

Book Reviews/Recensions

INTERNATIONAL ISSUES IN ADULT EDUCATION SERIES, VOL. 2. CITIZENSHIP AS POLITICS: INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES FROM ADULT EDUCATION.

Emilio Lucio-Villegas (Vol. Ed.), Peter Mayo (Series Ed.). Sense Publishers, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 2009, 180 pages.

Over the last 30 years, adult educators have produced an expansive body of knowledge on the theory of democratic education and citizen participation, as well as pedagogical practices for the knowledge, values, and skills of active citizenship. *Citizenship as Politics* arrives in the already crowded field of citizenship learning, and is positioned by its editors as a contribution to adult citizenship education as a response to neo-liberalism, xenophobia, and the problematic discourse of “lifelong learning.”

The complexities of this field are acknowledged early on by series editor Peter Mayo, who frames the text as, in part, a call to understand the relationship between citizenship, education, and neo-liberalism as not only a political response by citizens toward neo-liberal policy, but also a recognition that “the citizen” is formed within the neo-liberal organization of state–market relations. This is an important point to be made to citizenship educators, who can find themselves trapped in the warring polemics of “good citizenship.” Thankfully, those polemics are largely absent from this collection, although the equation of good citizenship with participation is present throughout. In this way, the terrain of debate is kept solidly on the ground of neo-liberalism versus democracy, rather than the more complex articulation of capitalism versus democracy.

Citizenship as Politics will perhaps be most useful to students exploring the diversity of avenues that scholarship on citizenship and adult learning can take. The chapters do not share, or in some cases clearly articulate, a theoretical framework, a political orientation, methodological considerations, or an organizational scheme. This diversity, however, is not a benefit to this text, or in the multiple texts of citizenship produced annually. Rather, students are in need of textual resources that allow them to see the development of theory in multiple locations, experiences, and cases. This kind of knowledge dissemination better allows students to comprehend the arguments of a field rather than disjointed knowledge on disparate cases. The crowdedness of citizenship learning scholarship can be better understood with more conceptual clarity that allows students and scholars to trace the movement of particular ideologies and theoretical frameworks. If we understand citizenship as a dialectical relation, a phenomenon that emerges through the interplay of local historical conditions and larger state and international movements of political economy, then it is these local conditions that provide us with insight into the nuances and possibilities of democratic education. Chapters in the text such as Astrid von Kotze’s case study of South Africa and Jim Crowther and Ian Martin’s discussion of Scotland stand out in this regard.

A chief weakness of the text is that while the multiple authors suggest the presence of differing perspectives on citizenship, politics, and the relation between the two, the reader does not emerge with a sense of the content, assumptions, or positions of these perspectives. This feeling may in large part be due to structural issues in the text. Emilio Lucio-Villegas has not provided an adequate introduction to the text, instead combining much of what would have been useful to frame the other chapters into a verbose chapter on participatory budgeting.

Further, as a critical adult educator I do not find much within the text that moves beyond the humane liberalism of social democratic politics. Thus, these multiple perspectives are in reality confined to a rather narrow political field. For example, while Andruske’s chapter on care work as caring citizenship provides a good overview of Nancy Fraser’s work on citizenship, dependency, the state, and women’s poverty, her argument to include women’s affective labour in the domain of liberal citizenship ultimately misses Fraser’s (1997) distinction between affirmative and transformative politics.

One interesting exception to this critique is an ongoing discussion across a few chapters of the role of democratic adult educators vis-à-vis the state. The assertion that adult educators can position themselves both in and against the state is certainly a worthwhile debate for the field to engage in. Our discussion of this issue would be expanded by reference to Peter David Thomas’s (2009) excellent new work on Gramsci, which raises the issue of the state itself, rather than policy content, as a target of transformation.

In conclusion, it is necessary to raise an issue about this text that may be perceived as superficial griping: copy editing. I hesitate to raise this problem given my own experience with the difficulties of producing a manuscript without assistance from professional editors, but the pervasiveness of this problem in today’s publishing environment convinced me otherwise. I settled on the notion that if those ultimately responsible for putting a book on the shelves heard enough dissatisfaction from their readers, they might take steps to ameliorate the situation. *Citizenship as Politics* has more typos, grammatical errors, and spelling mistakes than one should see in such a text. The larger problem, however, is that the translated sections of the text have not been sufficiently edited, and at times the cadence, phrasing, and vocabulary choices present significant barriers to its comprehensibility. This is a disservice to the authors who have clearly put much energy, thought, and integrity into their chapters and to the translators who have undertaken the extremely difficult task of translating academic work.

References

- Fraser, N. (1997). *Justice interruptus: Critical reflections on the “postsocialist” condition*. New York: Routledge.
- Thomas, P. D. (2009). *The Gramscian moment*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill.

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