

## **BOOK REVIEWS/RECENSIONS**

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### **CLASS, IDEOLOGY AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION**

Will Cowburn. 1986. London, New York, Sydney: Croom Helm Ltd. Radical Forum on Adult Education Series, Jo Campling, ed.

This series provides a forum of discussion for critical analysis of the contradictions within education and presents some of the current initiatives to create education for liberation and social change. Unfortunately, the typeface and layout of yet another poorly produced Croom Helm text did not make my review pleasurable.

Developed from Cowburn's dissertation, this book presents a Marxist analysis of the practice and ideology of community education in Britain. The central purpose of Cowburn's inquiry was to determine why community education came to exist and what role it has played vis-a-vis class relations and class struggle. The focus is on mainstream community education activities organized around community schools and community colleges, not the radical activities as discussed and proposed by Lovett. Using the major concepts of class, educational reform and ideology, Cowburn attempts to reveal what is hidden in the notion of community education and to weave a picture of community education as an instrument of capitalism. His analysis occurs at several levels. In the first half of the text, Cowburn builds the framework for his critique of present day community education. Cowburn argues that all reforms contain a preservation/alternation contradiction. His analysis of the current rhetoric of community education is particularly powerful. He reveals how the middle class has become the universal norm and the working class the problem. We see how the language of educational policy has become less vulgar, particularly regarding the perspective of the working class as an inferior group, and how the current rhetoric continues on with the same agenda, using more deceitful language.

Cowburn continues with his critical analysis in the form of a case study of a community school, which includes textual analysis of the publications of a community education organization. Using

questionnaire and interviews, he concludes that little changes have occurred in spite of some "radical" views held by the principal and the community tutor. Cowburn supplements his analysis with revealing excerpts from interviews with teachers, but, curiously, he did not interview any of the parents.

In the second part of his book, Cowburn analyzes several community projects which he views as examples of community education as it should be. Using the stories of several members of the working class who became involved in community-based projects sponsored by a local municipal council, Cowburn describes a different kind of community education - one that is not imposed, but managed by and for the working class. He found that a critical element in the success of these projects was the support of a local community college which offered short courses which supported the self-education process. Background information about the projects placed in the appendix would have been more useful in the main body of the text. Even with this added information, however, there was limited data from which to draw any conclusions as to why these projects emerged when and where they did.

In the final part of the book, Cowburn discusses strategies for exploiting the contradictions within education in order to bring about opportunities for self-education of the working class. Some of the strategies include moving education into venues not solely concerned with education and devolving the management of these activities to the people themselves. Other strategies emphasize the importance of involving all the staff of community schools and considering working class people as equal inservice participants. He also stresses the need to develop short courses at community colleges to enable the self-education process and to develop working class intellectuals. Cowburn thinks that creating educational consortiums would help provide such courses.

Cowburn's work makes an important contribution to critical inquiry in adult education, but it is not without some limitations. I was quite surprised, given that the text was published in 1986, to find sexist language used throughout the text, which persisted, most annoyingly, even as Cowburn discussed women's learning experiences. His use of sexist language was, I suppose, not surprising given that there was also an absence of any recognition of the interrelatedness of gender, race and class within capitalism. Although Cowburn does make it clear that he is presenting a class-based analysis, his failure to acknowledge these other issues suggests a very limited understanding of the developments within

Marxist theory, in particular, those contributions made by feminists. The author's exploration of those self-education projects he found worthwhile was limited and did not parallel his detailed attention to the etiology of mainstream community education.

The main strength of Class, Ideology and Community Education lies in its clear theoretical framework. The discussion regarding educational reforms I found particularly revealing as well as the attention to the use of language as a mystifying tool. A further strength of Cowburn's analysis lies in his attempt to provide a balance between criticism and vision, which many others presenting a critical perspective of education often fail to consider. With these limitations in mind, this text is recommended to those concerned with community education and to those interested in the growing body of research which makes the everyday world of adult education problematic.

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### **LEARNING FOR LIFE: POLITICS AND PROGRESS IN RECURRENT EDUCATION**

F. Molyneux, G. Low, and G. Fowler, eds. 1988. London: Croom Helm.

This new volume in the Radical Forum on Adult Education Series is apparently a collection of papers presented at Britain's Associate for Recurrent Education (ARE) 1984 annual conference in Sheffield. The book's purpose, according to Molyneux, the ARE president, is to shift away from the "outmoded apprenticeship view of education" by presenting "many important viewpoints against a background of current party-political belief". Molyneux intends to push the case for "a national articulation in political terms of an alternative recurrent education based model" in the face of an increased post-school publicly financed learning opportunities for adults.

This work is organised into three main sections: "Ten Years of Change", "The Politicians and Recurrent Education", which includes policy statements of the major political parties in the U.K., and "Recurrent Education in Practice". Bibliographic notes on the authors of the twenty-nine chapters, a list of abbreviations, and an index are also included.

A few chapters stand out. In his well-written and clearly