

Well, you're doing something for yourself, after you quit school at fifteen and you're forty years old. It's a big thing to have a grade twelve education. And you earned it, you didn't just say "I can do that, I can do that and give me my certificate". You earned it, you worked to get it, and it's satisfaction and everybody needs a little bit of satisfaction in their life. That's the way I look at it (p. 219).

Using Horsman's book, those of us involved in adult literacy, basic education and academic upgrading can better understand why women both resist and take part in the programming available for them. We can better understand the way in which their dreams intersect with the often disheartening realities of their day-to-day lives as individuals, family members, community members and workers. As Judy says: "I'm even feeling better just learning, having something else in my mind besides the everyday" (p. 218).

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## **THE POLITICS OF NONFORMAL EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA**

Carlos Alberto Torres. 1990. New York: Praeger Publishers

In his introduction to a slim monograph on Antonio Gramsci and Brazil, Timothy Ireland makes the cryptic observation:

Having worked in the field of Adult Education both at an academic and a practical level, in Britain and Brazil, I have become increasingly impatient of the lack of any really solid theoretical postulates capable of helping us to sustain...the study and practice of adult education.... We have a tendency to reduce the problems of adult education to the field of adult education and not to set education within the social context in which it takes place (p. 1).

*The Politics of Nonformal Education in Latin America* presents us with a mirror which forces us to look more critically at our practice and our lack of theoretical postulates. Much more than a mirror, however, Torres has provided the field a penetrating and, in my opinion, desperately

needed political perspective rarely found in North American adult education literature. This perspective and its attendant theoretical frame is grounded in what Torres calls the “political sociology of education: an interdisciplinary hybrid” (p. xviii) of political science, anthropology, ethnographic study, political economy and history. While the book’s focus is Latin America, its implications for research, theory, and critical analyses of the politics of North American adult education are a very welcome addition to the field.

Torres’s book reflects his “interest in discussing theoretically and explaining the formulation of adult education policy in Latin America” (p. xviii). Latin America has been singled out time after time as the continent where truly promising approaches to adult education and social change are taking place. Many will be acquainted with the advances of popular education in parts of this continent and the legendary impact of Paulo Freire. But most may not be aware that, according to UNESCO, between 1960 and 1970 Latin America experienced the highest rate of educational expansion in the world. In a continent with some 280 million population where 112 million (40 percent) live below the poverty line, this is surely a remarkable achievement. Many will be aware that such educational advances stop short, however, when the topic turns to adult education—in fact adult illiteracy remains largely undented with an estimated 45 to 60 million absolute illiterate adults in Latin America. But few have discussed the question of why adult education did “not follow the same pattern of development as the schooling system” (p. 34) as authoritatively or as eloquently as has Carlos Torres.

The rift between child and adult education policy and resource allocation has its parallels with North America. Adult education is marginalized in practice and study in Latin America, says Torres, since it is consistently marginalized at the policy levels—could we in North America claim a different experience? With certain exceptions, Torres says the Latin American situation is one of marginalization because, “Adult education lacks correspondence to the specific demands derived from the model of capital accumulation...[and] has little utility in the model of political domination (p. 34). There is a “Pedagogy for the North” here if the book is read not only for its theoretical and research-based insights into the Latin American experience, but into our own.

Unfortunately it is a rather frustrating book to read. It suffers from two quite unnecessary problems. The first is a structural problem due, it seems, to indifferent editing. The other arises from Torres’s use of

language and reference. On the first point, it seems that individual chapters have little connection to each other. The reader slowly begins to wonder if certain points have not already been stated, and is finally impelled to ask if certain statements somehow repeat, even contradict something said earlier. Not always sure where one has been, the reader keeps wondering where the book is headed. Frustration builds until it becomes evident that the chapters that seemed like independent essays in fact are independent essays. Like the denouement of a dramatic plot, it is revealed only in the final scene that no attempt was made to give this book a logical structure in the first place.

Torres steps on stage to speak directly to the audience in the eighth and final chapter, saying:

The strategy adopted is to give each chapter a life of its own instead of its being tied to the overall logical sequence and structure of the book.... In many respects, this strategy reflects the way this book has been written: as a series of progressive reports of my ongoing research (p. 145).

Of course there is a coherent argument, but is this really the best way the editors could think of to put this important book together?

On the second point, and this could be attributed in some degree to the compounding effect of the first problem, Torres uses a dense language overlaid with terminology from sociology, anthropology and political science. Within any given chapter, this is not an insuperable problem. Terms become defined when necessary within each of the shorter "essays-chapters". But, put into a book which does not explain itself early on creates a problem whereby definitions for terms such as "nonformal education"—used in the very title—do not appear until chapter Four. The reader is off balance, not always sure what Torres means by his terms, particularly since many terms are not defined and nuances of the terms appear to change through the time frame of the chapter essays, the "series of progressive reports of my ongoing research" (p. 145). Also troubling, one is not certain if Torres intends his observations to be generalized to industrialized countries, to the Northern hemisphere, strictly to Latin America, or to one or more of the countries of Latin America? This tendency to imprecision may be less the fault of the editors and more that Carlos Torres's work spans two hemispheres. He has analyzed Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Columbia, the Dominican Republic

and the socialist environments of Nicaragua, Grenada and Cuba. His social political analyses challenge us to take a more critical macro-political look at our own world of adult education.

Torres' perspective arises from the driving belief that, as Carnoy states in the "Foreword": "Ultimately...it is the state that defines adult education and is the principal beneficiary of its effective implementation" (p. x). Early on Torres states his assumptions that education is comprised of "a complex set of theoretical-methodological controversies" (p. 1) caught in a "constant struggle between alternative rationalities" (p. 2) pivoting on the degree of participation of the citizenry. In chapter One, he situates the struggle in a four model typology beginning with the Modernization-Human Capital model. This model views adult education as a variable in socio-economic growth based on the creation and cultivation of supply and demand. This simplistic consumerism model does not universally apply, and one asks if it even applies across the multi-cultures of Canada and the U.S.A. as universally as politicians would have us believe. The Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Popular Education model is a second approach discussed. This experientially based learning process (the "principal problems of adult education...are political" [p. 8]) is analyzed by Torres across a spectrum from "cultural action" to "conscientization" for social change education. Torres sees a natural link between theory and practice in this model for Latin America and he discusses Freire's influence on literacy in this context. After the decades of liberatory efforts in North America, from Antigonish to Highlander Research and Education Center, one asks why this stream of adult education is not seen as a more viable alternative among educators. Like Ireland, one grows increasingly impatient with the romanticizing of such models and the lack of theoretical discussion and attendant social policy which could help address the painful needs of those in our own Third Worlds here in El Norte.

The third model, as advocated by Dewey and Furter and the international *Faure Report* (1972), has been presented, says Torres, as a cultural strategy for pragmatic renewal and permanent education for the Third World. However, it "presupposes an unlimited confidence in the possibilities of scientific-technical advance for adult education" and never questions "the form of the organization of production, the effects of social hierarchies, and the form of articulation of power and social domination" (p. 14). This is surely an apt description of the hegemony of andragogy, liberal/progressive adult education and, many would add, of continuing professional education and human resource development at work in our

world. "Corporatism" or "Social Engineering" is discussed as model number four, one often imposed by military dictatorships in Latin America to accelerate development through bureaucratic rationality. It leads, typically, to highly structured education systems for the elite with "linkages" to suburban and rural audiences. Some in North America would argue that this is the institutionalization process which literacy and the wider field of adult education is evolving into. Clearly, each of these four Latin American models differs in quality, not in kind, from the North American experience.

In chapter Three, Torres discusses the political economy of Latin America, indicating where education and policy planning have worked together to conspire against the "structural location" of adult literacy—a world often comprised of "subordinate classes within the Latin American economies" (p. 38). As Torres says, "Latin American history is rich in valuable experiments in adult education" (p. 39) and he examines the literacy campaign experiences and levels of campaign success in Cuba, Brazil and Chile extrapolating principles of political economy from each in this chapter. These experiences are seen in contrast to those of capitalist Mexico which are analyzed in chapter Four. In a chapter (previously published in Mexico) Torres provides an intensive study of Mexican adult education policies from 1976-1988 and points to a number of significant achievements. He concludes with a research agenda which, he says, should be conducted through participatory research to resolve certain issues of literacy and policy in Mexico.

Cuba, Nicaragua and Grenada are discussed in chapter Five as three examples of countries in transition to socialism. Like the preceding chapter, this one provides solid recapitulations of the literacy movements in each of these countries. Torres analyzes the remarkable successes in literacy advancement in each of the reformist countries and discusses both the educational changes as well as the implicit contradictions among each of the three socialist experiences. He also draws some concluding lessons for discussion—"lessons" which raise important points on the value of materialism, the impact of moral incentives, the role of centralization vs autonomy in literacy campaigns, the debate over issues of quality vs expansionism, and the limiting or facilitating role of bureaucratic power in the advancement of literacy education. Such points need to be discussed in light of the recent failure of Soviet communism, recalling, for instance, that the famous 1919 *Decree on Illiteracy* in Russia made it illegal to be illiterate and "a criminal offense to refuse to teach or study" after the revolution (Eklof, p. 131). "At what

price literacy"? is one question; "At what cost a century of failed illiteracy initiatives"? is another. The value of this book is that it precipitates discussion based on carefully analyzed adult education experiences in a range of Latin American countries and does not miss the lessons to be learned from the pivotal importance of citizenry involvement in each of these countries.

Chapter Six is worth the price of the book. Torres takes on fundamental issues of our field asking if our plethora of terminology, for instance, arises from "confused theory" (p. 111). He asks, "Adult education for whom?" (p. 113) and challenges our assumptions of who should be served in Latin American countries—assumptions which have immediate relevance in the U.S. and Canada. He discusses the link between nonformal (literacy) education and development, raising the truly important point that the "contribution of [adult] education to growth is smaller than the early human capital theorists and development economists thought" (p. 116). This observation has recently been corroborated among Canadians and work place literacy as well (Blunt, 1990). Torres goes on to provide a brilliant discussion of the role of the capitalist state in adult literacy education: how it functions to legitimate and reproduce the state and why "the capitalist state addresses the needs of the masses by means of adult education programs, instead of simply leaving them alone" (p. 119)? He concludes the chapter with another previously published discussion, "Is the state a problem-solving agent"?

Chapter Seven examines theoretical and methodological perspectives as they apply both to Latin America and the Caribbean. Here, Torres more closely analyzes research—research agendas, approaches, theories and roles in the face of class conflict and social movements. It is one of the few thoroughly informed discussions of research and public policy which is available in the field today. Torres reviews the role of adult education within welfare policies, educational policies and areas such as illiteracy, workers' education and rural extension. The importance of understanding non-government and government policies is underscored by Torres throughout this chapter.

In his closing chapter, the author provides a summary and some conclusions, based on his conviction that "without a consistent theory of the state and politics, it will be impossible to understand the politics of nonformal education and nonformal education as politics in Latin America, and in the industrialized world as well" (p. 145). Torres ends with this sobering thought: "New research programs can produce a new,

fresh look at all these conflicting scenarios. It may perhaps be too naive to hope that these new research agendas will be developed from, and be informed with, theoretical rigor, progressive politics, and human compassion" (p. 151).

Given that the language in this book is difficult, that the sequencing of chapters lacks editing logic, and that it focuses on countries which are discussed only rarely—and they typically only in international contexts—I find myself echoing Torres's comment: it is probably naive to hope that new research or practice will result from this book in literacy or mainstream adult education. However, if educators are to develop the theoretical postulates for the field which Ireland and so many others continue to ask for, we will need to look beyond our own borders for inspiration. This book, I would suggest, can take us a long way towards that goal.

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#### UNIVERSITY ADULT EDUCATION IN CRISIS

John McIlroy and Bruce Spencer. 1988. Leeds: Leeds Studies in Adult and Continuing Education

At first glance, Canadian adult educators might well question the relevance of a book which is clearly based in the British university adult education system. The richness of this book, however, lies in examining the similarities rather than the differences between those two contexts. Even the casual reader can draw numerous, disconcerting parallels between the bleak British scenarios and the current situation of adult and continuing education within Canadian universities. An in-depth examination of those similarities is instructive. It provides useful insights into the structures and political pressures, limitations and