Maeve O'Grady 'A Review of Radicalizing Learning' in *Interface: a journal for and about social movements Volume 6 (1):492-514 (May 2014)*

Brookfield, S. and Holst, J.D. (2011) *Radicalizing Learning: Adult Education for a Just World,* **San Francisco, Jossey-Bass**

The title of the book indicates the nature of the radical learning to be done – to make the world more sustainable. To this effect, various chapters deal with different aspects of adult education whether we are working in and with social movements, or are employed in academia but wish to provide a critique of neo-liberalism in a way that will help social and socialist change. The type of change that is sought is described by the authors as democratic socialism, which they define in different ways: one is a reclaiming of the use of the word 'socialist' in the context of the demonising of the term in the U.S.; another is educating for democracy in order to hold decision-making in economics and politics accountable; yet another is to maximise the participatory element in those fields, and extend ideals of participatory democracy into economics.

Radical educators (in the socialist rather than the far-right tradition) already critique neoliberalism. So what does this book offer them that they haven't known before? It identifies a real change in the conditions and mode of production that provide new conditions for challenging the commonsense understanding of how the world should work. It argues that it may now be more possible for the working class to see that the American dream is unattainable; that the working class as the majority group in society can have a more unified sense that the way things were up until recent years will never be seen again; and that the underlying trends that were visible for a long time have now become endemic in an era of globalization.

The work starts with a reconceptualising of adult learning and education. The writers are concerned with adult education's egalitarian mission of "encouraging learning about the creation of democracy in political, cultural, and economic spheres. Political and cultural democracy entails learning how to recognize and abolish privilege around race, gender, status and identity; economic democracy entails learning how to abolish material inequality and privilege around class" (p.4). Such a project is socialist in nature, and in the early chapters a very optimistic view of socialism is implied, in that it provides the possibility of learning to make the world more sustainable. The transformation project is framed as educational in nature, because people need to learn how to view the world differently, and overcome the failures of neoliberalism by seeing it as an ideology with weak explanatory power when it comes to the allocation of resources and opportunities.

The second chapter critiques common sense understandings of adult development, and calls for a broader approach that connects developmental work with a moral purpose. The ideology of capitalism is blamed consistently throughout the book, and all other critical factors of race, gender, ableism, and sexuality are attributed to the spread of capitalist ideology. The assumption is that if we get rid of capitalism we will get rid of patriarchy, but feminists such as Starhawk (1990) attribute the foundation of patriarchy to the foundation of monotheism. However, there is no doubting the strength of the argument criticising capitalism that is presented in this work, but perhaps only the converted will pick up such a book in the first place.

The role of the educator is considered throughout, especially in relation to the social or collective nature of educational activity for development, and the modelling of democratic forms of being. Not only is reflection and action to be combined, but there is a differentiation in relation to reflection: objective reframing "involves critical reflection on the assumptions of others", and subjective reframing "involves critical self-reflection of one's own assumptions" (p.35). The democratic educator models this and facilitates a simple democratic idea: "that those affected by decisions should be the ones to make those decisions" (p.41). Ways of doing this are identified in later chapters.

There is a welcome recognition of the increasing prominence of sociocultural models of development, but models informed by psychology are acknowledged to be prominent still. These latter models deflect attention away from the need to prepare people for "co-operative, collective, and democratic forms of association", which sociocultural models incorporate and work with. Socialist or radical pedagogy does not deny individual needs, but when these are heard alongside the needs of others, then the structural nature of the problems can to be understood. The personal can then be related to the political, and each person can see how their own needs are part of a wider class and societal need.

If the first task is to enable agency to be developed in and against structure, then the next task is to develop the ability to work collectively, and to organize. This is dealing with the educational aspects of social movement activism, and different examples are given of support groups organized by feminists in the radical rather than the reformist tradition (hooks 2000), with "individual and collective identity" understood to be "intertwined" (p.53). The space has to be sufficiently safe for developing an emerging identity. The next task can be to teach "for radical development", using critical theory to enable people to think critically while developing common interests. A "pedagogy of ethical coercion" is needed so that educators can be sufficiently directive in keeping a focus on the critical thinking rather than commonsense thinking (p.59). Marcuse's ideas around repressive tolerance and ethical coercion are dealt with in greater detail towards the end of the book.

Critical theory makes us aware of the damage caused by the capitalist ideology and its "invasion of the lifeworld" (p.59). Habermas, Fromm, Foucault, Davis, hooks – all are referred to in the argument for a directive stance by the critical educator, and four particular 'clusters' are identified as to what kind of methodology is recommended. .

The next chapter contradicts the common sense and dominant contemporary understanding of training, by referring back to examples such as Che Guevara, the Highlander Folk School in Tennesse training teachers to conduct Citizenship Schools, and the Civil Rights Movement, amongst others. The radical tradition has a broad conception of training which incorporates democratic and participatory forms of education, and of course the context is by and with

people rather than the contemporary co-option of the term for profit by business. This chapter identifies many resources for social movement educators as well as the hidden histories of such training. The goal of any training plan should be political independence of the participants, and ways to do this are described. A very useful set of criteria to aid evaluation of such programs is provided, and this is a good checklist for participatory research activities as well as educational programmes.

The chapter on teaching adults considers the similarities between radical and other forms of educational practices. Practices differ in the way experience is used and in the desire to challenge capitalist forms of organizing the world. Marcuse's idea of repressive tolerance indicates that providing students with choices is not appropriate, even though it is often thought to be so in the humanist and progressive traditions. "Students' previous ideological conditioning will always predispose them to choose what for them are commonsense, socially sanctioned understandings" (p.109). The educator must be responsible for providing ideas that would be avoided if presented as a choice in order to prevent the marginalisation of challenging ideas.

The next chapter compares and contrasts two narratives of globalization, and examines them for their implications in radical education. The dominant understanding is critiqued, and it is claimed that what we are witnessing in contemporary society should be understood "as a historical process" (p.137). The problem is not production, as we live in a time of surplus. It is a problem of distribution, of getting the goods and services to people who need them but cannot afford them.

Marcuse's aesthetic dimension of learning is then considered in Chapter Eight, with the role for the arts in disturbing and challenging "White culture's conception of Black life", along with a reminder that "the revolution will not be televised" (p.150). Marcuse identifies the role of radical aesthetics in raising consciousness: a song can encapsulate argument and anger, build self-respect and the desire to challenge, teach history and subvert from within (p.161-164).

The chapter on Researching Learning highlights the role of research in planning, and how this fact-finding can also be participatory and democratic, combining investigation with pedagogy.

This chapter also provides an unexpected but valuable critique of Freirean literacy methodology, and how research and pedagogy were linked in order to identify generative themes for discussion and action. Participatory research precedes planning, and ensures not just relevant programme content but also an understanding of the best times of the year and the day for attendance. Again, a useful checklist is provided from the description of the principles and key questions for participatory research to ensure the co-creation of knowledge for action.

The final chapter deals with the ways in which diversity is understood in adult education. Recognising diversity presents the danger of co-option: recognition does not mean resources. Greater detail is provided about Marcuse's idea of repressive tolerance and how treating alternative ideologies alongside neoliberalism will result in a tolerance of the alternatives, but the status quo is maintained. Marcuse recommends the educator to use 'coercive morality' in an ethical objective to "free people from prevailing indoctrination" (p.197-199). Marcuse's analysis of how the Nazi movement grew stands as a warning to us all.

Privilege needs to be dismantled. Educators are well placed to challenge the racist 'microagressions' in collective learning groups. Racism becomes more subtle in an era when overt racism is curtailed by legal means (p.208). The hope for challenging White supremacy is more realistic now that "the objective basis for White privilege is weakening" (p.215).

Sometimes the tone of the book is certain in that the socialist frame of reference could be seen as the solution to the problems of White supremacist and capitalist neoliberalism, ableism, homophobia, and patriarchy. The work does not address the dangers of certainty: uncertainty could avoid the danger of uncritically replacing one ideology with another. However, the value given to the combination of reflection and action is implicit throughout the work.

The book is written in such a way that the educator can deal with chapters discretely, with each chapter presenting a coherent argument. However, the entire work needs to be read to be more assured of its explanatory reach and power, as some chapters do not address the kinds of questions posed above. Its value is that the cases and writings used are part of a hidden history which gives the educator a sense of the global and interconnected nature of radical pedagogy.

While this provides a sense of pride and identification with radical pedagogy and its role in social movements, it is also good to get practical information and checklists.

This book presents a convincing argument for the role of teaching and training in skills and knowledge for change. For the social movement activist who may not have given much consideration to the role of adult education, it explains the relationship between the function of change and the form it should take. Change is an educative process.

hooks, b. (2000) *Where We Stand: Class Matters,* London, Routledge

Starhawk (1990) *Dreaming the dark: Magic, sex, and politics,* London, Mandala