

BOOK REVIEWS

Marxism and educational theory: origins and issues, by Mike Cole, Abingdon, Routledge, 2008, 181 pp., £24.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-415-33171-5

The Oxford handbook of philosophy of education, edited by Harvey Siegel, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, 548 pp., £85.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-19-531288-1

Spontaneity: a psychoanalytic inquiry, by Gemma Corradi Fiumara, Hove, Routledge, 2009, 149 pp., £22.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-415-49269-0

Reading these three quite different books very close together was a challenging, broadening and thought-provoking experience. In a short space of time the authors engaged me with a wide spectrum of sociological, philosophical and psychoanalytic theories, expressed in many different writing styles. The range of alternative perspectives developed by Mike Cole, Gemma Corradi Fiumara and the group of authors edited by Harvey Siegel stimulated me to think afresh about aspects of educational theory and practice, and their rich references and bibliographies introduced me to many writers who were new to me.

On every page of Mike Cole's book *Marxism and educational theory: Origins and issues*, there is a strong impression of someone who has continued to be genuinely excited and stimulated throughout his life by Marx's ideas. In the introduction he recounts his personal history, tracing the roots of his political and educational ideas and convictions from their early beginnings in memories of conversations between his father and uncle and of his mother's life experience, to their later development through academic engagement and participation in direct action. The tone of the book is one of energetic commitment, and Cole's authorial voice communicates a deep and serious engagement with the basic concepts and principles of Marxist theory.

Cole is concerned with Marxism as an integrally interrelated theoretical and practical project. Throughout the book he is at pains to argue the position that Marxism cannot be a self-indulgent form of theoretical escapism; rather, there must be a strong relationship between theory and the endeavour to ameliorate and solve deep-rooted problems and conflicts in societies throughout the world.

Cole is committed to bringing discussions about socialism and Marxism into debates about education, and his book explores the contribution of Marxism, poststructuralism, postmodernism, transmodernism and critical race theory to educational theory. The book is organised into a two-part structure. Part I examines each school of thought in itself and locates it within educational theory, addressing socialism and Marxist theory, Marxist theory and education, and Nietzsche, poststructuralism and postmodernism. Part II opens with a Marxist critique of poststructuralism and postmodernism in educational theory, and their connections to social change and social justice. The challenges of transmodernism, globalisation, neoliberalism and environmental destruction are addressed, prior to a discussion of postmodern, transmodern and Marxist perspectives on the new imperialism. The penultimate thought-provoking chapter critiques critical race theory through a case-study of Britain. In a powerful and incisive final chapter, 'Common objections to Marxism and a Marxist response', Cole brings together the

themes of his book in the punchy format of 14 common objections to Marxism, which he addresses and responds to forcefully.

Written in a lively and accessible style, this book will appeal to a wide range of readers. Each chapter is prefaced by an abstract, and Cole takes considerable care to explain and contextualise clearly for the novice the concepts he then goes on to analyse at a more nuanced and sophisticated level. For example, informative elucidations of the complex ideas of Baudrillard, Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard are followed by vigorous and undoubtedly controversial engagements with the arguments of postmodernists and poststructuralists, especially with some of the contentions of feminist poststructuralist discourse analysts. Throughout the book Cole never loses his connection with students, and thinks through how difficult theories might be tackled with them. To take one example, in Chapter 7, 'Globalisation, neoliberalism and environmental destruction', he considers globalisation and environmental destruction in the context of global neoliberal capitalism. As well as analysing the meaning and evaluating the significance of the underlying concepts, he considers at a practical level how these complex issues might be discussed in the classroom. The book contains a valuable source of references for both beginners and experienced scholars in Marxist theory alike.

Mike Cole is an educator who clearly evokes strong reactions and loyalty in his students, as illustrated by the animated and entertainingly anecdotal foreword by Peter McLaren.

In his introduction, Cole expresses the hope that his book will promote dialogue with readers who believe in social justice and social change. There is no doubt that a lively debate will be ignited between those who agree and those who disagree with Cole's argument in this book, but that debate can only be invigorated by the wealth of contextual information and challenging perspectives it offers.

In his introduction to *The Oxford handbook of philosophy of education*, the editor Harvey Siegel defines philosophy of education as:

... that branch of philosophy that addresses philosophical questions concerning the nature, aims, and problems of education. As a branch of practical philosophy, its practitioners look both inward to the parent discipline of philosophy and outward to educational practice, as well as to developmental psychology, cognitive science more generally, sociology, and other relevant disciplines. (3)

The combination of these introspective and outward-looking orientations has produced a collection of 28 essays that are rich in range and thought-provoking in content.

The book is structured into six parts: 'Aims of education'; 'Thinking, reasoning, teaching, and learning'; 'Moral, value, and character education'; 'Knowledge, curriculum, and educational research'; 'Social and political issues' and 'Approaches to philosophy of education and philosophy'. Siegel gives a detailed and helpful introductory breakdown of the contents of each part, and indicates the particular perspective of each of the contributors.

Depending on their own special interests in education, different readers will be drawn initially to certain chapters rather than others. For me, Martha Nussbaum's essay on 'Tagore, Dewey and the imminent demise of liberal education' (Chapter 3), and Michael Slote's on 'Caring, empathy and moral education' (Chapter 12) immediately stood out and I read them first. But the strength of the book is that by collecting together in one volume such a cross-section of philosophers engaging with education the reader is encouraged to explore and experiment, and try out authors and fields that may be less familiar but which prove to be extremely rewarding. This happened for me with Catherine Elgin's essay on 'Art and education' (Chapter 18) and Gareth Matthews' essay on 'Philosophy and developmental psychology: Outgrowing the deficit conception of childhood' (Chapter 9).

Among the stated purposes of the book are the reversal of the benign neglect of philosophy of education both by many in the philosophical community and by scholars working from within

a different educational research orientation, and the introduction of philosophy of education to new readers who may be unaware of its existence. I think the book succeeds in these aims through the sheer diversity in content and style of the collected essays.

Both severally and together the chapters open a window on to the field that is exciting and informative in its scope. Readers with myriad different personal interests in education will find something in this book to provoke, engage or even enrage them. On the one hand, readers who are interested in the large question of how research in philosophy of education relates to other educational research will find a detailed survey of this particular battleground in Chapter 21. In his lively essay 'Empirical educational research: Charting philosophical disagreements in an undisciplined field', D.C. Phillips gamely confronts the enormity of the task facing a philosopher commenting on issues in educational research. Phillips captures the intensity and sometimes downright acrimony of the debates and controversies about theoretical constructs and methodologies in the field of educational research. As he dryly observes: 'It is safe to say that, on all sides of the debates over methodologies and their implications, there is mutual incomprehension mingled with distrust' (387).

On the other hand, readers coming from particular research orientations of their own such as – among many others – feminism, values education and multicultural education, and who want to 'drill down' into philosophy of education's contribution to their field, will not be disappointed. Nel Noddings' essay on 'Feminist philosophy and education' (Chapter 27), Graham Oddie on 'Values education' (Chapter 15) and Amy Gutmann on 'Educating for individual freedom and democratic citizenship; in unity and diversity there is strength' (Chapter 22) provide valuable insights into the focus of philosophers of education in these specific areas.

A particular strength of this collection of essays is that the chapters are accessible to those without prior knowledge of philosophy of education. In this way the book provides an immediate and stimulating immersion into the pool of issues that exercise philosophers of education and their critics. From my own limited experience I believe there is a potentially receptive audience for these topics. A number of my professional doctorate students start out by never having heard of philosophy of education, and instinctively reacting against the very idea of it as being most probably difficult, obscure, impenetrable or simply irrelevant to their day-to-day working experience as educators. Yet many of them come to value and engage with the questions it raises. I have already added this book to their reading list, and anticipate with keen interest the face-to-face and online discussions I am sure it will generate.

As a layperson in the field of psychoanalysis I approached Gemma Corradi Fiumara's absorbing book *Spontaneity* with some trepidation. It is a demanding read, but I found it compelling and thought-provoking. Corradi Fiumara's subtle development of her ideas encourages the reader to persevere, and her fluent interweaving of references from philosophy, literature and psychology illuminates and clarifies her argument: Aristotle, Kierkegaard, Bacon, Dante, Jung, Freud and Winnicott are among the many diverse thinkers who feature in the book's pages. For me as a non-specialist it was a book that was well worth taking pains with, and one that yielded unforeseen and rewarding insights.

Corradi Fiumara understands spontaneity as 'an essential and perhaps most important quality of psychic life, sustaining all forms of creativity' (4). She argues that it is not what happens to us but how we react to adverse events and relationships that forms who we are. In particular she links the concept of spontaneity with the concept of vulnerability in its positive sense, summing up this position at the end of the book: 'the thesis that runs through the present work is, of course, that both as individuals and as a species we have more to gain from accepted vulnerability than from illusory power' (120).

Vulnerability in this positive sense entails openness to new ways of seeing and being that involve the dissolution of patterns of thinking and behaving that are familiar, secure, and may

even have enabled a person to survive. Corradi Fiumara sets up a stimulating dynamic between ideas of self-formation and self-decreation, and suggests that self-decreation is essential to the cultivation of spontaneity. Among the many stimulating ideas about the development of persons in the book, her thinking about the challenge of taking the risk of deconstructing entrenched attitudes – not only attitudes that have led to failure but also those that have led to success – is particularly interesting.

One unexpected and perhaps less obvious fixed attitude that may need to be dislodged is that of entitlement, where individuals who have suffered might see themselves as somehow exceptional and deserving of special attention and compensation in an insatiable manner: 'individuals may become restrained in an outlook of entitlement of their own making; which is the contrary of spontaneity' (54).

In Chapter 5, 'The problem of entitlement', the author analyses the implications and repercussions of this limiting mind-set in depth.

Embarking on a deliberate process of disintegration can lead the person into dangerous and disturbing territory. Corradi Fiumara proposes that:

... the changes necessitated by creative life and spontaneity may be implemented primarily when one achieves the ability to discard something, almost a part of one's own self, or a basic affectual assumption for which the individual may have developed a sort of addiction. (116)

If I have understood the argument at this point correctly, Corradi Fiumara advocates the rejection of a form of repetitive psychic paralysis that can grip individuals equally whether they are successful or unsuccessful. In one of the many arresting images in the book she writes: 'It is like an endless inner echo relayed from one part of the self to another, reverberating and rebounding through the same discourses' (114). The individual is in the grip of an inner script that becomes a rigid, repetitive pattern. S/he is trapped. A strength of this work is that the author has the gift of illustrating the complex theoretical points she is making in a way that a non-specialist can grasp. She explains one paradoxical dimension of the relationship between self-formation and self-decreation thus:

As we can readily observe, we sometimes appreciate that it is wonderful for somebody to develop into a successful person, but then we may secretly feel sorry for that person strenuously maintaining the contours of his psychic and social accomplishments. We could, for instance, think of some individuals who excel as clinicians, scholars and theorists and who reach a stellar position in a micro- or macro-community. It is possible that these subjects would greatly gain from a process of self-decreation as an alternative to becoming fixed or constrained in their interlocking personal and professional achievements. Such psycho-social conditions can ultimately be detrimental to spontaneity and transformation. (114)

Although not directly concerned with education, *Spontaneity* engages with concepts of personhood, agency, and the roots of pathology that underlie many debates in higher education. As I read the book, and afterwards, I found myself thinking about the importance or over-use of the term 'self-esteem' in education, what self-esteem actually means, and what the functional boundaries for understanding the 'student experience' might be. Corradi Fiumara's suggestion that a climate of cognitive constriction induces a sense of paralysis made me think afresh about self-inhibition in learning and self-limitation in students' personal development planning. Her questioning of whether pathology arises from early trauma, an impoverished environment or the way an individual responds to such difficulties reminded me of the sometimes inexplicable differential flourishing and frustrated 'stuckness' in my own classrooms.

The book prompted me to think from a new perspective about strategies for helping and supporting students; the affective dimension of learning; understandings of creativity; and alternative perspectives on success and failure. Corradi Fiumara's insights into the risks of responding to change made me re-evaluate the sometimes unremittingly positive presentation

of policies and strategies for students and academics to fulfil their potential, and to appreciate the losses entailed and the grit and courage required in working towards personal and professional transformation. The concerns examined in this book are relevant to student development, and to institutional and individual ideas of self and identity formation that underlie matters of staff development such as coaching and mentoring. Despite the difficult struggles and disturbing conditions of mind analysed in the book it left me with an unexpected feeling of hope that individuals could overcome adversity and achieve a condition of spontaneity. In common with the other two books reviewed here it is a text that I look forward to going back to and re-reading.

Denise Batchelor
 Institute of Education, University of London, UK
 d.batchelor@ioe.ac.uk
 © 2010, Denise Batchelor

Home is where one starts from: one woman's memoir, by Barbara Tizard, Edinburgh, Word Power Books, 2010, 310 pp., £12.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-9549185-8-3

It would take more than an entire *London Review of Education* to list, exhaustively, what this book is *about*, what it teaches its readers. Highlights include: socialist Sunday schools and their 10 secular commandments, Greek dancing as a summer alternative to piano at a certain type of girls' boarding school, the birth of the Radio Times, the Queen of Puddings, shifts in the sexual mores of the working and middle classes from 1920 to the present day, the British Communist Party's perceptions of Soviet Russia (before and after 1956), what one ordered at Lyons Corner Houses and British Restaurants, the unspoken night-time fears of children during the Blitz, High Days, the complications and contradictions of child evacuation and 'billeting' during the Second World War, how to butter an entire loaf of bread, Popper and Marxism, changes in approaches to childbirth ('Push, Mrs Robinson, push, just as though you were going to the lavatory!' (48)), who ate offal and who didn't, and the challenges of running the Thomas Coram Research Unit. This is a social history in the form of a memoir, written by someone who clearly knows how to teach, eminent psychologist and educationalist Professor Barbara Tizard.

It is also a love letter to her mother, a woman (like anyone honest) full of contradictions: a socialist who devoted her working life to improving the educations of working class children, and yet did not seem to want her own children playing with them. She was an antimonarchist who refused an OBE on the grounds that she deserved to be a CBE or a Dame instead. She was also a woman who, as head of the National Union of Teachers, gave stirring speeches on the importance of education to build moral courage and cooperation, and lived these values in every footstep of her hard-fought independent life. The mother dominating this memoir is a woman impossible not to admire, yet difficult for the reader to like, perhaps simply because we are so busy liking the young Barbara.

Home is where one starts from could also be described as a story of the English class system, told as a tale of food and rooms. Professor Tizard notes that when reading biographies and memoirs she always wants to know what people ate, and I think most of us feel this way (how can we understand people's lives without understanding what they ate and where they slept?), and yet so often these quiet, uncelebrated and often solitary aspects of life are missing from written accounts. This memoir brings them back: the Post Toasties, boiled bacon, Apple Charlotte and bread, butter and jam of her grandmother's house; the lumpy porridge, boiled fish and 5:30 bedtimes of her first boarding school; and the hot suppers which appeared along with