



An Interview with Henry A. Giroux and Joe L. Kincheloe

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In the snowy spring of 2008, The Paulo and Nita Freire International Project for Critical Pedagogy opened in Montreal at McGill University. As part of his Canadian Research Chair, Joe invited critical scholars to join the celebration, Henry was the keynote speaker. Generous in every way, for over 20 years, Henry had been mentor and brother to Joe, supporting him as a scholar, introducing him to others in critical pedagogy, writing letters of support for new positions, and facilitating Joe's publications as he did for many young scholars. Henry's charismatic intellect is infectious, and Joe wanted to capture Henry in an impromptu sit-down at McGill, where we filmed this short interview on Henry's entrance into critical pedagogy. Critical brother to brother, precious moments in the field. Kincheloe died later that year, this was the last interview he conducted with the great influencers of critical pedagogy. srs

Joe Kincheloe: Henry I want to talk to you in particular about the history of critical pedagogy and your role. And don't be modest here. I know that in the spirit of Paulo, that you want to not emphasize your own role

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S. L. Macrine (ed.), *Critical Pedagogy in Uncertain Times*,
Education, Politics and Public Life,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-39808-8_12

in it. But I'd like for you to talk very specifically about the emergence of critical pedagogy and your role in shaping it and the term itself, and what you were doing in the late Seventies.

Henry Giroux: You know it's interesting because my role in critical pedagogy emerges on what should be a central tenant of pedagogy per se, and that is it emerged out of a particular struggle. I was a high school teacher, and I found myself in a class trying to do all kinds of innovative things. The vice-principal came up and he said, "I don't want students sitting in a circle. I want them in a straight line and blah blah blah," and I didn't have an answer for him. I didn't have the theoretical language. Ironically, the week earlier, somebody had given me a copy of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. I was so frustrated that I went home, read the book, I stayed up all night, got dressed in the morning, went to school. I felt my life had literally changed. I mean I felt that it changed because I had a language that all of a sudden seemed to say...to speak very directly about the kinds of issues I was involved in. But more importantly, gave me a way of theorizing that experience and that practice rather than just saying, "I think it works" or "I think it's good" or "students seem to like it." Something was going on that was quite profound for me. It was the beginning of moving from a position of being voiceless and having a voice. And that was my emergence in critical pedagogy. And it's fair to say that certainly Paulo Freire, for me, to talk about the origins of this movement in the United States...while you can talk about Dewey and the social reconstructionists who talked about critical democracy and education...but really never talked about critical pedagogy. Paulo's work is really the first to mock that moment. The archive really should begin there. And I became dedicated. And not just to Paulo's work but to reworking and redefining what critical pedagogy meant from probably that point on—where it really begins is when, in the 1970s, I attempted to do three things. One, I attempted to theorize critical pedagogy through the lens of critical theory. So there was an attempt to sort of link Paulo's work with European intellectual work.

Joe Kincheloe: Which you did in *Theory and Resistance*.

Henry Giroux: Which I did in *Theory and Resistance*. There was also an attempt to move beyond even then, what I thought was a reductionist economic model at work in critical pedagogy. At least at work in the sociology of education, sorry, but we're spilling over. We saw elements of it emerging in work in Madison, Wisconsin, and some other places. And I wanted to fight that. I also thought there was a kind of radical extension biographical work emerging that I thought was very important, but I thought was limited by virtue of its refusal to link the

personal to the public in a way that exemplified the personal, not as a kind of emancipatory moment in itself but one that also needed to be translated. So, we had to understand how private issues translated the public issues. So, there was an attempt then on my part to link critical pedagogy to questions of democracy. And thirdly, I wanted to link our pedagogy questions to social movements. I thought that that was an important issue. And, of course that's really my entry into the field, but it was a field marked by a very peculiar silence on the part of many other people for a number of years. The field was locked up by Routledge (Routledge Press). This is long before you came in. And they were the only people publishing critical educational work. And I could not get *Ideology, Culture and the Process of Schooling* published...

Joe Kincheloe: Until 1981.

Henry Giroux: Until 1981. and I get it published at Temple University Press because I happen to be reviewing a book for them, and the guy said, "You have any manuscripts that I might be interested in?" I gave him that. And he published it. But the fact of the matter is the book had actually been published first by Falmer in England. So that book was first published in England.

Joe Kincheloe: What year?

Henry Giroux: The year before, in 1980. That book came about by Falmer Press in 1980.

Joe Kincheloe: I did not know that.

Henry Giroux: Yes, so it didn't even begin in the United States, which is very interesting. Then when Paulo found out about my work, I then introduced Paulo to Donaldo (Donaldo Macedo). And then later, Paulo got involved with Peter (Peter McLaren). That is really where I mark the beginning of something that has a uniquely American, i.e., United States take on the integration of a kind of Latin American sort of revolutionary kind of pedagogy with one that was more nuanced for the American context.

Joe Kincheloe: So, in as far as the term critical pedagogy is concerned, what's the origin that?

Henry Giroux: Actually, Joe I'll tell you. There are a lot of people who ascribe that term to me, and I am not going to be unhumble... I am not going to suggest that I produced that term, because I actually now can't remember. I know that when I look back at the work, I see it appearing there first, but I know that Roger Simon had talked about critical pedagogy certainly. I know that there was some discussion of it in OISE (Ontario Institute of Studies in Education), but I think it really began in discussions with Paulo because we had rejected the notion of radical pedagogy. I remember speaking with Donaldo and Paulo, and

his point was that as important as that term is, it carried an exclusionary weight to it that would not allow most educators to take the leap and identify with it. So, we thought critical was far more interesting. Now this may have emerged at the same time at OISE, or it may have emerged at the same time in Australia. I don't know. What I do know is that the focus around critical pedagogy as a very significant theoretical body of work as opposed to, let's say, the focus on the political economy of schooling, was what we did. There's no question in my mind. If we can get beyond definitions here, there's no question in my mind that critical pedagogy certainly has a significant investment in a body of theoretical work. I mean I would certainly argue, I may be terribly wrong, but it really does begin in the United States with that work around Paulo in the middle of the Seventies.

Joe Kincheloe: When I wrote the *Critical Pedagogy Primer*, I said that critical pedagogy as we know it in the present era began in the middle of the late Seventies with you. Seems to me that you were the central figure.

Henry Giroux: I don't think of that as terribly untrue, that's for sure.

Joe Kincheloe: Yes, it certainly seemed that way to me in just the exploration and the questions that I'd ask. As far as your relationship with Paulo... obviously we're building this Paulo and Nita Freire center, and you so beautifully put it before that Paulo would never have wanted some type of center dedicated to *him, the person*, that it was about his work, it was about not only reading his work but critiquing his work and moving forward with his work. Just talk to me a little bit about your relationship with Paulo and the influences, the intellectual, scholarly, critical influences that his work and persona had for you?

Henry Giroux: I mean, I think the thing about Paulo that has never failed to not move me, was the extraordinarily richness and originality of his interventions. It's one thing to read his work as we all did. And to recognize the obvious...an assemblage of ongoing brilliant insights. But to be around him... there was a spontaneity coupled with a humility unlike, I must say, anything I have ever seen among a major intellectual. I've never seen anyone who was so humble but yet at the same time had a sense of himself.

Interview: March 13, 2008 Montreal Quebec

Producer: Shirley R. Steinberg

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