

WinkWorld September 2002

Methods and (anti)methods

Created specifically for WinkWorld, 9-1-02, in preparation for CRA, November 2002. Eventually, this will be adapted and used in the introduction to methods in the book about passionate pedagogy, which Dawn and I are writing. We are indebted to Le Putney for digging out the Macedo citations while we are on the ranch in South Dakota. (jw 8-25-02)

Praxis is the union of theory and practice; it is that magic moment when learning is lively because the methods are, not only student-centered, but also theoretically grounded in social justice.

A cautionary and, seemingly, contradictory comment on methods. Depending on the moment, we love them, and we hate them. Joan came to theory through methods; and Dawn came to methods through theory. It was only after years of experimenting with every method imaginable, that Joan came to understand, that methods in isolation can look good, feel good, and even sound good; however, unless methods are tightly linked to the lives of the students, they ignore reality--the reality of the students' world. Dawn, on the other hand, grew up with theory, and it was only after teaching, that she came to appreciate the power of methods.

Any classroom teacher who daily faces 150 secondary students appreciates good methods; any teacher who daily faces 20 wiggling 5-year-olds appreciates good methods. Our goal is that each method we share be firmly grounded in theory. We recognize that each method is only as good as the teacher's own knowledge and passionate commitment to pedagogy.

The methods we share reflect our passion for reading. Whether you are a pre-K, a high school math teacher, or an assistant professor struggling for tenure, we are all linked through literacy. We are all reading teachers, even if we had never thought about it previously. Hopefully, as teachers, we are voracious and passionate readers outside of the classroom, as well. A teacher, who reads continually and loves reading, is a ~real~ reading teacher, far better than even the best methods. However, if we are going into schools to teach tomorrow, we want some solid methods.

Anti-method Pedagogy

Macedo (1997) captures the concept of our own love/hate relationship to methods. Drawing on the works of Freire and Aronowitz, Macedo writes of his notion of anti-method pedagogy.

- Finally, I end this chapter by proposing an anti-method pedagogy that refuses the rigidity of models and methodological paradigms. The Anti-method pedagogy forces us to view dialogue as a form of social praxis so that the sharing of experiences is informed by reflection and political action. Dialogue as social praxis "entails that recovering the voice of the oppressed is the fundamental condition for human emancipation." (from Aronowitz, Stanley, "Paulo Freire's Radical Democratic Humanism," p. 18) The anti-method pedagogy also frees us from the beaten path of certainties and specialisms. It rejects the mechanization of intellectualism. In short, it calls for the illumination of Freire's leading ideas that will guide us toward the critical road of truth, toward the reappropriation of our endangered dignity, toward the

reclaiming of our humanity. No one could argue more pointedly against reducing dialogue and problem posing to a mere method than Freire himself:

Problem posing education is revolutionary futurity. Hence, it is prophetic....Hence it corresponds to the historical nature of man. Hence it affirms men as beings who transcend themselves. Hence it identifies with the movement which engages men as being aware of their incompleteness - an historical movement which has its point of departure, its subjects and its objective.(from Freire, Paulo, cited in Stanley Aronowitz, "Paulo Freire's Radical Democratic Humanism," pp. 11-12.)

The anti-method pedagogy not only adheres to Freire's view of education as revolutionary futurity, it also celebrates the eloquence of Antonio Machado's poem: "Caminante no hay camino, se hace el camino al andar." (Traveler, there is no road. The road is made as one walks.)

Bartolomé (2000) informs our understanding of methods when she writes that effective strategies need to be grounded in the sociocultural context of the students and must have fundamental pedagogical features which cut across strategies because they are, above all, student-centered. She warns teachers of the dangers of reducing complex educational issues to mere methods, without critical reflection of the entire context. She draws on the work of Freire (1987) when he spoke against uncritically importing and exporting methods with no regard for the socialcultural context.

Bartolomé, L. (2000). Effective transitioning strategies: Are we asking the right questions? In J. V. Tinajero and R. A. Devillar (Eds.), *The Power of two languages 2000: Effective dual-language use across the curriculum*. Pp. 142-154. NY: McGraw-Hill.

Macedo, D. (1997). An anti-method pedagogy. In P. F. with & J.W. Fraser & D. Macedo & T. McKinnon & W. T. Stokes (Eds.), *Mentoring the Mentor: A Critical Dialogue with Paulo Freire* (Vol. 60, pp. 1-9). New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.