education as 'something that educates', would have been greatly appreciated to encounter more closely, as Kohan indicates in the fifth principle of childhood. The book elaborates on different moments where we encounter Freire's childlike and childhood 'attitude' towards questioning, experiencing, transforming life, understanding and questioning the world, and engaging with a new beginning. The recovery of Freire's childhood, as a political act, is an invaluable aspect of this book, one that guarantees we can think about the potentiality of childhood as a form of education and transformation. And a radical childhood approach to education is an interesting and challenging one. This is an approach that allows any person to question their own reality, to keep curiosity alive, to enter into dialogue and different ways of relating to others. A radical approach that, in the end, will allow people to become fully aware of 'oppressive' conditions of life, to confront, to transform and to see the world with children's eyes. This, perhaps, is a good opportunity and moment to consider a childhood approach to education and emancipation. It is also a good time to contribute with transformative new beginnings; not only a beginning of 'becoming conscious' and keeping alive the 'inner' child, but also a

beginning that gives children a 'time' in education from their early years and listens to their voices and questions.

Recovering an image of the child and childhood in education opens a time and space to question and transform the world. This recovery can be a powerful encounter and an opportunity for further discussion within the education community to celebrate childhood, to understand our present and transform our future. A hope that can become a philosophy for a liberatory and emancipatory education.