

Doyle, C. & A. Singh (2006). *Reading & Teaching Henry Giroux*. New York: Peter Lang.

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While many agree on the need for radical democratic education in contemporary classrooms, few books provide any concrete insight into the forms such pedagogical objectives should take. In contrast, in *Reading & Teaching Henry Giroux*, Clar Doyle and Amarjit Singh move in iterative fashion between theory and practice to create a teaching stance which is ever mindful of critical pedagogy's transformative vocation. Quite appropriately the authors remind us that their chosen subject, Henry Giroux, is one of the preeminent figures in contemporary critical pedagogy, a pioneering voice in media and cultural studies, and a passionate proponent of democratic education. The author of dozens of books and countless peer reviewed articles, Giroux has helped establish critical pedagogy as an often influential discipline, whose reach extends beyond academia, into high school classrooms and broader culture. Beyond the elitism, territorial infighting and reactionary conservatism of the traditional Academy, Giroux insists on the importance of the public dimension of the intellectual's vocation as central to the viability, as well as the interdependence, of democracy and the contemporary university. For Giroux, behind narrow, often disciplinary calls for enhanced rigor, accountability, and standardization lies a drive towards dispirited, alienating and ultimately dehumanizing educational systems. Schooling, as an instrument of dominant discourses becomes a-historical, depersonalized and reified, presenting knowledge as simply instrumental, objective and divorced from teachers' personal lives (56, 57).

Against such oppressive institutional realities, Doyle and Singh argue, counter discourses can be found and situated through critical pedagogy's tactical concern with the exigencies of power and myriad ways in which inequality and injustice express themselves in everyday life and its most important institutions, schooling included. The authors point out that "Giroux claims that language should be studied not only as a technical and expressive device but also as an active agent in the production of various texts and institutional powers" (28). Not surprisingly, then, debates about language often become a way of policing meta-discourses about power and schooling in ways which limit the possibilities for change inherent in emergent, public disciplines. For Giroux, in his own words, "knowledge must be linked to the issue of power, which suggests that educators and others must raise questions about its truth claims as well as the interests that such knowledge serves" (53). Yet, this emphasis on constructivism is not tantamount to a reductive relativism, since Giroux's work is unashamedly concerned with the search for a more democratic and socially just society.

As such, Giroux's emphasis on the construction of knowledge, the public pedagogical nature of culture, and the formative influence of media and language are all orientated towards furthering the struggle for deep democracy. For Doyle and Singh, education requires a continual attempt to connect and reconnect

teachers and learners in the search for a more intimate, critical and caring schooling environment. In many ways this book is the product of such a philosophy—a handbook for understanding the full range and complexity of Giroux’s thought—without sacrificing accessibility for intellectual sophistication and depth of thought. This book provides a comprehensive, often detailed, exploration of Giroux’s work, and more importantly, it has connotations for educators who seek to make a difference through their chosen profession—in ways which challenge its most fundamental assumptions. It is also one which, as Giroux says, underscores the importance and power of “pedagogy as a mode of witnessing, a public space in which students learn to be attentive and responsible to the memories and narratives of others” (53). For the authors, this tendency in Giroux’s work perhaps is a response to contemporary culture and its struggles. Ironically, as popular culture has become more and more corporatized and the influence of the military-industrial-surveillance complex has deepened, teaching has become increasingly deskilled and insularized. This contradiction in many ways serves as a reminder of the need to emphasize the role of teachers as “transformative intellectuals”: thinkers and doers whose primary function is to serve as democratic agents for critical engagement and social justice.

As Doyle and Singh contend, Giroux’s work points to teaching being a form of cultural politics since “the role of teachers cannot be understood without reference to the place of schooling, the power of ideology, and the needs of democracy, as well as the other spheres that help explain how personal identity and social reality get constructed” (26). More importantly, however, Doyle and Singh devote much of their text to orienting readers to possibilities for using Giroux within their own classrooms and pedagogical encounters. While critical education may challenge standardization it does need tactics and ways of mapping the contemporary educational reality and the enormous challenges it poses for cooperation and coordinated dissent. In this vein, the authors highlight three strategies for using Giroux’s work within the classroom, these include: i) asking students to question the interests and ideological location of textbook producers and curriculum materials; ii) encouraging students to “discuss these issues in historical and comparative contexts”, often by placing them in a local, regional and global set of inter-relations as well as a historical and socio-cultural context; and iii) by discussing the production of curricular knowledge from a Canadian perspective since quite often curricular materials originate from, or are heavily influenced, by American sources (91, 92). As a complementary strategy, Doyle and Singh also describe how Giroux writes to combine the interconnected strands of public issues, ideological and cultural influences and concrete tactical strategies (95). Together, such a combination of pedagogical and academic strategies enable the authors to describe in detailed fashion how they use Giroux’s writing to guide and inform their own work with undergraduate students, graduate researchers and teacher interns.

“A teacher who is attempting to teach without inspiring the pupil with a desire to learn” said Horace Mann “is hammering on a cold iron”. Doyle and Singh take

Mann's admonition to heart by showing how Giroux's approach can form a transformative influence in the lives of students and teachers alike. For Doyle and Singh, Giroux's writings have also enabled them to develop more informed and effective classroom management and teacher education practices. To such an end, the authors also outline a critical internship teaching model based on Giroux's public transformative pedagogy which they term a Reflective and Critical Internship Model (RCIT Model) (135). Here they draw on the experiences and concerns of teaching interns and base their approach on the ongoing educational challenges highlighted by these students. Through this model and by referencing the voices of students and interns, they seek to give voice to a "pedagogy of affirmation" which makes use of "five forms of action: a) describing and contextualizing, b) bringing and recognizing cultural capital, c) engaging in communication, d) examining and problematizing dominant practices and discourses, and e) functioning as intellectuals and cultural workers" (158). A central part of this approach involves using "reflection and the production of local theories" to allow "teaching interns [to] empower themselves" (163). It also requires recognizing how students and teachers have been devalued and "overburdened by discourses of despair" (77). Yet, as innovative and useful as this pedagogical model proves, Doyle and Singh, despite emphasizing the radical possibility inherent in Giroux's work, resist oversimplifying the challenges of teaching for transformation:

"As we have claimed above, the role of the intellectual is much more than a mantle placed on teachers. This is not a job for which one applies. We stress to the students and teachers we work with, that being an intellectual, in this critical sense, can in fact be a burden. For many teachers it is easier to accept the prepackaged curriculum content and the objectives that are printed in the teacher guides. The role of intellectual for teachers means that this is no longer enough. Now the responsibility is to shape the very purposes and conditions of school. This is where teachers have to take responsibility for their own work, Interns remind us of the constraints that are imposed by the curriculum, as well as by the rules and regulation set by local school administrators. In fact, one of the biggest challenges we face is to convince students that as teachers they can have power. At this crossroads, we encourage students to remember teachers who had power—who gave themselves power. We never try to down play the difficulty of this. Rather, we prompt these teachers, and would be teachers, to move quietly but definitely towards such moments. Reminding them that as transformative intellectuals, we never really arrive. We remain in progress. Of course we have to remind ourselves of this also. (148)"

Here, Doyle and Singh aptly emphasize the importance of commitment and the danger of becoming radicals in name only. They remind us that quite often

established interests have strong, often negative and sometimes vindictive reactions to radical critique. Whether or not such a reactionary stance arises from a conscious decision to oppose radical democratic change, or simply, naked self-interest, it is a real concern for those pushing for change. There are costs to teaching against the grain, balanced only by a sense that one is living and teaching in a fashion which is at once, fulfilling, and, deeply authentic. These are real issues for conscientious teachers teaching to youth hemmed in by a “politics of disposability” where the concerned citizen becomes the victim of a carnivalesque gulag culture dominated by irreverence, mistrust and diversion. For Giroux and these authors, the security state is the fractured skeleton around which an empty commodified culture of instant gratification and despair, is lulled into a calf like stupor as democracy plods onwards towards an unknown, and uncertain nightmarish future.

Seeking to avoid such a cultural fate by questioning essentialist political paradigms, Giroux challenges the political left and right alike by emphasizing the essential role played by the dissident and activist in creating vibrant democratic cultures. Mapping the terrain of “politics after hope”, as Giroux says elsewhere, requires us to challenge the false economies of power and pleasure offered by the corporate media’s seductive dream machine. A key question at the heart of this book, then, requires us to consider how can teachers find a way to create fulfilling pedagogical engagements in an increasingly troubled, dysfunctional and disenfranchised culture? In its simplest sense, Doyle and Singh suggest, the flip side of alienation is the burden of taking responsibility for radical teaching from the margins. Rather than seeing students as objects to be acted upon or interfered with, Giroux, Doyle and Singh promote pedagogical encounters which use hope and the imagination to create engaging, transformative learning experiences. As this seconded teacher’s comments point out, those within the schooling system often underestimate the transformative power of hope and enthusiasm:

“I’m going back to a classroom when I finish this job in April, and I’m going back with some good ideas. I’m going back with some new combinations of pieces of literature that I have never put together before, some new insights. I think I’m going back a little bit revived. I believe, too, when the school board selected me, or when my principal selected me, they may have had that in mind. It’s not exactly been retraining, but I think it has been a source of revitalization and so it’s been good for me. And I hope it’s been good for my interns. (Jo) (171)

As this educator suggests teaching should not be about training the life and vitality out of students—it should be an opportunity for sharing and exploring—finding reasons to celebrate love and hope. Likewise, according to Doyle and Singh education for Giroux is simultaneously an intensely public, self reflexive endeavor. In this nexus perhaps is the crux of critical democratic education, as

the everyday and the political interfuse and constitute each other as provocative, challenging and inspiring. Democratic public life, at once relies on institutions and the reproduction of public interests as personal concerns. This is a relationship which is continually changing, meaning that the critical educational project always is preoccupied with examining this connection and the ways in which publics have coded and recoded the fractious dialects of power. Like Freire's concrete pedagogical strategies aimed at helping learners achieve a new form of critical cultural literacy, the best tactics of the critical pedagogy tradition are often simple, direct and use the learner's everyday environment to provide new ways of contextualizing life experience through language to create a mindful agency that pushes back the boundaries of the possible.

The politics of representation, then, Doyle and Singh insist, is notable for its ubiquity and contentiousness. Constructing youth through the social engineering of failure and social stratification ignores the revolutionary promise of schooling as a site of shifting hegemony and disavowed desire—a site of borders and thus the realization of the need for revolutionary border crossing pedagogies. Using an eclectic mix of postcolonial, critical, postmodernism, feminist and liberal theory, Giroux encounters contemporary culture through history by using a critical literacy fueled by imagination and hope. Such tools are coupled with the stark realization that we live in a century confounded by the open-endedness of new vistas and haunted by the ghastly history of war which dogs us from our bloodied past. Breaking free of our collective hatreds and phobias requires intense emotive, intellectual efforts towards a reemergence of freedom and a form of social justice which embraces both tolerance and the freedom of the individual will. As always such big questions are played out as a stance against the thoughtlessness and banality of institutional realities. Teaching not only by precept but by example, Doyle and Singh demonstrate how the theoretical and cultural work of Giroux makes a concrete difference in teachers' everyday lives. They also show how Giroux has inspired and informed their teaching practice which, at its heart, shares a common, critical and imaginative theme of viewing “pedagogy as a form of cultural and political production rather than simply a transmission of knowledge and skills” (152). As such, this book explores central educative themes in ways which are recursive, sophisticated and engaging, representing a thoughtful affirmation of teaching and public agency, in a time wherein a rapidly dissolving public conscience falls increasingly victim to a crusading cultural politics of fear.