GRAMSCI, FREIRE AND ADULT EDUCATION: POSSIBILITIES FOR TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION

Peter Mayo. (1999). London and New York: Zed Books. 211 pages.

During the process of writing my book, *Critical Psychology and Pedagogy*, I found the works of Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire to be important pieces of scholarship needing to be taken into an emerging field: critical pedagogy and cultural studies. Since my academic background was in developmental psychology, I was traveling far afield by attempting to use these two seminal thinkers in my critical analysis in psychology and critical pedagogy. I was first introduced to the works of Antonio Gramsci when I was struggling to incorporate a cultural perspective that would analyze power as an intricate structure of cultural analysis. During that same period, I encountered the work of Paulo Freire in his work "Pedagogy of the Oppressed." It struck me at the time that these two men had much in common and that I was only touching the surface of their work. I intended to return later to these great thinkers, so I was pleased to come across Peter Mayo's groundbreaking work where he addresses Gramsci and Freire within the context of adult education. What is refreshing about Mayo's book is the depth of his understanding of these theorists. His scholarship around them is rich in detail, bringing to the reader a deep sense of their biographies. Mayo addresses his work to the field of adult education and it is his expressed intention to move toward a synthesis of Gramsci and Freire within this field.

Mayo situates his treatise in a theory of "transformative adult education" which has as its objective a conscious recognition of the political nature of educational interventions in adult education. Mayo presents for the reader a fresh reflection on these contemporary educational thinkers at a time when market driven educational forms are running wild. Gramsci and Freire are *joined* within this work as locations of dissent from the contemporary juggernaut of globalizing education. The reader is given two excellent chapters that expose the backgrounds of Gramsci and Freire. Given the different contexts and times in which these two theorists lived, the distinct chapters are both helpful and appropriate to Mayo's eventual comparative task. We see Gramsci's work contextualized in an urban setting and within the context of a Marxist trade unionism. Freire's work developed in a rural popular education setting and there was only an indirect connection to a leftist political party. What both theorists share, at a fundamental level, is a sense of the profoundly political nature of education and we get a sense of the deeply felt political commitments of both men. This political sense of education brought one to prison under Mussolini and the other over thirty

years exile from his beloved Brazil. Mayo provides the reader with a sense of the personal by bringing both theorists to life in a way that shows how a theory is intimately tied to an historical context.

After completing the two chapters of biographical sketches, Mayo moves the reader on to the central task of his work, namely a comparative analysis of these men. Chapter 4 discusses the educational comparisons between Gramsci and Freire within the context of adult education. For Mayo, the comparative relationship is one of complementarity. Although he makes note of and emphasizes several areas of similarity, Mayo stresses that the strength of his comparison is highlighted when one provides insightful material the other lacks. He weaves this discussion through some intricate arenas such as showing the parallels in thinking between the two on such topics as the politics of education, coercive power, civil society and agency, the role of the intellectual in society, and praxis. The chapter then discusses areas of divergence, covering such topics as literacy, issues around "universal class" or a "polyphony of voices," cultural production, and banking education.

Having completed the analytical and historical comparisons, Mayo then creates the synthesis between Gramsci and Freire. I consider this the core chapter of the book and the very reason for attempting this comparison in the first place. Here the author attempts to create a framework for a radical adult education based on Gramsci and Freire's core ideas. He specifically explores the foundational elements that might constitute the basis for a theory of transformative adult education. He explores several themes in developing his synthesis: commitment; agency; social movements; the role of adult educators; issues concerning cultural production; and the role of history in transformative adult education. Adult educators will find the last two themes extremely helpful if they find that their own praxis is committed to a social justice education that challenges the conventional market driven framing of the field of adult education in this current moment.

Mayo concludes with a chapter entitled "When Might it Work? Transformative Adult Education in Context." Here he takes on the perplexities of our contemporary moment by exploring various contexts and situations and the limits they impose on, and the possibilities they offer for, transformative action. The author is very aware of the complexities that he is dealing with when he states:

> Each situation is sufficiently complex to prevent me giving a straight answer to the question I posed at the outset: namely, to what extent and under what circumstances can transformative pedagogical ideas be successful in contributing to a process of social transformation. (p. 174)

Mayo believes that he has made a case to suggest that Gramscian-Freirean transformative pedagogy is more likely to be effective within the context of social movements or an alliance of movements than in isolation. The author explores a range of questions around these issues and concludes his fine treatment of Gramsci and Freire with humility when he leaves us with this last sentence:

> Many elements in this book warrant extensive treatment in a more exploratory form. The work remains an unfinished canvas, the issues raised being far from settled. (p. 181)

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