

Teaching Peter McLaren edited by Marc Pruyn and Luis M Huerta-Charles. New York: Peter Lang, 2005. 206 pp. ISBN 0-8204-6145-8

In *Teaching Peter McLaren* editors Marc Pruyn and Luis M. Huerta-Charles present a unique text that is as instructionally candid as it is inspiring. This new collection brings together various educators from Brazil, Mexico, England and the United States to offer insights, critiques and personal stories about the influence of the radical educator Peter McLaren both on their lives and work. Yet *Teaching Peter McLaren* goes beyond mere tributes or homage writings. More importantly, it is a book that not only critically reflects on McLaren *and* his work but also describes the difficult journey of critiquing capital and advancing social justice through education, seemingly amongst a sea of deaf ears. We learn not just from the critiques of McLaren's theoretical development but from the very real doubts, hesitation, uncertainty and commitment that are involved in following McLaren's lead.

McLaren has always been adamant about the inseparableness of combining education and social justice with an ever-present critique of capitalism. Many of the essays in this collection underscore that education and the classroom are pivotal sites where the logic of capitalism can either be challenged or reinforced. As Mike Cole explains in Section Four of the book, discussing capitalism helps to identify a real, locatable system that is all too often invisible to most people. Furthermore, discussing capitalism allows for its "natural" character to be eroded once it is revealed as a continuing source of misery for millions. For students to participate in this debate, educators have a special role that allows them to assist students to understand, question or acknowledge the negative social relations under the capitalist system. Many of the essays describe ways in which critical pedagogy has been used to disrupt the indoctrination of uncritical students into uncritical workers.

Teaching Peter McLaren is divided into four sections. Section One provides an introduction to the general construction of most of the essays, which are part critical reflection on McLaren and part narrative of personal development. Section Two looks at the complexities and influence of McLaren's work on the field of education and the Left in general. It also presents many of the challenges radical educators are up against both inside and out of the classroom. The third section examines how McLaren's work has been received, understood and used in various classroom environments amongst different groups of people. The last section provides solid critical assessment of the development of McLaren as a Marxist scholar and educator over the years. And it is a fitting end since it is within Marxism that McLaren continues to invigorate critical pedagogy. His inspiration for others, as Huerta-Charles writes, is real because he "walks his talk...He is a coherent scholar because he lives his theory" (p. xxvi).

Two essays in particular stand out because of their treatment of class issues among students worldwide and therefore the relevance of critical pedagogy: Roberto Bahruth's "Peter McLaren: A Scholar's Scholar" and Marcia Moraes' "Peter McLaren: One Intellectual in Two Realities." Many scoff at critical pedagogy here in the U.S. since, supposedly, the oppressed critical pedagogy purports to help are to be found far off in some other less privileged place. But as Bahruth explains, even privileged students have something to learn from a critical education. He writes:

By avoiding the social, historical, political and economic contexts of education under the pretense of neutrality and by labeling children with a language of deficit, privileged class students are allowed to graduate with little or no social consciousness as well. This is why another aspect of the cultural work of critical pedagogues is to help the privileged to discover their privilege (p. 7).

After Bahruth demonstrates the general applicability and urgency of critical pedagogy, Moraes' essay complements his by describing how McLaren's critical pedagogy was received among more privileged graduate students in Rio de Janeiro as compared to her elementary and secondary students in the rural outskirts of Rio. Much like Bahruth's experience, the university students feel disconnected when confronting McLaren and his critical pedagogy. Based on the responses from the two groups of students, Moraes concludes that, "the rural area group locates itself as part of McLaren's analysis, while people of the Master's group speak as if they were not part of the process" (p. 94). Moraes also observes that while the rural students sought ways to improve their lives and schools after reading McLaren's work, the graduate students asked how to "do" critical pedagogy. Thus, Bahruth and Moraes' examples, though rooted in two different countries and cultures, highlight an important lesson despite class differences: Critical pedagogy can reveal insights not just for the oppressed but also for the privileged classes anywhere.

Yet by no means does this text shy away from honestly confronting McLaren's work head-on. As contributors Alipio Casali and Ana Maria Araújo Freire succinctly state, "it is simply not easy to read Peter McLaren," (p. 20). Although reassured that we are not the only ones who welcome McLaren yet feel the challenge of his scholarship and political commitment it still leaves the question about the accessibility of critical pedagogy open. Many of the contributors describe how they have grappled with McLaren's theoretical complexity and its development over the years. It must be admitted however that it's a challenge McLaren has begun to address in his most recent writings. Yet it still remains a dilemma whenever progressive academic theory is unable to converse with progressive action.

Teaching Peter McLaren is very much the story about the solitude and pessimism of living in late capitalist society while whole heartedly disagreeing with it even if at first you have no idea why. However, in the end we do not have a consensus as to the degree to which capitalism is seen as the ultimate adversary. So the question remains amongst each author and ourselves as to whether we will approach capitalism as a mere hindrance to social justice or an irreconcilable host that perpetuates exploitation and thus our struggles ad nauseam.

Teaching Peter McLaren offers an insightful glimpse into the life and work of radical educators influenced and inspired by McLaren. This text may give you the examples and language to form a better understanding as to why radical education and activism are perhaps more relevant today than ever before. *Teaching Peter McLaren* insists that radical educators cannot allow themselves to define the everyday classroom experience as separate from ideological visions of hope and justice. For those tired of the same *grand* capitalist narrative, *Teaching Peter McLaren* proposes a different one. It is a narrative where what an educator *could* be is revealed as indispensable for facilitating what the world *must* be.

Reviewer

Mike Alexander Pozo is a first year doctoral student in the Literature Department at the University of California, San Diego. He was editor of the SJU Humanities Review while an undergraduate in New York. His scholarly interests include: Marxism, critical race theory, labor, Latin America and political theory.