

**Book Review: Marc Pruyn and Luis Huerta-Charles Eds. *Teaching Peter McLaren: Paths of Dissent* (New York: Peter Lang)**

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We seem to have reached a juncture in critical educational scholarship. In the absence of a new overarching academic movement, attention seems to have turned towards a broad reassessment of scholarship of the past three decades. Among other things, this seems evidenced by the recent number of books and – American Educational Research Association (AERA) panels which have explored the impact of key educational theorists and researchers including John Ogbu, Basil Bernstein, Paul Willis, and Michael Apple. Broadly associated with the new sociology of education and critical pedagogy, this work has looked soberly and strategically at the academic and political impact of this “critical turn” in educational scholarship which began in the 1970s—its gains as well as losses.

Clearly, there have been some important victories. Critical work has become part of the common sense of much mainstream thinking in the field. Work on power, social inequality, and the transformative power of pedagogy, for example, has become firmly ensconced in many teacher training and doctoral programs in the US and throughout the world. Yet, this move to mainstream acceptance has come with a price. In particular, this work has often divorced its insights on teaching and research from the overarching political agendas and goals which originally gird them. Nowhere is this clearer, of course, than in the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire whose “dialogic pedagogy” is widely imported without his Marxist political agenda.

All this underscores the complexity and importance of our moment—a moment when the story of critical educational scholarship and its contours is forming. It is the responsibility of this next generation of scholars, we maintain, both to preserve and reinvent that story as the progressive struggle continues to unfold on new terrains. For these reasons (and others) *Teaching Peter McLaren: Paths of Dissent* (edited by Marc Pruyn and Luis Huerta-Charles) is a book worthy of broad attention and critical reflection. *Teaching Peter McLaren* draws together a wide group of scholars—many of them McLaren’s former students—to reflect on the dynamic career of one of critical pedagogy’s most important figures. Indeed, McLaren’s career has been marked by a sustained and earnest effort to invent and re-invent himself with the times. From his earliest work as a journalist in Canada through his recent return to Marxism, McLaren has never been afraid to present himself as a public and performative “work in progress.” A profoundly human and generous person, this book offers a panoramic view of McLaren’s impact on the field as well as the individuals around him.

Shirley Steinberg's foreword sets the stage for Marc Pruyn and Luis Huerta-Charles and the many invited critical contributors that follow. She notes, correctly, that the authors have completed the arduous task of "writing about a writer and teaching about a teacher" whose critical scholarship, cultural work, and critical teaching practices have had a profound impact on pedagogues and activists across the globe for the past 30 years. In the preface that follows, – Antonia Darder provides insight about Peter McLaren that extend beyond his scholarship, speeches, or lectures. She calls McLaren "one of the kindest and most generous souls" in the "world of academia" (xv)—someone more than willing to "extend a hand and create opportunities for comrades and struggling young scholars who seek his support" (xv).

In the final part of this first section, Marc Pruyn and Luis Huerta-Charles provide their own reflexive narratives of how McLaren's scholarship, teachings, and personal interactions impacted them as teachers, scholars, and citizens. Pruyn became attracted to McLaren's work during his doctoral studies at UCLA during the 1990s. As he described it, he was drawn towards "the progressive ideas that linked dominant educational practices with capital, exploitation and oppression" (xx), and was afforded the privilege to learn directly from McLaren when he joined UCLA's faculty in 1993. After experiencing firsthand McLaren's revolutionary pedagogy, conducting emancipatory research in East LA's elementary playgrounds and classrooms, and engaging in critical dialogues in West Hollywood's coffeehouses, Pruyn was drawn, as were many left-leaning graduate students, to McLaren's radicalism (xxii). The remaining part of his narrative makes this evident, why he believes McLaren has remained a beacon on the left for the past thirty years:

It is an unflinching and populist commitment to accurately and intensely scrutinize and critique the economic system under which most of us in the world live, the system that is at the heart of so much of humanity's suffering: capitalism, an economic and ontological system—a way of knowing and acting—that praises greed, individualistic accumulation and selfishness, over sharing, compassion and the collective good (p.xxii).

Luis Huerta-Charles also treats McLaren's major contributions to critical scholarship. By examining McLaren's development as a scholar, cultural worker, and critical pedagogue, Huerta-Charles documents McLaren's moral commitment to "understanding the world and trying to

change it for the better” (p.xxviii). McLaren is a scholar who lives comfortably within contingency, uncertainty and tentativeness; he cautiously employs a variety of theoretical tools, such as postmodernism, Marxism, and -post-structuralism, in working towards the ever-elusive goal of an egalitarian society (xxvi). According to Huerta-Charles, unlike many critical scholars, McLaren has engaged in this reflexive and critical process without compromising his core set of principles or sacrificing the quality of his scholarship.

The authors in the following section, “The Arc and Impact of McLaren’s Work” discuss the themes and ideas which span McLaren’s career as teacher, scholar, and social activist. In the first essay, Roman Bahruth provides an “almost biographical account” of how McLaren prompted him to interrogate the nature of schooling and society (p.3). Not only has McLaren’s scholarship helped Bahruth “see the oppressive nature of schooling as a ritual performance,” but has provided him with the critical autonomy to evaluate whether his teaching practices and scholarship have the clarity and commitment to “democratize education” (p.8). Through the critical lens developed in part by McLaren, Bahruth considers whether McLaren’s “eulogizing of Che and his work on the situation in Chiapas and the armed struggle of the Zapatistas” will inadvertently reinforce “the hegemony we are attempting to challenge” in its stress on violent struggle (p. 15-16).

In Chapter 2, Alipio Casali and Ana Maria Araujo Freire discuss McLaren’s impact on the educational left in general as well as his impact in Latin America more specifically. Since McLaren possesses a “deep and wide-ranging intellectual makeup” as well as a commitment to the oppressed across the globe, the authors compare him to Paulo Freire (p.20). Acknowledging the difficulty of reading Peter McLaren’s work, Casali and Freire maintain that many Latin Americans have been empowered by his critical thought and are untied with him in the struggle “on the side of the oppressed” (p.27). In the final essay of this section, Zeus Leonardo discusses McLaren’s foundational contributions to the field of critical pedagogy. He argues McLaren’s “greatest academic achievements” has been the “creation of this new subdiscipline” (p.31). Although there are many tensions in McLaren’s prolific writing, his eclectic work makes it “possible for critical young scholars in education to appropriate a vernacular with which to name their experience in the most politicized way possible” (p.42).

The next section of the book, “McLaren Across Contexts,” assess McLaren’s work within various social contexts. In Chapter Four, Alicia de Alba and Marcela Gonzalez Arenas engage

McLaren in a critical dialogue, sparking cultural contact between him and Mexican and Latin American scholars. Looking through a critical postmodern lens, the scholars argue that left Mexican scholars and practitioners embrace many key elements of critical North American pedagogues' work, including that of Apple, Giroux, and McLaren. Some of these supporters, however, have adopted these theoretical insights without allowing "themselves the time for a careful study of the contents of the critical perspective" (p.58). Not coincidentally, de Alba and Gonzalez Arenas call for McLaren and his Latin American interlocutors to develop more genuine forms of "multicultural" contact, cultural work that may truly engender a deep understanding of "the Other" in this globalized, hyper-driven world (p.61).

A doctoral student at Harvard University during the 1990s, Pepi Leistyna was caught in the middle of so-called "culture wars" over the meaning and realities of multicultural education within public schools across North America (p.64). As he demonstrates, he wrestled with whether the spate of multicultural pedagogical and curricular practices being implementing could really democratize schools and wider society. Leistyna details how McLaren's critical examination of the various multicultural camps allowed him to evaluate professional development multicultural programs launched within an inner-city school system. Because McLaren's work helped him see how many so called "multicultural" instructional practices and programs do little to promote democracy in schools, he suggests educators must explore the important work of "critical pedagogues like Peter McLaren," if they plan to influence and "democratize the larger social realities that shape the very texture of school life" (p. 86).

In the final chapter of this section, Marcia Moraes explores how McLaren's work is received within rural and urban sections of Rio de Janeiro. She suggests rural citizens see McLaren's work differently than urban citizens, as rural citizens' lived experiences better position them to "locate their life within the epistemological dimensions of critical pedagogy" (p. 94). Yet, Moraes suggests this group's more intimate connection to McLaren's work should not inhibit teacher educators from employing critical pedagogy in their classrooms most broadly.

In the last section of the book, "McLaren the Marxist," contributors explore McLaren's most current work. They collectively posit that McLaren's reinvigorated Marxist analysis of global capitalism, neo-liberalism, and American Imperial hegemony is necessary to create humane, democratic social relations across the globe during the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In "The 'Inevitability of Globalized Capital' Versus the 'Ordeal of the Undecidable': A Marxist

Critique,” Mike Cole argues that a Marxist paradigm is the only viable theoretical lens which critiques global capitalism while offering “a vision for a new world order” predicated on social justice and equity (p.101). He criticizes scholars who embraced postmodernism during the 1980s and 1990s, as they have abdicated a commitment to eliminating capitalism and the alternative vision of socialism (p.106). In the remainder of the essay, Cole details the chain of events that spurred McLaren to end his “love affair with postmodernism.” In particular, he shows how McLaren’s retooled “revolutionary critical pedagogy” helps us examine how class and capitalism are tied to the massive global injustices that exist, while concomitantly providing us with a vision of a more humane future (p.115).

In Chapter 8, Ramin Farahmandpur documents how radical scholars, situated within the field of sociology of education, have continually downplayed class politics in favor of more “advent-garde overtures of postmodern, - post-structural and cultural theories” (p.129). He situates McLaren’s work within the sub-discipline, showing us how McLaren flirted with postmodern and – post-structural approaches to educational theory and practices during the 1980s and 1990s. McLaren initially believed his postmodern Marxist approach was flexible enough to accommodate both political economy and cultural politics (p.134). But by the late 1990s, Farahmandpur details how the changing social and economic landscape pushed McLaren to reorient himself with Marxist social theory. Farahmandpur argues that McLaren’s realignment with Marxism allows our next generation of teacher educators and pre-service and in-service teachers to build a democratic society.

In Chapter 9, Dave Hill discusses the pernicious effects of the current corporate assault on teacher education programs across the globe. Within England and Wales, for example, Hill has witnessed conservative governments policing teacher education programs ensuring the social, political, and economic dimensions of schooling are obscured (p. 152). Using a Marxist theoretical framework, he develops a re-theorized, egalitarian manifesto for schooling and teacher education. He argues that McLaren’s current “reloaded” Marxist analysis is central to helping the Radical Left realign schools towards the principles of democracy, social justice, and egalitarianism (p.168). In the volume’s final essay, Curry Malott applies the critical work of Marxist scholars, like Allman, McLaren, and Rikowski to the field of the social studies. Curry finds the social studies -are currently seeped in corporate logics and values. Elementary and secondary students across North America, for example, are required to regurgitate dominate facts

and values, without being afforded the agency to engage in a dialectical understanding of self and society (p.187). Malott suggests a Marxist-inspired social studies would develop “informed citizens” who understand the deleterious effects emanating from capitalism. Such an approach will help students become “active citizens,” individuals who will stand up against oppression and fight for social justice (p.196).

In sum, then, *Teaching Peter McLaren: Paths of Dissent* is a compelling collection that asks us to reflect on the work of a major critical educator whose long career has reflected much of the theoretical and political complexity of contemporary critical pedagogy writ large. It is indeed fitting that this book is the first in a series dedicated to excavating the work of key critical scholars in education and related disciplines.

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