

## LEARNING FROM THE GROUND UP—GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

Aziz Choudry and Dip Kapoor (Eds.). Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2010, 256 pages.

This book aims to dislocate and rupture orderly, atomized learning spaces by privileging sites of collective action over the sterile confines of typical academic inquiry, making the case that much of the intellectual work of various social movements is unseen but enormously important. One goal of this book is to shed light on sites and forms of knowledge production beyond the academy, avoiding an overly romantic view of activism at the same time as recognizing the intellectual contributions of these engagements. The editors reference Bevington and Dixon (2005), echoing their call for “recognition of existing movement-generated theory and of dynamic reciprocal engagement by theorists and social movement activists” (p. 4).

Organized into three parts, this book offers wide-ranging examples of social movement activism, many of which are anti-colonial and anti-imperialist in their orientation. In the first section, the tensions and challenges of knowledge production and representation in civil society, academe, and social activism are considered. In these chapters, much critique is aimed at the work of non-governmental organizations (in the Philippines, at world summits, and in Europe) and their reproduction of class relations and claims of representing the grassroots (Chapters 2, 3, and 4). The work of broad coalitions and forms of education that enable the development of analytic capacity of subjugated people comprise another theme (Chapters 6 and 7). The second section examines the knowledge production work of unions, worker alliances, and left-party political activism. We learn about moving beyond banking models of labour education (Chapter 9), the power of coalition between workers and academics (Chapter 10), and how the vanguard became distanced from the people (Chapter 11). The third and final section focuses on the knowledge generated from peasant and Indigenous peoples’ struggles. Offering insights into learning through social action are explorations of Dalit movements in India (Chapter 12), tenant farmers in Pakistan (Chapter 13), and points of solidarity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous fishers in Nova Scotia (Chapter 14).

While each chapter gains momentum from its own textured context and reality, certain realizations are apparent in the volume, one being that it is possible to theorize individuals and communities without fragmenting and dislocating them from their culture, histories, and lifeworlds. Another important theme is that spaces for popular/collective action based on the ideals of social justice constitute valid sites of learning and knowledge generation that mirror (if not surpass) the academic integrity and validity of more controlled spaces of inquiry. There is also some contestation regarding what constitutes academic knowledge and who has the authority to produce it. Another theme common to several chapters is the constant positioning and identification of capitalism and its neo-liberal arrangements as the battleground for adult education to enable lasting, structural change.

Capitalism and colonialism are clearly identified as causes of social inequity. The edited volume suggests that social movements should not merely be positioned as struggles to mitigate capitalist-driven market failures or reclaim the excluded and marginalized, but offer micro solutions for a macro problem—as narratives that both replace and displace dominant capitalist ideologies. However, the volume falls short of any actual bridging work of how such localized social movements can inspire broader national/global change.

The book helps draw some commonalities and connections between various social movements occurring in diverse national and community contexts. The expansive geographical span of the included chapters allows readers to gain familiarity with the shared humanity embedded within each story. The book doesn’t pretend to present any grand answers (such as how to dismantle capitalism), and it does not position each narrative/account of social change (or attempts at social change) within success/failure dichotomies. Rather, the focus is on individual and collective transformations and stories of solidarity and resistance against oppression. Social movement activists, academic researchers, and educators should read this volume. Academics are cautioned about assuming a narrow vision of where and how knowledge is created, but are also encouraged to work in solidarity with grassroots movements while not assuming leadership roles. Activists will find the cases contain a breadth of lessons on organizing and maintaining momentum. Educators will have in their hands a wide variety of cases to teach their students about exploitation and marginalization as well as the persistence of various forms of resistance and efforts to create a more just world.

### References

Bevington, D., & Dixon, C. (2005). Movement-relevant theory: Rethinking social movement scholarship and activism. *Social Movement Studies*, 4(3), 185–208.

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## **FLEXIBLE PEDAGOGY, FLEXIBLE PRACTICE: NOTES FROM THE TRENCHES OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

**Elizabeth Burge, Chère Campbell Gibson, and Terry Gibson (Eds.). Athabasca University Press, Edmonton, 2011, 348 pages.**

Flexibility is a concept found in many aspects of life, but probably nowhere is it more actively discussed than in the education sector, where definitions and practices relating to flexible pedagogy are as varied as the people and institutions involved. While recent trends tend to equate flexible education with distance and e-learning, this well-organized