

of assuming universal experience and abstract goals. Freire rejects this criticism, reminding others that they have a responsibility to recognize the historical and cultural context of his work.

In a chapter entitled "Critical Pedagogy and the Welfare State," Peter Leonard takes up the dilemma of universalizing Freire, pointing out that an attempt to use ideas generated in different cultural contexts and historical periods is fraught with dangers of over-simplification, vulgarization, and distortion. As Freire's work has shown, it has constantly been reinterpreted and reinvented, even in industrially advanced societies by those who attempt to construct a new theoretical synthesis of Freire, Dewey, and Habermas.

Each of the contributors to this book point out the situated origins of Freire's pedagogy. All the same it continued to inspire and guide wider applications. Freire himself suggests in the foreword, that his purpose is to point to directions which discourses of liberation might take, discourses which are "purposeful, rational, dialectical, yet nontotalizing and open to the particular and specific needs of the oppressed" (Freire, p. xii). This volume shows that his work continues to perform this work.

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Lewis, C. (1995). *Educating hearts and minds: Reflections on Japanese preschool and elementary education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 249 pp. (Softcover).

Educating Hearts and Minds is a readable and thought provoking addition to the literature on Japanese education. It is written by an individual whose interest in Japanese education began as an exchange student in a Japanese high school and who has subsequently spent 14 years conducting research in Japanese preschools and elementary schools.

Catherine Lewis begins *Educating Hearts and Minds* with the question which has puzzled North American educators – "Why do Japanese children do so well academically?" Instead of seeking the answer in junior high and high schools, Lewis explores elements in preschool and elementary school education which form the foundation for Japanese children's successful academic achievement.

Lewis develops her book around the thesis that "Japanese education succeeds because, early on, it meets *children's* needs – for friendship, for

belonging, for opportunities to shape school life" (p. 1). Through vivid descriptions of children actively engaged in cooperative, play-based and inquiry-based learning experiences, Lewis quickly dispels the myth that Japanese schools are rigid institutions which place undue pressure on young children to excel at academic skills. Ultimately, through Lewis's comparison, it is North American schools which come across as perpetrators of skill-based learning which ultimately fails because of the failure to address the needs of the total child.

As she describes her visits to Japanese classrooms where even 3 and 4 year-olds are allowed to use real tools without adult supervision, engage in noisy free play throughout the school for extended lengths of time, or fight among themselves without adult intervention, Lewis is honest in expressing her discomfort and reactions. Like many Japanese educators, she questions the amount of conformity fostered through the routines and rituals of daily classroom life which de-emphasize individual expression and creativity. She addresses other perceived faults, such as bullying and a highly standardized national curriculum, within the Japanese education system. However, she places these concerns within the context of an education system where young children are valued as children who are capable of taking responsibility for their participation in their learning as a worthwhile member of the educational community. Lewis explores how teachers foster this sense of community through children's participation as members of small and large groups. She distinguishes between "working as a group" in a truly collaborative process and "working in a group" (p. 84). She concludes that it is children's security within this community of learners which facilitates their future educational success.

Lewis's observations ring true to my more limited experiences in Japanese preschools. During my visits to Japanese preschools in the summers of 1993 and 1994, I have marvelled at the ability of young children to work cooperatively together, take responsibility for their actions, and care for their school environment. I have wondered how teachers create this sense of community in a program where the focus of the program is learning through free play. I noticed that the teachers' referred to the class members as "friends" (*tomodachi*) rather than as classmates or boys and girls. Standing in the middle of children attempting to construct canals in a flooded sand area, I have observed teachers facilitate children's learning through sensitive questioning. I have pondered with them the question of "when and how to intervene to facilitate children's thinking." I have been amazed by children's abilities to make and serve refreshing mint tea to everyone on the playground as part of their play activity on a hot day. Finally, I have been acutely aware

of the notable lack of emphasis on academics in the form of preliteracy or mathematics experiences in the preschool.

Catherine Lewis has helped me understand my observations within the context of cultural beliefs and values which underpin Japanese preschools and elementary schools. These beliefs include a perception of children as innately good and capable who misbehave through lack of understanding rather than wilful disobedience and why being a supportive friend within the group is valued over competition and individual success.

Two themes emerge throughout the book: how Japanese teachers build the sense of a community of learners where all children share leadership responsibilities and play an active role in shaping and monitoring the daily life of the classroom; and the role *hansei* or reflection plays in both the social and academic components of education. Experiences are designed to prevent discipline problems through children's meaningful, active engagement in the process of learning through which products are created and skills mastered. Early in their educational life children are encouraged to openly reflect upon their own effort and learning within a supportive environment of teacher and peers.

Through clearly organized questions and exploration of educational issues, Lewis presents a persuasive argument that North Americans can learn a great deal from Japanese education practices. She provides support with examples from the United States where similar methods have been used successfully. She is realistic in her assessment of differences in social structure and values between North America and Japan. She does not advocate wholesale adoption of Japanese educational methods. Through the lens of another culture she causes the reader to reflect on personal beliefs and values about learning and the roles of the teacher and peer group in the educational process. Ultimately, she has provided North American readers with an informative and insightful account of Japanese education with possible applications to our own schools. This book now takes a valued place on my bookshelf. I recommend *Educating Hearts and Minds* to anyone thinking about the future of education.

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