

Is It Time To Shelve Paulo Freire?

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No doubt some will consider the question “Is It Time to Shelve Freire?” a singularly asinine query, especially when this issue of the *Journal of Thought* is devoted to an examination, application, extension, and utilization, if not critique, of his ideas. But is that rather spur-of-the-moment response merited? Are we not guilty of inconsistency and, worse, hypocrisy if we do not entertain the idea that Freire’s day may largely have come and gone? Or are we too ideologically dogmatic to critique his or our own beliefs that are inextricably rooted in his ideas? How then should we approach a twentieth-century philosopher in the twenty-first century?

Even to the causal student of Freire, it is obvious that some have never embraced Freirean ideas. Many quickly rejected nearly everything he claimed years ago. Thus, they cannot reject his thinking; they can only maintain their ongoing repudiation of his ideas. In this case, we might be well-advised to revise our question to those that follow: Are we too ideologically dogmatic to critique our own beliefs with the insights Freire offers? Is it time to reconsider—or consider for the first time—Freire’s perspective and what it may offer us?

Others have been less spontaneous in rejecting Freire’s thinking, including some of those who initially welcomed aspects of his ideas and others who had a more encompassing affection for his consciousness raising inquiries. Some who fall into these categories have abandoned Freire in whole or in part for an assortment of reasons. What, we might ask, are the reasons for their disaffection? Some reject him because he

is not seen as a thoroughgoing Marxist, a militant feminist, an orthodox Catholic, or a militaristic revolutionist. Others claim his theoretical orientation is shallow, e.g., his epistemology is suspect, his ethical theory is inadequate, and his social philosophy is unbalanced. Still others critique his views of teachers as cultural workers and administrators as strong leaders as being inconsistent with his liberatory philosophy. Even others reject Freire because they think his ideas are irrelevant to transnational and global issues and are hopelessly embedded in a Brazilian meta-narrative. And others seem charred by his radical and uncompromising love, a love that seeks to humanize even the dehumanizer. Naturally, the number of critics and the targets of their criticism could be expanded almost indefinitely. So, for many, the answer to the question—is it time to shelve Freire?—is definitely yes, at least largely, certainly in particular areas. Even this widespread criticism, however, speaks to the influence Freire has had in recent decades and to the influence he continues to have in many circles. Those who continue to critique Freire without noting his strengths, therefore, may be unconsciously perpetuating his influence.

Everything considered, we seem well-advised to consider negative criticisms as well as positive critiques of Freire, including his own admonition that we reinvent him in our unique circumstances. This orientation is consistent with Freire's own emphases, for he argued that the genuinely radical person keeps on learning even as he (she) "is convinced [that] he is right, but respects another's prerogative to judge himself correct. He tries to convince and convert, not to crush his opponent" (*Education as the Practice of Freedom in Education for Critical Consciousness*, p. 10).

Readers of this issue have the opportunity to examine how Maria Cristina Acosta, Mary Frances Agnello, Brian Beabout, Gina M. Borgioli, Mary Brydon-Miller (and other members of the University of Cincinnati Research Team), Joe L. Kincheloe, Mariana Souto-Manning, Christine Ballengee Morris, Rosalie M. Romano, César Augusto Rossatto, Macy Satterwhite, Dilys Schoorman, Sister Rachel Sena, Shirley Steinberg, and A. Dee Williams answer the question: Is it time to shelve Freire? Their answers are inventive and forthright but diverse, shaded, multilayered, and nuanced. Taken as a whole, their voices are, perhaps, more telling, than they would be if read or listened to in isolation. While authors' topics vary widely, ranging from utilizing a critical pedagogical lens in curriculum integration to the awareness engendered through student teaching abroad, all hold out the possibility of potentially liberatory meaning making within and through diverse contexts. All seem to require readers to question their own ideological stances and accepted

social scripts. Collectively, the authors agree that Freire's ideas remain viable, valuable, even vital in a world that thinks, cares, dialogues, and acts far too little on behalf of everyone, especially the socially, economically, and politically disinherited and exploited.

Reflecting a similar overarching or unifying theme, guest editor Shirley Steinberg notes that the voices represented within this issue emphasize the "the reverberations" of Freire's "radical love." Within each article there is evidence of the need for educators to live out a humility that is both passionate and active in order to recognize, critique, and transform negative or "violent" social constructs. Hope is present for stultifying assumptions to be unearthed and reshaped as authors adopt a critical lens yielding loving action and liberatory awareness. So, regardless of one's perspective on Paulo Freire, much appears to be gained from reconsidering what his perspectives have to offer us. Within this issue, authors' examinations of his life and work continue to generate new hope, much faith, and loving action. In terms of answering our focus question ("Is it time to shelve Freire?"), educators have much with which to work as they hopefully continue to grapple with this question—and others—regarding Paulo Freire's ideas. Therefore, we and our contributors are all indebted to our guest editor, Shirley Steinberg, for overseeing the conceptualization, development, and creation of this issue of the journal.



Paulo Freire