

Book Reviews / Recensions

Michael Welton. (2005). *Designing the Just Learning Society: A Critical Inquiry*. Leicester, UK: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE). 250 pages. ISBN: 1-86201-242-3

Mia Perry, doctoral student, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia

Can humankind *learn* from its mistakes? Can we change the course of progress/collapse or is evolutionary psychology all we need as a theory to shirk the suspicion that we may be gradually degenerating as a race into a wasteland of plundering, disease, and inequality? Augusto Boal (1985), one of the most influential leaders in theatre and social justice, relies on humankind's unique capacity for self-reflection and the idea that "the human being perceives what it is, discovers what it is not and imagines what it can become" (p. 13). It is this act of imagining what we can become that is also at the center of Michael Welton's new book, *Designing the Just Learning Society: A Critical Inquiry*. Welton's self-confessed "foolish hope [is] that humans contain the potential for doing good in the world" (p. 3). In this spirit the book presents a thorough investigation of conceptions and manifestations of learning in the last century of western society leading to his advocacy of a paradigm that he terms the "just learning society".

Not all learning is "good" learning and "all interactions are not learning encounters", these are themes that carry through *Designing the Just Learning Society* (p. 211). Welton poignantly reminds us that human beings can learn "to hate other peoples, races, religions.... We can acquire techniques, carefully mentored or taught, to torture, maim, murder, bomb and harass"(p. 3). In an extensive review of theoretical studies, Welton covers many of the significant landmarks of progress and experimentation in learning models existing in business organizations and, to a lesser extent, in state and civil structures. In his

analysis, Welton describes the concepts and proposals of learning societies that have been raised, debated, and undertaken, from the British Government commissioned *Design for Democracy* report at the end of the First World War to UNESCO's fifth international conference on adult education in 1997. The history of industrialization, the information society, the rise to supremacy of technology, and the corporate world all have had massive implications on the existence and development of learning or knowledge societies; Welton touches on them all, dealing with society in three main categories: organisational (business), civic, and state. Although Welton's introduction to this journey portrays a strong viewpoint and perspective on today's Western society, the conclusion is diluted by an ever more concealed voice, an unclear context and a conclusion consisting of vague expressions of hope with little direction or assertion. The assertive "I" and "my" of the opening chapter transforms into "we" and "our" by the conclusion, as if Welton has integrated his own voice and beliefs with those of the various and diverse sources that he refers to in the body of the book.

In the end, the "just learning society" is defined in its opposition to current trends in society that are identified sporadically throughout the book. According to Welton, two prevalent pathologies afflict contemporary society: the market economy has become our dominant religion; and our culture has become dependent on therapy in all its current manifestations. He claims that the most powerful, universal, and awe-inspiring element of our society has become money and commodity; the cures, crutches, and sources of comfort so essential in this new paradigm come from psychiatry, psychotherapy, counselling, etc. Both "pathologies" identified involve consumerism and a trajectory that exists in the learning structures of workplaces, civil, and state domains: the citizen role has been deflated and the consumer role inflated (p. 215). The just learning society differentiates itself from this paradigm in a promotion of co-operative learning, active citizenship, self-respect and the teachings of "enlightenment humanism: that human beings are active creators of their own existence, able to take risks, to imagine alternative worlds beyond the limited ones we inhabit" (p. 202).

An interesting contemporary trajectory that Welton addresses in this book is that of technology and its role in democracy and the learning

society. Welton challenges the belief among “internet enthusiasts” and “dreamers of cyber-democracy” that modern advances in technology serve democracy providing free access to information and expression and promote social capital in the on-line communities that transcend physical boundaries (pp. 213-215). He argues that this optimistic ideal overlooks a number of elements, not least the divide between those who have access to the necessary technology and those who do not. And of course with the wealth of information that the internet provides for those who have it, there arises the question of how it is consumed. Welton admits, “one has to sift through a critical strainer, but gems of insight are caught” (p. 217). The concept of critical literacy (Luke, 2000) is one that goes unspecified in Welton’s analysis, but seems essentially relevant in much of his thesis. He proposes that the availability of information, the development of communication (today having reached unprecedented sophistication), and the advancements in sciences have created the appearances of a “Learning Age” (p. 8). The contradiction in this concept, however, lies in the increasing pace in which we are exhausting our resources and creating a world that is uninhabitable. Welton succinctly summarises this state as a “paradox of ignorance in an age inundated with information” (p. 4). With this blatant inconsistency, the manner of learning and the question of literacy cannot go unnoticed. Welton describes the information management industries upon which “governments, corporations and civic groups rely...in their attempts to manipulate public opinion and maintain social control” (p. 159). The promotion and development of critical literacy, considered as “the capacities to understand, critique, and transform the social and cultural conditions in which [we] live; to be creative and transformative subjects and not just objects of domination and manipulation” (Hull, Mikulecky, St.Clair & Kerka, 2003, p. 4), seems crucial to the potential of a just learning society as put forward by Welton.

Designing the Just Learning Society is a book that is well equipped with historical information and punctuated with compelling theories, but rests too heavily on enigmatic hopes, assumptions, and disparate voices. At no point is the term *just* made clear; rather it is implied as an antithesis to an analysis of current trends that include the use of information to dominate and the promotion of commodity and

dependence on commercial industry. We are led to assume, therefore, that the *just* society includes the promotion of individual empowerment, active participation, and critical literacy. This lack of clear definition extends to other areas of this book, chiefly in Welton's concluding proposal of a "realistic utopia" (p. 210). Welton suggests that "the just learning society paradigm is offered ... as a counter-utopia to the commodity paradise of globalising capitalism" (p. 219). Are we to assume, then, that in utopia we would live in a world of nationalist socialism? Nevertheless, readers' sympathies and tendencies may lie with Welton's views; I am an optimist and more than eager to share his hopes in a learning utopia, but if the dream is to have any grounding in reality and any possibility of progress, it will need more rigorous theorizing and clarity.

REFERENCES

- Boal, A (1995). *The rainbow of desire* (A. Jackson, Trans.). London, UK: Routledge.
- Hull, G., Mikulecky, L., St. Clair, R., & Kerka, S., (2003). *Multiple literacies. A compilation for adult educators*. Washington DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement (Eric Publications).
- Luke, A. (2000). Critical literacy in Australia: A matter of context and standpoint. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 43(5), 448-461.

R. P. Solomon & C. Levine-Rasky. (2003). *Teaching for Equity and Diversity: Research to Practice*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press. 211 pages. ISBN 1-55130-246-2 (paperback).

Darren E. Lund is a professor in the Graduate Division of Educational Research and the Division of Teacher Preparation, Faculty of Education, University of Calgary

Reading this book for the first time a few years ago, I strongly suspected it would contribute much to the ongoing struggle for equity in Canadian schools. Striving for social justice within the field of education means negotiating a rocky terrain of competing ideologies, intense politics, institutional roadblocks, and emotionally charged discourse. This book

offers its readers more than the authors' sound theoretical insights into the contested fields of multicultural and anti-racist education in Canada. Certainly, there is no shortage of voices crying for more equitable schools and communities here and elsewhere, but a strength of this book is that Solomon and Levine-Rasky bolster their rhetoric with wisdom gained from serving as the architects of the first national study on the way teachers actually take up social justice work in schools.

Originally published as a government report over a decade ago (Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 1994), their groundbreaking research project featured surveys and interviews that engaged over 1000 teachers from across the country. In this landmark study, the authors both named and analyzed the daunting attitudinal barriers to implementing progressive change in Canadian schools. Through the last several years they have been integrating these insights into their ongoing work within an "Urban Diversity" teacher preparation program at York University; this link to their own professional and academic practices provides a strong backbone for the volume. The book's subtitle, "research to practice," somewhat simplifies the reflexive relationship between the two, downplaying the complex interactions they nurture between their scholarly research and the improvements they seek for the lived experiences of students and teachers in real schools.

As antiracism scholar Jon Young notes in his Foreword to the book, Canadian public education takes place "in a society in which social relationships are substantially mediated by race, ethnicity and other constructions of social difference [and where] the ideals of accessibility, inclusion and equity make particular demands upon that educational system" (p. x). Solomon and Levine-Rasky rise to the challenges offered by those significant demands, and offer a book focused mainly on hope.

Their first few chapters offer a helpful overview of the wide-ranging field of equity education as they map out their place and lexicon within the broader educational landscape. They ask in the opening chapter: "How do we link hope to reality?" (p. 3). Facing the abysmal social conditions currently existing in many contemporary schools, the authors contend from the outset: "Only with a thorough understanding of the divergence between the reality of the classroom and the hope for an equitable future for all children, can we reconfigure equity and diversity

education so that it effectively addresses barriers to its implementation” (p. 4). This book lives up to this task in a manner that offers a critical look at the material conditions in schools from within a hopeful perspective, illuminated by examining promising practices within teacher education to address these shortcomings.

Solomon and Levine-Rasky’s inclusion of the voices of so many Canadian educators from their research in this field allows readers to recognize the frank expression of a range of views on diversity and difference, some of which might make readers uncomfortable. Their ongoing analysis of these narratives, countered and illuminated by statistics about the implications of racism and other forms of discrimination, shines light on the many avenues of possibilities and optimism for a more equitable future for all Canadians. For the first half of the book, they direct their attention on equity toward a number of levels of the educational system, from the experiences of teachers in classrooms, to school board politics and school district policies, to staff in-service and teacher preservice preparation, to parent and community participation in school decision making. One notable set of voices missing in the text is from students themselves; including first-hand accounts of the experiences of young people would have greatly enhanced this section of the book.

The second half of the book outlines the initiatives the authors have undertaken in their award-winning *Urban Diversity Teacher Education* model from York University, in which a number of specific approaches are designed to address equity and diversity concerns. Framed through the lens of Critical Race Theory, their approach adapts Janet Helms’ racial identity model and highlights issues of self-identity and privilege for mainstream, white student teachers as well as those from marginalized groups. This teacher-education model is a departure from the typical “add-on” approach of many universities, whereby the faculty adds a single diversity or multicultural education course to the calendar. It is helpful that these authors have had a hand in the design and ongoing evaluation of this more complex model of teacher education that highlights a range of equity issues through candidate selection, cross-race student dyads, collaborative community partnerships, and a focus on the complexities and challenges of racial identity development.

They address the many ongoing challenges of this work and offer practical commentary to guide the work of their colleagues seeking to implement similar progressive models in other faculties of education in this country and beyond.

Through this accessible book, the authors have designed a valuable roadmap for antiracism that I hope many more educators and scholars will discover in the years to come. I have included this text for the past few years in my graduate courses on social justice activism in education because I value the authors' use of plain language, practitioners' voices, and attendance to the intersections between anti-racism research and practice, too often overlooked by scholars in this field. Their explorations of the barriers and limitations to equity education may help others to elsewhere create the necessary conditions to nurture equity both within and through teacher preparation programs. May more educators in Canada become inspired and enlightened by the hope that infuses this volume.

REFERENCE

Solomon, R. P., & Levine-Rasky, C. (1994). *Accommodation and resistance: Educators' response to multicultural and anti-racist education*. North York, ON: Department of Canadian Heritage & York University.

Ratna Ghosh and Ali A. Abdi. (2004). *Education and the Politics of Difference: Canadian Perspectives*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press. 193 pages. ISBN: 1-55130-266-7 (paperback).

Lisa Comeau, research associate, Centre for Social Justice and Anti-Oppressive Education, Faculty of Education, University of Regina.

In their introduction to *Education and the politics of difference: Canadian perspectives*, Ghosh and Abdi assert that multicultural education constitutes a paradigm shift from an earlier assimilation paradigm according to which "the traditional goal in education has been the transmission of the dominant culture, involving assimilation for those who were different" (p. 6). In this context, they present their purpose as "[suggesting] a restructured vision of multicultural education as an

important site for cultural transformation" (p. 7). A quick flip through the book suggests that it might indeed make an important contribution to educational thinking and practice around issues of difference and identity. However, after a careful read, the authors have failed to convince me that even a restructured multiculturalism might be an adequate solution to a racist Canada.

In Chapter One, the authors present an overview of educational theorizing about social equality and equity. They consider changing theories of knowledge, and the politics of difference and recognition. Chapter Two discusses several categories of identity (race, class, gender), the forms of oppression associated with them (racism, classism, sexism), and multicultural education approaches to difference. In Chapter Three the authors trace the evolution of Canadian immigration policy, the development of Canadian multicultural policy and ideological shifts in multicultural theory, and conclude with a history of multicultural education in Canada. This chapter includes sections devoted to education in Quebec and Aboriginal education. Chapter Four discusses the potential opportunities and barriers to integrated multiculturalism which are posed by the globalization of world economies, politics, and communications (such as World Wide Web). Chapter Five concludes the book with a discussion of seven main ideas characterizing the "paradigm shift" that they see in the future of multicultural education.

I agree with Ghosh and Abdi that multiculturalism and multicultural education are intended to rectify assimilative practices in Canadian history. However, I think it is erroneous to focus on cultural assimilation as the central practice in historical and contemporary oppression. Ghosh and Abdi also point to the construction of difference—and thereby dominance—as instrumental in perpetuating social inequality. I argue that this is a far more crucial point, and lament that it seems to get lost in their concern to avoid liberal articulations of multiculturalism that encourage "blindness" to difference, and which equate sameness with equality. Although they are clear that the equation of ethnicity with race is a strategy used to "evade...[and] selectively invoke racism" (p. 57), they persist in using these two constructs "interchangeably...because in Western societies they produce similar reactions in social relations" (p. 58). In so doing, I think Ghosh and Abdi *themselves* evade racism, for

example in their interpretation of the “history of education of the Native population by missionaries and the governments [as] one of a clash of cultural values” (p. 132). An alternative interpretation is possible if residential schools are considered within the social, political, economic, and ideological context of the late 1800s-early 1900s. As the authors repeat often, racism was a central ideology in the Canadian nation-building process during this era. For example, immigration laws of the time severely limited—and in the case of the Chinese people, banned outright—immigration by “undesirable” because *racially* “unassimilable” immigrants. Where such immigrants were already present in Canada, they were subjected to segregation in society and in education. Paralleling the segregation of non-European, non-white, non-Christian and therefore “racially degenerate” immigrants, Aboriginal people were also segregated socially and spatially on reserves, politically through disenfranchisement, economically through the imposition of poverty, and educationally through residential schooling. In this wider context, residential schooling appears as part of a systemic and systematic effort to extinguish a race of people for the colonial purposes of expropriating resources, settling land, and producing a white, Anglo Nation within the British Empire. This is clearly about racism, not merely a clash of cultural values, and certainly not assimilation.

The authors also undermine themselves through contradictory language use. For instance, they make the important claim that race, ethnicity, gender, and class are social constructs, specific to history and location. The transformative potential of this theorizing is in the recognition that difference—or the meaning ascribed to difference—is not essential, and therefore, can be changed. Yet they undermine this potential in their use of essentialist, deterministic, and binaristic language. For instance, their discussion of gender is a summary of psychological work including Carol Gilligan’s 23 year old work, and is filled with such statements as “boys are more concerned with rules, and girls with relationships. Boys’ orientation is positional...for girls it is personal” (p. 64). Another example of troublesome language: “it is quite possible for a registered or status Indian to have no Indian blood” (p. 130). Surely if “race is not a biological fact, and does not represent any constant and/or consistent biological categories” (p. 55), there can be no

such thing as Indian blood. Such essentialist language repeats discourses that authorize a racist and sexist social ordering. However, the authors fail to engage with the growing literature theorizing the discursive maintenance of racial (and gender) dominance and subordination as “normal” (Henry, Tator, Mattis & Rees, 2000; Hytten & Warren, 2004; Schick, 2000; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). They do not consider scholarship that shows how “culture” talk produces the same effects as “race” talk—understood in biologically essential terms—once did (Razack, 1998). They don’t engage with literature that considers that dominantly positioned people’s vested interest in maintaining dominance is supported by their desire not to know their own complicity (Kumashiro, 2000).

I am sympathetic with Ghosh and Abdi’s goal that “ultimately there should be no centre, no periphery” (p. 167). However, their vision of a radical equality is not new. Goldberg (1993) shows that since the Enlightenment, liberal commitments to equality produced the paradoxical effect that “race is irrelevant, but all is race” (p. 6). Much of the literature I’ve cited above argues that all is *still* race. Notwithstanding the authors’ critique of liberal ideas and practices of multiculturalism, they haven’t given me any reason to hope that their version of “difference-friendly” multiculturalism will lead to anything but more of the same.

REFERENCES

- Goldberg, D. T. (1993). *Racist culture: Philosophy and the politics of meaning*. Oxford & Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Henry, F., Tator, C., Mattis, W., & Rees, T. (2000). *The colour of democracy: Racism in Canadian society* (2nd ed.). Toronto: Harcourt Canada.
- Hytten, K., & Warren, J. (2003). Engaging whiteness: How racial power gets reified in education. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 16(1), 65-89.
- Kumashiro, K. (2000). Toward a theory of anti-oppressive education. *Review of Educational Research*, 70(1), 25-53.
- Razack, S. H. (1998). *Looking white people in the eye: Gender, race, and culture in courtrooms and classrooms*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Schick, C. (2000b). White women teachers accessing dominance. *Discourse: Studies in the cultural politics of education*, 21(3), 299-309.

Wetherell, M., & Potter, J. (1992). *Mapping the language of racism: Discourse and the legitimation of exploitation*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Michael W. Apple. (2004). *Ideology and Curriculum* (3rd Edition). New York & London, UK: RoutledgeFalmer. 234 pages. ISBN: 0-415-94911-4 (Hardback); 0-415-94912-2 (paperback).

Christine Giese, doctoral candidate, Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto.

The publication of the 3rd edition of Michael Apple's *Ideology and Curriculum* marks the 25th anniversary of this pivotal work in the field of educational theory and practice and attests to Apple's ongoing commitment to education for thick democracy and social justice. The release of this new edition is also timely; as a critique of the influence of neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideology over educational policy and reform, *Ideology and Curriculum* is as relevant today, in an era of increasing pressure from the Right, as when first published in 1989.

The addition of two new chapters further contemporizes this volume. "Pedagogy, Patriotism, and Democracy: Ideology and Education After September 11" explores the 9/11 tragedy against the backdrop of growing conservatism in the United States. In "On Analyzing New Hegemonic Relations," Apple has reworked an interview he gave in 2001 in which he discusses how the political, economic, and cultural ideology of the Right is aggressively shaping school reform today.

Although at times a challenging read—the book is rather "densely argued" in Apple's words—*Ideology and Curriculum* provides a comprehensive analysis of the complicated relationship between economic and cultural power, and the ideology of schooling. For Apple, the notion of hegemony or ideological saturation is pivotal to our understanding of how both historically and currently, the interests of

dominant economic and sociopolitical groups shape the experience and structure of schooling.

In Chapter One Apple provides a deft analysis of the complex and often subtle relationship between dominant ideology and the experience of schooling. He examines how ideology is embedded in and enacted through the explicit and hidden curricula, and reproduced in the ways that educational theorists, policy makers, and practitioners come to understand, value, plan, organize, and evaluate educational experiences. Throughout, Apple draws from critical theory, and the work of theorists such as Gramsci, Bourdieu, Bowles and Gintis, and Raymond Williams.

Apple cautions against an overly deterministic understanding of how ideology shapes schooling and instead contends that there is a dialectical relationship between ideology and schooling. Thus in Chapter 2, he addresses how dominant cultural and economic ideological traditions and curriculum interact to reproduce and maintain the unequal distribution of, and access to, what counts as legitimate knowledge. Subsequently, Chapters 3 and 4 examine how historically hegemony has been enacted through the hidden curriculum of schooling, specifically as a vehicle for social control, and a perceived need to instill a common American culture in the face of massive waves of immigration. Apple challenges the pretense of neutrality in public education, arguing that middle-class interests, cultural norms, and behaviours are clearly dominant, but unquestioningly and uncritically taught in schools.

In Chapters 5 through 8, Apple discusses how dominant ideology also operates through the privileging of certain kinds of understandings and perspectives. Increasingly, education is modeled on scientific, technical, and managerial principles that construct student diversity as something to be measured, sorted, labeled, and managed. Throughout the book, Apple argues that these frameworks reproduce and maintain dominant interests and currently fuel an aggressive reform agenda directed towards standardization, testing, and privatization, an agenda that has had a devastating effect on students and teachers alike.

Additional chapters 9 and 10 bridge the conceptual framework that Apple so carefully crafted in previous chapters, with current economic,

cultural, and political trends and their impact on educational reform. They also add a lived dimension to a text that is, at times, theory laden.

Apple's discussion in Chapter 9 of the events of 9/11 is particularly powerful. He offers a complex analysis of the historical and sociopolitical contexts of the tragedy, and the resulting rhetoric of fear and terror that has fueled an already alarming trend toward Rightist ideology. But Apple also shares his personal response; he openly describes the difficult and painful work of confronting the event with students and trying collectively to arrive at a response rooted in justice, not revenge.

The interview format of Chapter 10 similarly makes this a more accessible chapter than preceding ones. Apple has expanded and reworked the original interview in keeping with the heavily theoretical tone of the volume, but the conversational and interactive format yields a less complex examination of how neo-liberal, neo-conservative, fundamentalist, and marketplace ideologies are shaping education today.

While there may be limits to the relevance of this book to Canadian educators and researchers, much from Apple's book is applicable to the Canadian context. With increasing privatization, managerialism, and standardization in education, public schooling in this country is unquestionably under similar pressures. For readers interested in exploring the Canadian context further, Ken Osborne (1999) provides the Canadian counterpart to much of Apple's analysis of the historical and sociopolitical contexts of public education. For example, Osborne traces how industrialization and mechanization have impacted on schooling in Canada, and examines how the principles of scientific management have been applied to instill in young people a common Canadian culture in the face of massive immigration at the turn of the 20th century.

Apple challenges educators everywhere to persist in the difficult, often painful work of critically and honestly exploring the ideological assumptions and understandings that shape their work, and to confront how they themselves are implicated in the reproduction and maintenance of the dominant structure and organization of schooling. Thus, nearly three decades after its first publication, *Ideology and Curriculum* continues to speak to educators and scholars committed to

ongoing, critical reflection on the nature of schooling and the inevitable connection between institutional education and the reproduction and maintenance of unequal economic and social power. It is a valuable read for teachers and theorists alike.

REFERENCE

Osborne, K. (1999). *Education: A Guide to the Canadian School Debate—Or, Who Wants What and Why?* Toronto: Penguin Books.
