

Book Reviews

Critical Crosscurrents in Education. Michael Collins. Melbourne, FL: Krieger, 1998, 214 pages.

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The Krieger Publishing Web site (www.web4u.com) provides the following electronic description of/advertisement for Michael Collins' (1998) *Critical Crosscurrents in Education* as a text that makes

the insights of critical theory and practice accessible to educators and people interested in education who work beyond the walls of academia. It describes the important theoretical ideas of critical pedagogy in a straightforward way and explains how sensible strategies that are consistent with these ideas can be put into practice. At the same time, the book is instructive for academics and their graduate students, who want to get across the ideas and practical consequences of critical pedagogy to a wider audience.

(http://www.web4u.com/cgi-bin/full_page?0-89464-755-5;09/15/1999).

In the case of *Critical Crosscurrents in Education*, through the Introduction and across eight chapters entitled: "Schooling and Society: Reappraising Ivan Illich", "The Deskilling of Educators," "The Prison as Metaphor," "Dimensions of Critical Pedagogy," "Education and Work," "Reflections on Lifelong Learning and Lifelong Education," "Participatory Strategies," and "Internationalist Pedagogy," the text fulfills its advertising. And, also as advertised, the text exists so "busy schoolteachers, adult educators, teachers in training, community-based educators, public service workers ... and others who believe that education should be a means for the realization of a more just and peaceful world than presently exists" (p. x.) might become encouraged "to enact a thoughtful pedagogy for transforming our schools, our communities, and ourselves" (p. xi).

Collins' instructive message is clear. In a world rushing toward societal collapse the need for critical theory has never been greater. In defense of critical theory, it is intellectually difficult to deny that as theories or ideologies of social change and social empowerment go, critical theory could hold enormous potential for the world's disadvantaged people. Critical theory could frame opportunities for social justice and the equitable access to and distribution of resources for the oppressed. Critical theory could offer a new, instructive social order framing opportunities for individual, personal, and professional development through community solidarity that positions ethical responsibility for an ever-evolving socially just struggle in the hands of the people themselves, that stresses the "true" egalitarian economic and historical nature of the human

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project, that favors critical praxis (theory informing practice; practice informing theory) as a ground for meaning-making, and that uses Marxist social analysis to provide for critical yet constructive understandings of change.

It is these critical theory theoretical *coulds* that Collins seeks to enfranchise in critical pedagogy as a pragmatic means to the revolutionary end. And why does critical theory need critical pedagogy? Critical theory, from its Modernist-minded conceptual beginnings to its current pseudo-postmodernist mutations, has always faced two interesting theory-practice issues. First, how will critical theory deal with the inherent forgetfulness embedded in our original economic sin? That is, we were disenfranchised from the means of our production, and there was a co-current giving over of our consciousness to the consumptive seductiveness of Capitalism. The critical theory response: Reenfranchisement of self as producer/consumer with a critical consciousness can only occur through a revolution of embodied remembering, in turn facilitated via an instructive, critical existence. Therefore, critical leaders/revolutionaries (educators) are needed to free both the oppressed and oppressor. Second, where is the earthly, life-world agency in a minded theory of human perfection? The critical theory response: Oppressors and the oppressed must be actively educated via critical pedagogy and/or liberation theology. Both these issues are at the core of why critical theory has not been widely accepted in the Western world as a purposeful, populace, revolutionary movement. Like all critical theorists, Collins has had to face the stark reality of these issues.

Collins faces the critical theory issues by using neo-Marxist analysis to examine examples of historical and contemporary oppression and what he frames as successful critical pedagogy responses to the dominant social order: Capitalism. It is the grand narrative of Capitalism and its associate narratives (Positivism, Behaviorism, Empiricism, Rationalism, etc.), again, ironically, that have constructed the very conditions that should spawn critical theory practice, but has truly dislocated most citizens' desire for revolutionary change. These narratives seduce through reward and punishment a citizen's forgetfulness that things could be otherwise. The purpose of Collins' text, then, is to offer an interpretive space between theory and practice for the reader. The goal seems to be to position the reader as a remembering citizen who has been deeply disoriented by an oppressive social order.

However, for me, it is this core desire that renders Collins' text problematic. Collins assumes the critical project's importance for the hyper-institutional, hyper-minded, hyper-consumed, hyper-technologically enslaved citizen-educator. He assumes that a simple, straightforward and bounded description of critical theory/pedagogy will lead the reader onward to elevated critical consciousness and that this consciousness will be transferable into a person's practices for social justice.

The problem with Collins' text, again for me, is that he overwhelmingly achieves his desire to simplify critical theory/practice and offer equally simple, sensible revolutionary pedagogic strategies. And the cost? Collins does not really attempt to explain how one can invoke Marxist categories without accepting the conclusions that follow from Marx's theory of historical (dialectical) materialism. Thus Collins enshrines Friere as an emancipator, but fails to face the historical and contemporary failures of Marxist ideology in Africa,

Latin America, Asia, Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union. What many critical theorists have done is invoke Marxist social categories to a lesser degree (as Collins does), and, therefore, effectively hedging their once-revolutionary conclusions (again Collins). Although anti-Capitalism remains as a focus in most critical pedagogy writings, recent critical pedagogy writers (including Collins) seem to have recognized that there are other sources of oppression: sexual, gendered, political, racial, religious, and ethnic. This awareness requires an acknowledgment of indebtedness to the poststructuralist-modernist thinkers, something Collins is unable to do. Still, Capitalism remains the principal critical problem. However, critical theorists/pedagogues propose that the historical examples of "real" socialism cannot be viewed as genuine instances of liberation. They argue that the invocation of Marxist critical analysis tools in no way limits them to accepting Marxist conclusions about an inevitable worldwide proletarian socialism (Collins again). Such critical theorists/pedagogues claim their work to be revolutionary not because they advocate the Marxist version of a socialist revolution, but because they feel that any just, rational, and substantive change in the dominating oppressive reality will necessitate drastic changes in the status quo (still Collins). Changing the status quo is revolutionary whether or not it results in Marxist socialism. In this light, and by selectively circling around the failure of several historical examples of Marxist socialism, the critical emancipatory project remains current and alive. To a degree Collins is correct in saying that just because some socialist endeavors have failed, socialist thought is at fault. However, in doing so they evoke the critical theory problem: in theory it should work because of careful analysis of the life world as a truly oppressive condition, but when pragmatic versions of critical pedagogy are put into practice, it is the life conditions that evoked the theory that resist the practices of critical pedagogy. It must be admitted that among critical theorists themselves there has been some difficulty finding or creating an alternate, viable form of critical theory socialism. So we have Collins' text. And the difficulty continues.

In conclusion, critical pedagogy could help citizens of the world get at what it means to free oneself from an oppressive situation. It could provide a means for a world-illiterate, consumer-powerless, critically unconscious individual to be led out of, liberated from, the present dominating social order. Critical pedagogy could get learners to explore the root nature of sociopolitical oppression. It could get at the physical, mental, and emotional states of affairs we find imposed on one group by another and as shaped by systems created by the dominating social order. Critical pedagogy could get at our domestication into the established order. Critical pedagogy could emerge as a possible response to this state of affairs. If critical pedagogy could be practiced as a system of educational guidelines designed to enable learners to gain a broader, richer, deeper understanding of the world they live in, then there is hope. If critical pedagogy could enable learners to examine their surroundings, interpret them, and formulate their own definitions for things, then it could be significant to their lives. However, it is difficult to imagine readers getting to such a state of critical consciousness by becoming engaged with Collins' "Critical Theory/Pedagogy Lite." Collins' text did not transport me into the passionate critical inquiry associated with wondering about the essence of critical pedago-

gy's alterity—the pedagogic possibility for being/becoming otherwise. A different book perhaps. And perhaps simply a book that might have been something less “sensible,” but certainly much more engaging.

The Internet and the First Amendment: Schools and Sexually Explicit Expression. Fred H. Cate. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 103 pages, softcover, \$12.00.

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Although computers and related technology have been used in many schools in North America to a greater or lesser degree since the 1960s, the advent of schools accessing the Internet has led many educators and segments of the general public to pay considerable attention to it. Also known by terms analogous to high-speed roadways, such as the Information Highway, Electronic Highway, or Infobahn, the Internet has grown considerably in a span of less than 10 years, and most of that growth has occurred outside the realms of education and government. The rise of e-commerce firms such as Amazon.com and eBay are prime examples. Nevertheless, governments in both Canada and the United States extol the Internet as a source of information and as a rapid means of communication in the “global village.” Governments in both countries have programs underway to connect every school to the Internet as quickly as possible.

In spite of such developments, concern is expressed in some quarters that much of what is readily available on the Internet is related to the prurient aspects of sexuality. This view is reinforced by many media reports that focus on the apparent availability and quantity of pornography on the Internet, and especially illegal materials such as child pornography (Vernadakis, 1998). This exposure by the media has led some individuals to assert that the Internet must be regulated in much the same way as the Universal Postal Union regulates the mails. Moreover, it is suggested that teachers may face litigation if they permit students free access to the Internet while in school. The opposing view contends that the Internet is a true manifestation of the principle of free speech and that attempts to regulate it amount to censorship by the state. It is into this charged and unclear discussion of free speech versus safety for schoolchildren

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