

## BOOK REVIEWS/RECENSIONS

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### ***IN DEFENSE OF THE LIFEWORLD: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ADULT LEARNING.***

Michael Welton (Ed.) (1995). New York: State University of New York Press.

This is a much needed collection of essays at a time when intellectual paralysis seems to be affecting adult education. Dominant approaches established on field-based training and on learning-for-earning models devalue higher order critiques of practices provided by foundational theories. This book engages the reader in a challenging journey that rescues our own humanity, "the fullest development of humankind potential to be self-reflective and self-determining historical actors" (p. 5).

The title of the book, Welton explains, has its roots in the imagery of Jürgen Habermas; "the lifeworld is the realm of intersubjective interaction and adult learning par excellence" (p. 5). The book may be read as an indictment of the already battered andragogical paradigm and the method of self-directed learning as well as of contemporary practices of adult education guided by an instrumental rationality rooted in the organization of work and technology.

The book consists of an introduction by Welton, six chapters and a conclusion. The authors share a common concern with critical social theory although they identify different problems and relate to contemporary post-modern and feminist theories in different ways. Chapter 1, "The Critical Turn in Adult Education Theory," by Michael Welton, provides a thorough explanation of critical theory. He argues that Habermas' social learning paradigm can contribute a normative and theoretical foundation for adult education. Welton deals with Habermas' understanding of the learning process and explores core values of self-clarity, collective autonomy, and social happiness.

Chapter 2, "Transformation Theory of Adult Learning," by Jack Mezirow is in the social reform tradition of American adult education. In fact it appears more rooted in the progressive education paradigm than in critical theory. In clear language and mainly from the perspective of the psychology of learning, Mezirow, nevertheless, touches issues that may be relevant to critical social theory. The chapter focuses on critical reflection that he conceptualizes as central to the task of the adult educator. It also makes substantial points regarding the capacity to create meanings of one's experience through equal opportunity to participate.

Chapter 3, "Critical Commentaries on the Role of the Adult Educator: From Self-Directed Learning to Post-Modernist Sensibilities," by Michael Collins, addresses a very important issue, the ethical agency of the educator of adults. He is critical of the term facilitator that, he says, "belongs more to the argot of

management than to a discourse on education" (p. 95). In his view, the role of the teacher or the role of the adult educator carries with it a sense of engagement and moral force that is not implied in the concept of facilitator. He includes an interesting quotation attributed to the founder of the Highlander Folk School, Myles Horton: "There's no such thing as just being a coordinator or facilitator, as if you don't know anything. What the hell are you around for, if you don't know anything" (p. 95). Collins also calls for a conjunction of knowledge produced in the academy and knowledge produced in popular education and community based initiatives.

Chapter 4, "Motherwork: A Radical Proposal to Rethink Work and Education," by Mechthild Hart, is a powerful chapter that introduces the gender dimension into the discussion of the "lifeworld." She challenges the notion of learning-for-earning by examining an alternative concept of work. I fully concur with Hart when she says that "the issue of gender, or sexual difference, intertwining in complex ways with race, ethnicity, or nationality, is itself irreducible to any of these categories" (p. 106). Hart deals with racism, class, and gender in a manner that is meaningful within the context of the current historical juncture.

Chapter 5, "In Defense of the Lifeworld: A Habermasian Approach to Adult Learning," by Michael Welton, is devoted, to an important extent, to a critical analysis of the constitution of adult education as a field, its boundaries, and the need to develop a new paradigm. I certainly agree with Welton when he asserts that there is an implicit learning theory in the Marxist tradition, made explicit by Habermas, and that this theory has a lot to offer to critical adult education. But I also agree with Donovan Plumb's comments in the critique-conclusion of the book when he writes that "Welton underplays the unrelenting challenges that confront it [adult education] in postmodernity" (p. 208).

Chapter 6, "Declining Opportunities: Adult Education, Culture, and Postmodernity," by Donovan Plumb, pays particular attention to the impact of postmodernity on the emancipatory discursive formation in adult education. It places postmodernity and its complexity at the center of the discussion. Plumb explores the potential impact of cultural changes. He addresses issues that Welton neglects to consider such as the limits of the modernist conceptual emancipatory framework, in this case critical theory, to deal with heterogeneity and difference.

The conclusion of the book actually is a critique that the authors wrote about each other's work. It is a very fine chapter.

The book represents a significant contribution to critical adult educational theory; it is an important landmark for future theoretical developments. The reader, however, closes the book with a sense of incompleteness, of having been presented with many good questions and not many answers. This is due in part to the relative self-containment of each chapter with the exception perhaps of the conclusion. Another reason is the relative theoretical underdevelopment of adult education in general.

The excellent chapters by Welton leave out important questions concerning the articulation of difference in a critical adult education discourse. I think that to some degree Welton is caught in the acrimonious debate that has characterized Franco-German intellectual relations for a long time. A critical appropriation of postmodernist and poststructuralist theories may help to fill gaps in critical adult education theory particularly in dealing with language theory and articulation of difference. Some of the authors in the book made observations in the same line of thought.

In general, the chapters do not contain a theoretical reflection on practice. A critique of popular education practices and other community initiatives, for example, would help to clarify reasons for their marginality. A theoretical reflection on practice would generate new theoretical questions. Collins does open doors in that direction (p. 97).

Finally, throughout the book, there is very little consideration of feminist theories—including feminist educational theories—in relation to critical adult education. Hart made a good effort but her chapter seems somewhat disconnected from the rest. Welton shows in his concluding comments a degree of uneasiness with Hart's chapter. He says, without elaboration, that Hart does not provide us "with a social theoretical justification and dialectical argument for her defense of motherwork." In fact, she does, but mainly from a feminist perspective with which one may agree or disagree. He asked for historical evidence of the revolutionary implications of the idea of motherwork. What about the evidence to support his own paradigm or the workings of critical adult education theory? In fact, Hart's chapter is more historically grounded than any other chapter. After closing this very rich and powerful book I was left with some discomfort, memories of discourses that subsumed gender and race into major projects but left women and minorities almost invisible, almost voiceless.

I am certain that this book will generate a powerful intellectual debate in the adult education community. The debate will help further to clarify the very notion of critical adult education.

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### ***THE DESIGN OF EDUCATIOH (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)***

Cyril O. Houle (1996). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.

If men and women learn in countless situations in all aspects of their lives, either alone or with some kind of guidance, it becomes hard to grasp the scope of adult education and difficult to guide and direct it. But if the situations in which it occurs can be reduced to a manageable number of prototypes,