

## Book Reviews/Recensions

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### CRITICAL PEDAGOGY & CULTURAL POWER

D. W. Livingstone, ed. 1987. Toronto: Garamond Press.

The crisis in Marxist and neo-Marxist thought has resulted in a variety of responses. Some intellectuals have ditched the whole legacy; others have responded by exploring anew difficult and applied questions. *Critical pedagogy & cultural power* is a serious and very honest attempt by a number of writers—many with Canadian affiliations—to take this second route.

The book is a contribution to the wider area of 'cultural studies' that over the past 30 years or so has emerged as a discrete field of academic inquiry; in effect, one created from within the neo-Marxist, humanist tradition that found expression in the late 1950s and early 1960s in the theoretical works of Richard Hoggart, Edward Thompson and Raymond Williams. Hoggart's and Williams' work rescued the notion of culture from its more elitist connotations and reworked important ideas within Marxism, especially the concept of 'consciousness,' while Thompson's historical sociology emphasized agency: people making their own history.

During the 1960s and 1970s, this tradition was forced to engage a variety of other Marxisms, some friendly, some hostile. In the 1970s, the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies became both a focus and an inspiration for work in this field, much of which addressed educational problems thereby placing in a wider social and cultural framework issues that many educators tend to examine in isolation. This tradition, therefore, is one of the most fruitful and enduring outcomes within English speaking neo-Marxism of the Marxist revival of the late 1960s and 1970s. It continues to enrich and define socialist humanism and serves as a solid base to engage enriching European ideas. Raymond Williams' more recent theoretical work is an example.

Written in this tradition, *Critical pedagogy & cultural power* is a collection of essays compiled and introduced by David Livingstone. It has its origins, we are told, in a study group at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Some of the essays were apparently presented as papers to the study group, others, it seems, were invited. There is a loose theoretical theme holding the book together—I will come to that in a minute—but one has to say that the overall impression is that it was assembled in a hurry, rather than edited. Although gathered under four general headings—"Cultural paradigms," "Ideologies and education," "Schooling & skilling," and "Political practice,"—each contribution is a stand alone piece. Furthermore, they

appear not to have been written for the same readership. In places, the study group appears intent on talking to itself; paragraphs run well beyond a page; the discourse assumes much prior reading (even study group attendance). These are not chapters for a wider readership. But in other places the essays are well written; it is almost as if the further the author is away from Toronto and the study group, the clearer her or his thinking.

The loose theme providing the theoretical spine that attempts to hold the book together is the coupling of two organizing concepts: 'cultural power' and 'critical pedagogy'. In his introduction, Livingstone sketches what he terms a "hegemonic crisis" in advanced capitalist societies: a social crisis marked by the weakening of subordinate groups' acceptance of the dominant social order. In other words, most ordinary people do not *believe* in 'the system', but out of economic necessity they comply with its demands. If they don't work, they and their children will either starve or be forced to rely on ever decreasing welfare services and private charity. By 'cultural power', Livingstone means something like the ability of particular groups—his interest is in subordinate ones—to express within their own group and to society as a whole their beliefs, values, meanings and aspirations. The second concept, 'critical pedagogy', owes much to Freire and refers to educative work that is designed to develop cultural power among subordinate groups. Livingstone identifies "families, the mass media and schools" as "the prime educative agencies" in advanced capitalism (p. 5). Surprisingly, he omits 'work'; nor does he talk of other important sites where adults interact in everyday life and within which values and meanings are formed and transformed.

Space does not allow consideration of all of the essays in the book, hence what follows are brief comments about five; hopefully, this selection provides some insight into the diversity of the chapters. The first substantive essay is by Philip Corrigan who, elsewhere, has contributed much to our understanding of the state. This essay, however, is an unfortunate opening chapter. Corrigan sets out to discuss ways of thinking about schooling and to relate these ideas to the nature and role of the state. In a potentially interesting way, he draws on both his British research and more recent Canadian work. The result, however, is a premature paper; I do not know how long Corrigan had been in Canada before the paper left him, but reading it one continually has the feeling that this is fundamentally a British theoretical essay spiced with last minute Canadian illustrations. For the reader with 'Study Group 501' or an equivalent prerequisite, neither this nor the density of the piece may be a disadvantage; read and reread, this is a rich paper; but in the context of this book, it does not work and accordingly gets the book off to a poor start.

One of the essays that tries to remain close to the theoretical thrust of the book, in form as well as in spirit, is Edmund Sullivan's critique of television. His focus is the "culture of television"; he argues that whether we watch it or not, it is "the most powerful instrument for value formation within our culture" (p. 58). Sullivan then builds the case for a critical pedagogy of the mass-media, relates it to social power and then to trace its contours. Sullivan

is very skilled at making macro-micro links. For example, in one section he suggests that we live in an age of "decadence" and cultural decline and explores the ways in which the dominant social order responds to this and how the media, in particular television, are an essential element in that response. One political strategy is to deflect attention elsewhere: the Soviet Union. But as Sullivan then argues, the Russians are not at all responsible for acid rain, support for Pinochet, the decline of cities and so forth. An immense military arsenal is justified by way of reference to the Soviet threat, yet when we walk through a video parlor, a toy store or a shop selling pornographic material extolling violence against women we are confronted with a "preoccupation with violence" that cannot be blamed on the Russians.

In the same section, Satu Repo uses concepts derived from Gramsci to look at the worldview of working people and two contrasting ideological discourses directed at them: (1) the weekly tabloids that greet us at the supermarket checkout; (2) a media educational campaign conducted by a labor union (CUPE). One of the strengths of Repo's essay is the way in which she is able to apply Gramscian concepts and insights derived from the British cultural studies work to Canadian situations; the transition is much smoother than Corrigan's forced mesh. There is, however, an inclination towards oversimplification. For example, Repo chides the union (CUPE) for conducting its campaign in the *Globe and Mail* which, she suggests, is a paper that "workers are least likely to read" (p. 95). As those with any sustained experience of unionized workplaces know, the dynamics of learning and leadership are much more complex than this. What is important in a campaign such as the one she discusses is that 'the message' is disseminated to the on-the-job educators, the people who by way of quiet conversation, speeches at meetings, pinning things on notice boards and so forth help make and remake working peoples' worldview. Embedded within this particular paragraph is a reading of working class culture and a pessimism with respect to work as an educative site that is just too dismissive; it closes off any sense of possibility rather than looks for spaces and openings. Nevertheless, this piece generally offers a good example of ways in which overseas theoretical insights can inform a discussion of Canadian research.

Written in a generally accessible style is Jane Gaskell's contribution on gender and skill. She opens with her core premise: "the notion of skill is central to the way inequality is justified in the workplace" (p. 137) and from there examines how skill comes to be defined, its relationship to ideas about women's work and women's pay and the role education and training plays in all of this. Much of this has been discussed by Gaskell elsewhere, but that makes this contribution no less valuable. She deals very neatly with the relationships under consideration, but remains, I feel, imprisoned by the training model she critiques; education, schooling and training are pressed too tightly together, almost as synonyms, and it is hard to see where she would offer a critical pedagogy other than in schools and colleges.

In the same section—"Schooling & skilling"—Roger Simon's "Work experience" is probably the best piece in the book. Like Gaskell, Simon has

the ability to introduce quickly the ideas with which he proposes to work. Gaskell considers 'skill'; Simon considers 'experience'; both articles complement each other nicely. Simon opens his essay by treating as problematical the notion of "experience"; while it "may provide powerful messages about the world we live in, it contains no guarantees that it will generate the insights necessary to make its 'truth' transparent" (p. 155). He sets his theoretical framework early, succinctly and with a greater clarity than some of the writers on which he draws; he then presents us with an illustrative, ethnographic case study of how one student in a 'co-operative education program' "produced a particular understanding of herself and her work" (p. 156) in a day care center. The point of the essay is to show how the production, regulation and legitimation of experience, such as that in school based 'work experience' programs, structures subjectivity.

These brief comments hopefully point to some of the strengths of the book. Despite the problems with the book's assembly, the organizing theme linking cultural power with critical pedagogy is sound. Where an essay offers both a critique of some aspect of cultural life followed by an outline of the cracks and spaces within which critical pedagogy can take place, the book fulfills its aims. At the same time, there are a number of concerns that need to be thought through by adult educators interested in the general thrust of work on 'critical pedagogy'.

The problem of reader accessibility is a good place to start. While I readily concede the place of theoretically complex works, I am not at all convinced that books that purport to be written for 'educators' should aspire to enter into discourse at this more complex level. If critical pedagogy is to have any meaning and any possibility, then it needs to be explored in dialogue with educators. But who are the educators? One of the disturbing trends in much of the radical education literature is the tendency of authors based in academic institutions to continually impose a K-PhD vision of education and to define educators accordingly. This doesn't happen all the time in this book, but it happens too often. What we see here is a hint of the notion of the privileged intellectual and an accompanying dismissive attitude towards working people and their cultural organizations, including the labor movement. What is lacking in so much of this work is any sense of the dynamics of education in everyday life. Adults interact with each other in a variety of formative sites; as Raymond Williams has taught us, values and meanings are in a constant state of formation and transformation. Within each of these formative sites there are educators, adult educators; not people with a diploma or a degree that labels them as such, but men and women who shape everyday knowledge and opinion, who interpret the world, and who contribute actively to the making and remaking of meanings and values. If we accept Livingstone's notion of a "hegemonic crisis," then it follows that there are many sites of formative influence within which a critical pedagogy can be developed. But this requires radicals to rethink notions of education, to adopt a more inclusive definition of educator and to write in a way that promotes much more symmetrical dialogue with these educators.

It is the narrow view of education and educators that limits the value of *Critical pedagogy & cultural power*, at least if it is read solely on its own terms. And there is a danger that because of the increasing specialization of our field, we adult educators will fall into that trap; a danger that the book will be seen simply as another useful source of readings for the sometimes obligatory, single semester, birds-eye view sociology of adult education course that decorate our graduate programs. Alternatively, we can see this and related work as presenting adult educators with a challenge. This decade there has been a debate in our own literature about the theoretical shallowness of adult education research. Cultural studies have much to teach us; and we, potentially, have much to contribute to the development of cultural studies. The challenge presented by *Critical pedagogy & cultural power* is to take the ideas and insights offered and to employ them as theoretical tools in order to open up the concept of education in ways that extend critical pedagogy into the everyday lives of adults.

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