



education review // reseñas educativas

editors: gene v glass gustavo e. fischman melissa cast-brede

a multi-lingual journal of book reviews

June 7, 2010

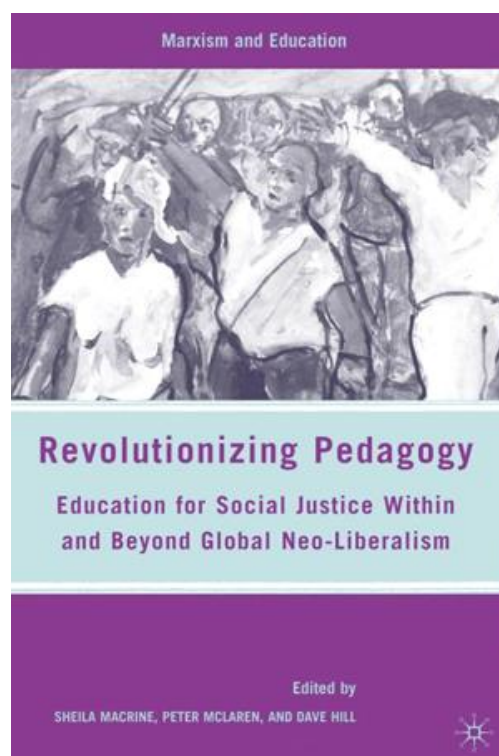
ISSN 1094-5296

Macrine, Sheila; McLaren, Peter & Hill, Dave. (Eds.) (2010)
*Revolutionizing Pedagogy: Education for Social Justice Within and Beyond
Global Neoliberalism*. NY: Palgrave Macmillan/St. Martin's.

Pp. 226 ISBN 978-0230607996

Reviewed by Samuel Day Fassbinder

The most puzzling reality of our present-day world society is that it currently has the wherewithal to be able to solve all of its social problems, as it itself defines them – pollution, resource shortage, poverty, violence, hunger, disease, and so on — and that it could do so in a few short years if it truly made an effort -- but that it is nowhere close to actually doing so. What makes this more puzzling is that the international conflicts which characterized world society are no longer in evidence, and so world society today is united under one model of global governance. The “Cold War” between the United States and the Soviet Union ended nearly two decades ago, and the various other hindrances to the creation of what the senior George Bush called the “New World Order” have been integrated into the



Citation: Fassbinder, Samuel Day. (2010 June 7) Review of *Revolutionizing Pedagogy* by Macrine, Sheila; McLaren, Peter & Hill, Dave. (Eds.) *Education Review*, 13. Retrieved [Date] from <http://edrev.asu.edu/reviews/rev929.pdf>

larger economic and political system. Thus the social conflicts which characterized the societies of tribes, of empires, and of competing nation-states have, despite trivial exemptions, ended.

Of course, this reality is “puzzling” only if we don’t look at how world society is actually structured. In this regard economic statistics are telling. World society is economically structured as a pyramid, with 793 billionaires at the top of the pyramid and a bottom half of the human race living off of less than \$2.50/day. In terms of power, world society is governed by a political elite which exists largely to serve the profit motives of the corporations owned by the financial elite and to protect principles such as “property” and “money” wherein the elite retain and expand their advantages, and wherein everyone else is motivated to strive for improvements in their own personal status within the framework of the system.

To what do we owe the social order? There certainly is an element of rationality to the social order, but just as human rationality does not compel people to believe any particular set of beliefs, so we might look to explain why a society is organized as it is by looking at what it believes. And we can understand what it believes by looking at what it does. Monuments, of course, are the first line of evidence for the social investigator.¹

The ancient Egyptians, for instance, believed in an afterlife that would be somewhat like the lives they led, and so they built giant pyramidal tombs for their pharaohs in which necessities for the imagined afterlife could be stored. In studying the ancient Egyptians, then, we can see how civilization works as a rational advance for human societies: each society creates institutions on the basis of belief systems (e.g. beliefs about the afterlife), and the institutions (in this case the various Egyptian kingdoms) in turn create monuments (the Pyramids). In much the same way we might look at our own monuments to power, our corporate

Sheila Macrine is a professor of teacher education at Montclair State University. She has been a school psychologist and a reading specialist. Her research focuses on connecting the cultural, political, institutional and feminist contexts of institutional and personal contexts of pedagogy and learning theory.



¹ The work of Lewis Mumford, especially of *Technics and Civilization* (1966) and *The Pentagon of Power* (1964) is a testament to the fruitfulness of this line of exploration.

skyscrapers and factory farms and global networks of communication and transportation, to discern what the ruling beliefs of our society really are, as going beyond the political documents which announce our “rights” and claim that we’ll solve our social problems, all of which signifies what we merely profess.

Revolutionizing Pedagogy: Education for Social Justice Within and Beyond Global Neoliberalism is an edited volume about education. But it isn’t about education in the sense of learning how to fit in with the existing social order. Rather, the ten essayists whose works are featured in this edited volume wish to bring our institutions more in line with what we profess to believe, and in doing so create educational systems which might actually work toward solving social problems.

Disciplinarily, this book falls in the genre of sociology of education, as currently performed against the backdrop of neoliberal political economy which has dominated world society since the 1980s. Its primary audience appears to be that of professors in education programs (as well as of that portion of the intelligentsia which calls itself “interdisciplinary,” which would include me). Perhaps teachers and activists would also be interested in the material in this book. It does an admirable job of introducing many of the major themes of its genre of writing. Its writers are, on the whole, accessible and direct, and this anthology might therefore make a good introductory volume for a course on education and neoliberalism, if such a thing can still be funded in this day and age.

Much of the philosophy of education used in this volume is “Marxist,” a word which doesn’t really mean a whole lot in itself. The editors’ introduction, though, specifies “the pedagogy of critique,” in which a complex relationship is assumed between economy and “the production of subjectivities under capitalism” (p. 4) which, in turn, can be taught to students, thus making them aware of the wealth pyramid and “mak(ing) it possible to see that things do not have to be as they are, and in such a way, organizes people for change by recognizing their theoretical frameworks.” It

Peter McLaren is a Professor of Education at the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, University of California at Los Angeles. His published writings deal with traditional schooling, media and popular culture, and education as a revolutionary act.



is, however, not always a sure thing that students will perceive their “interests” as congruent with the creation of a global alternative to the wealth pyramid – but there really isn’t much of an alternative for the teachers. Neoliberalism itself compels teachers to be both for one’s interests and against neoliberalism, or the other way around.

There are, as stated above, ten essays in this collection. Some of them define neoliberalism itself as the main social problem to be solved. Others look at various local contexts (Chile, South Africa), and examine how neoliberal policy exacerbates those problems. There is a general problem-solution format to each of these essays, in which the problem takes shape within the political economy of neoliberalism (sometimes the problem is characterized as neoliberalism itself), and

For Jill Pinkney Pastrana, author of Chapter 1, the problem is fundamental class inequity in Chilean society. The educational system is seen as typifying (and exacerbating) this inequity. The lot of educators and students has improved economically since the dictatorship ended in 1989, but the rules governing education which were imposed under the dictatorship were not fundamentally changed, and so the classism perpetuated by the Chilean education system remains. The result of all this has been a continuing student revolt, leading to a “Revolucion Pinguina” of 2006-2007, which changed the political climate of Chilean education. The politics of Chilean education, Pinkney Pastrana argues, has yet to be determined.

Chapter 2, authored by Salim Vally, Enver Motala, and Brian Ramadiro, is about South African education, which does its job against a backdrop of rather severe poverty. Hearings were held in 1998 which determined that “inability to afford school fees and other costs such as uniform, shoes, books, stationery, and transport was one of the major obstacles blocking access to education.” (p. 47) The upshot of the hearings was that a new agency, the Education Rights Project, was formed in South Africa in 2002. Thus South African activism continues to this day to focus upon the right of access to education.

Dave Hill teaches at Middlesex University and is Visiting Professor of Critical Education Policy and Equality Studies at the University of Limerick, Ireland.



Chapter 3 is about the corporatization of public education in the United States, and here author Pepi Leistyna criticizes neoliberal education as itself the problem, for the sweet deals made between the Federal and state governments and private, for-profit testing corporations. Leistyna then asks, “what can educators do?” (p. 79) Educators can, as suggested, “learn how to be more effective agents of change” (p. 82), perhaps in hopes that someday an effective political mobilization against corporatized education can somehow manifest itself.

Chapter 4 is an interview conducted by Sebastjan Leban with noted proponent of critical pedagogy and UCLA professor Peter McLaren, in which McLaren discusses his work to create “an activist movement toward a postcapitalist alternative” (p. 89) to the existing order. In this interview McLaren discusses a number of different topics, including the challenge to marxist thought by postmodern academics, colonialism, multiculturalism, and class struggle.

Chapter 5, by Dave Hill, is a summary of neoliberal and neoconservative government policy in the US and the UK over the past three decades, and of its impact upon schools. Hill characterizes neoliberalism and neoconservatism differently, the latter being characterized by an emphasis upon “culture wars.” For Hill, however, the economic upshot of both of these trends is “class war from above.” Chapter 6 is Wayne Au’s argument against “mechanical Marxist” critique of the schools and in favor of a “dialectical Marxist” critique of the schools. Au does not want to argue that schools are just another repressive organ of the capitalist state: rather,

Schools, on behalf of the state-superstructure,
have to simultaneously accomplish the
fundamentally contradictory goals of reproducing
the social and material relations of capitalist
production while hegemonically working to win
the “spontaneous consent” of the
students/workers through appeals to individual

equality within the educational and social meritocracy. (p. 159)

There is, then, room for resistance within the schools, at least as Au sees them.

Chapter 7 is an unusual essay by Joao M. Paraskeva, discussing aspects of recent political and educational history in the United States in terms of what author Paraskeva calls “neo-radical centrism,” apparently his name for neoliberalism. Paraskeva depicts, choosing different details, the same “class war from above” that one reads in the Hill text.

Chapter 8, an essay by John Smyth, emphasizes “critical teaching as the counter-hegemony to neoliberalism,” trying to assess what value teaching has in a sort of Gramscian analysis of the “war of position” conducted for and against neoliberalism. Smyth then proceeds to detail techniques teachers might use for “problematizing approaches to teaching” (p. 192), which is to lead (in some way or other) to “teaching for social responsibility” (p. 196) in ways mentioned in some short detail.

Chapter 9 is an analysis of “cynicism” and “hope” in a Freirean context, conducted by Richard van Heertum. The terms “cynicism” and “hope” are structured in his essay to put “cynicism” firmly on the side of the neoliberals, and “hope” as an aspect of Freirean pedagogy. The last essay, by Susan L. Robertson, is another examination of teaching (in the American context) amidst the backdrop of neoliberal political economy, but one which also offers “an examination of the knowledge economy discourses promoted by the international agencies from the late 1990s,” (p. 236) – though the discourses themselves, as Robertson reveals, originate from germinal works in the 1960s. (My guess is that their efflorescence coincides not accidentally with the rise of the Internet.) Robertson’s conclusion is that “the teacher of the secular bible must give ground to the learner and a new pedagogy of production,” in which the roles of teachers change because “the pedagogical project for the learner is the making and remaking of goods and

services for the economy in a continual process of re/invention and consumption.” (p. 252)

Except for the essays on Chile and South Africa, then, most of the discussion in this anthology centers on the Anglo-American context. And much of the discussion about the Anglo-American context addresses this problem: “how do you discuss education in the ‘political’ sense in places where resistance to neoliberalism is not sufficiently articulated to oppose it as a force? This contrast, between the activism of maybe Chile and South Africa and elsewhere, and the “passive revolutions” of the U.S. and the U.K., appears most bluntly in comparison between chapters 1 and 2 and the rest of the book. To borrow terms from the world-systems theorists, we might say that the “core” nations have not achieved much in the way of resistance to neoliberalism when compared to the residents of nations in the “semi-periphery.” Thus the sort of activism recommended by many of the essayists in this volume appears in much more preliminary form when voiced by writers in the “core” nations. To find dissent, then, we should perhaps look first in the margins, rather than to the places in which our world-society has imposed most of its monuments.

In this regard, I think I should be forgiven for wanting the “core” nation writers to articulate a firmer connection between teaching and activism, so that the residents of the “core” nations can catch up with the “semi-periphery.” In my opinion John Smyth and Richard van Heertum do the best job of this among them. It must be said, though, that their work is among the best of our hopes.

I might also be forgiven for wanting a sequel to this volume (or at least some sort of Internet discussion group) in which the issues begun in this volume are discussed in further detail. The stuff in this volume explodes with meaning – which can be taken in so many different ways! Pepi Leistyna suggests that K-12 students need to be “encouraged to engage in praxis” (p. 82) – at that point I wanted to hear from the students themselves: how did they think they engaged in praxis, and what did they think it was all worth?

In the age of the Internet, books can exist as part of multi-media packages: this multi-vocal book perhaps deserves one.

For instance, I would want to see van Heertum's discussion of "cynicism" broadened to include some sort of focused, many-voiced discussion of Peter Sloterdijk's discussion of cynicism as "enlightened false consciousness" in his book titled *Critique of Cynical Reason*. Sloterdijk continues with this definition by explaining the politics of cynicism as such:

In modern times, enlightenment shows itself to be a tactical complex. The demand to universalize the rational draws it into the vortex of politics, pedagogy, and propaganda. With this, enlightenment consciously represses the harsh realism of older precepts of wisdom, for which there was no question that the masses are foolish and that reason is to be found only among the few. Modern elitism has to encode itself democratically. (Sloterdijk, p. 11)

Thus it can be said that cynicism threatens even the philosophical foundations of van Heertum's recommended antidotes for cynical pedagogy: Freire's "problem-posing education" and Marcuse's aesthetic education (as cited by van Heertum in Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*). The elites like neoliberalism just fine, they know what we're doing, and they are doubtless willing to co-opt any sort of "democratic" activity for the sake of their own will to power. Does that include radical education?

Or perhaps Robertson's discussion of education in the "knowledge-based economy" can be expanded to include the great "surplus supply of capital" (Shutt, p.87) which has characterized the global capitalist economy, as depicted in Harry Shutt's groundbreaking (1998) *The Trouble With Capitalism*. What would the experts on the "knowledge-based economy" say if they were asked about this? Are, for instance, the authors of the World Bank's 2003 *Lifelong Learning for a Global Knowledge Economy* trying to provide a managerial class for a capitalist system in which there is simply "too much capital"?

Thus you have this edited volume: a useful and groundbreaking book, complementary to further discussion.

About the Reviewer

Samuel Day Fassbinder was Adjunct Professor of English at Mount San Antonio College, in Walnut CA. He works with Food Not Bombs (<http://foodnotbombs.net/>).



Copyright is retained by the first or sole author,
who grants right of first publication to the *Education Review*.
<http://edrev.asu.edu>

Editors
Gene V Glass
Gustavo Fischman
Melissa Cast-Brede
