

The format of the book is accessible and easy to follow. It begins with the history of ALP, setting it within the educational context of 1980s Scotland. There is then a chapter on Freire and his ideas, which introduces some key terms such as *themes*. The body of the text consists of two chapters providing case studies of ALP projects. At the end of the book are some statistical tables, a Freirian glossary and a selected bibliography that has not been updated for this edition. The illustrations are a bit cheesy to the modern sensibility and some parts of the text are anachronistic, but I believe the book captures the flavour of ALP’s work extremely well. It could easily be used by adult education students today to help them think through what a radical approach might mean, and would provide a far more authentic insight than many more recent texts.

The book should not, however, be used as a Freire primer. Given that it was written in 1989, when a relatively small amount of Freire’s work was available in English, the summary of Freire’s philosophy and educational approach is very good. However, there have been many layers of Freire scholarship since then, and the chapter on Freire’s ideas might appear as an incomplete account. In addition, despite being written in relatively plain English, this chapter could still be a bit confusing. It would be best to read this book alongside other accounts of Freire’s ideas and work.

I spent some time considering whether the book is overly aimed at insiders. As with many similar texts based on experience within a specific educational context, knowledge of that context can help the reader understand some of the nuances. Overall, however, I believe that the text should be transparent to most readers, wherever they are located. The black and white photographs illustrating the book and the authors’ efforts to describe their experience in the most straightforward language possible help achieve this transparency.

Throughout the Freire canon, there are surprisingly few accounts of Freirian ideas being applied in a concrete educational situation and surprisingly many discourses on his ideas. *Living Adult Education* reads as pragmatic, inspirational, and insightful. The sections describing the work of 25 years ago are notably fresh and recognizable to any adult educator working in communities facing poverty and other challenges. To answer the question I asked earlier, this book deserves its place in the contemporary Freirian canon by reminding us of the importance of concrete action and of courage in radical educational work.

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RADICALIZING LEARNING: ADULT EDUCATION FOR A JUST WORLD

Stephen D. Brookfield and John D. Holst. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2011, 262 pages.

This very thoughtful and at times provocative book introduces a radical perspective of learning to the field of adult education—“radical” in the sense of being “concerned with

organizing education for and encouraging learning about the creation of democracy in political, cultural, and economic spheres” (p. 4). It is heavily influenced by the work of Gramsci, Marcuse, and other radical educators such as Che Guevara, Nelson Mandela, and Paul Robeson. The book seems to be a natural spinoff of two earlier works by Brookfield and others, including *The Power of Critical Theory* (2004) and *Learning as a Way of Leading: Lessons from the Struggle of Social Justice* (Preskill & Brookfield 2008).

Essentially, the goal of a radical practice is the “deliberate and intentional attempt to help people critique capitalist ideology, envision a truly democratic future, and learn socialist practices” (p. 109) within a context of shared responsibility for ensuring basic survival needs for everyone and fostering, fairness, creativity, and inclusion. The book approaches this task from a pragmatic and somewhat dispassionate perspective where chapters are organized within a traditional perspective of the field inclusive of adult learning, adult development, training, program planning, and teaching adults. However, there are exceptions, such as the chapter about the aesthetic dimensions of learning. Drawing heavily on the work of Marcuse and others, the authors discuss the role of aesthetics (art, music, theatre) in social movements, such as sounding warnings, claiming empowerment, and affirming pride, to mention a few. In addition, they bring aesthetics to life with authentic examples like Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed and the documentary *Amandla!*, which revealed the role of music in the South African struggle against apartheid. In this chapter I found myself taking notes about creative teaching resources for different adult education courses.

One of the most interesting and likely controversial discussions is found in the chapter “The Teaching of Adults,” which attempts to get at the nitty-gritty work of instructing from a radical perspective. If this chapter is read superficially the reader will leave with some general common-sense features that inform a radical practice, such as the importance of illuminating power and hegemony, ways to create a more democratic socialist society, and recognizing that teaching is informed by particular struggles. Although this is informative, more interesting is the implicit message of the authors’ middle-road approach to a radical practice. For example, the authors state that all teaching approaches are appropriate, dependent on context. This perspective neuter practice. It overlooks the unique epistemological foundations of teaching practices. At the same time, the authors state that teachers need to “subvert modes of teaching that are hierarchical, compartmentalized, competitive and individualistic” (p. 108). The triumph of this book is that it takes an unwavering position about the purpose of adult education—that of confronting a capitalist ideology and fostering socialist democracy. It should, therefore, do the same with practice.

Teaching with an activist agenda becomes even more interesting when the authors start to question a core approach long associated with consciousness raising: learner-centred teaching as a means to foster social change. To address the students’ lack of initial experience with socialist democracy, the educator is to use “her power to force students to learn about the full range of alternatives” (p. 117), breaking them of a false consciousness. Only then can “authentic democratic negotiation of curriculum and evaluation . . . begin” (p. 117). Drawing on Gramsci, the authors see the activist educator as a persuader who ironically is encouraged to use his or her authority and power to indoctrinate learners about a critical theory.

A great strength of this book is that it is chock full of examples of social movements (e.g., the role of the African National Congress [ANC] in confronting apartheid in South Africa, the Citizenship Schools organized through Highlander, and activists who played central roles in these movements). It is through these examples that much of the book is brought to life. Of particular interest is the brief discussion of Paul Robeson—an African-American pop-culture singer, the first African-American All-American football player, and an expert on musicology—who “strove to use the Hollywood studio system against itself by promoting films that . . . could help undermine White supremacy” (pp. 166–167). Another individual extensively referred to is the social reformer Che Guevara, who is seen as the epitome of a radical educator and whose conception of hegemony takes on a new face, that of “sacrifice imbued with love and empathy transformed into service” (p. 95). Despite the relevance of these models they unfortunately emerge one-dimensionally, devoid of the complexity and challenges inherent to a radical educator’s role. Most disconcerting is the uncritical and uncontroversial portrayal of Guevara as a prophetic iconic social activist whose contested actions, such as his use of summary executions of informers and deserters without trial and his support for the use of nuclear missiles during the Cuban Revolution, are completely overlooked. Ironically, by not recognizing the inherent shortcomings of these educators who act as models of leadership in the pursuit of a socialist democracy, the authors are promoting a false consciousness not far from what they contest about Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh’s misdirected conception of socialism.

Despite these shortcomings, the authors accomplish much of, if not more than, what they intended. This book, as well as other writings by Brookfield and Holst, offers a confrontational view of adult education that challenges the capitalist ideology, and plays a significant role in introducing and re-engaging the field of adult education in the practice of participatory democracy.

References

- Brookfield, S. D. (2004). *The power of critical theory: Liberating adult learning and teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
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