Review: *Critical Pedagogy for Social Justice*. Smyth, John (2011) London: Continuum.

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This book is part of the Critical Pedagogy Today series, which aims to build on and reinvigorate the work of Paulo Freire. John Smyth's *Critical Pedagogy for Social Justice* offers an accessible exposition of critical pedagogy, and an interpretation of radical education which is both fitting and relevant for contemporary times. Whilst the book is not intended to be a guide or a toolkit for practice, it will certainly engage and challenge those working with the marginalised and the excluded. It deserves to be read by teachers, youth workers, advice and guidance practitioners and others working in disadvantaged communities – as well as by academics and policymakers.

This book comprises five chapters, the first of which introduces the Freirian concept of critical hope. This provides the backdrop for the twin themes pursued throughout the text: a critique of educational and social injustice, and the development of more socially-just alternatives. In Chapter 1, Smyth explains how critical hope is profoundly different from neo-liberal notions of personal ambition based upon individualistic acquisition. At least since the 1970s, neo-liberal discourses have labelled the poor as hopeless; in contrast, Smyth argues for the return of hope, although, as he explains, this needs to be a serious, politically-informed critical hope.

Chapter 2 raises important questions about teaching. The chapter's first theme is a critique of the 'management pedagogies' which are a particular manifestation of neo-liberalism, and which Smyth argues has led to the immiseration of teaching. The second theme is a 'critical re-imagination of teaching', which outlines a range of ways in which critical pedagogy can be introduced at the 'chalk-face' – ways in which inequality and injustice can be critiqued, and democratic alternatives promoted. Drawing on a range of thinkers, including Gramsci, Kohl and Giroux, Smyth argues that the compliant, uncritical teacher needs to be replaced by the intellectual, politically-active teacher who asks searching questions about knowledge: about why certain forms of knowledge are legitimised and selected, and others are omitted; and about whose world-view is privileged and whose are denied. Smyth reminds us that teachers should be intellectuals and critical thinkers, not technicians.

Chapter 3 focuses on students and how they are affected by the ways in which education is organised and operated. Smyth argues that traditional forms of subject and teacher-centred pedagogy often reinforce and exacerbate disadvantage, but he also recognises that simplistic attempts to be more democratic and supportive can create fear and insecurity amongst students. It is argued that the key to empowering students lies in building 'relational trust' within and across a range of groups. This, Smyth argues, is a more effective way to include the disadvantaged and the excluded than the current preoccupation with structural and organisational change. Central to Smyth's approach is a desire to empower young people as active participants in education. This is not a straightforward task, especially when working with the most marginalised – and Smyth recognises this. However, the case of 'Mango High School', an institution with extraordinarily difficult circumstances, is used to illustrate what can be achieved when relations are prioritised. This discussion is worth reading carefully as it provides valuable insights into the forms of pedagogy, organisation and leadership necessary to create relational trust.

Chapter 4 deals with community engagement and begins by reminding us that, whilst various forms of disadvantage are concentrated in certain communities, it is not a natural phenomenon. Quite rightly Smyth points out that disadvantage is a constructed state, related to systematic inequality and injustice. Flowing from this, he argues that community regeneration programmes, which assume that disadvantage is rooted in the shortcomings of certain individuals and groups, are inherently flawed. Smyth argues there needs to be an emphasis on the capabilities which individuals and communities possess rather than their perceived deficits. Facilitating such a programme of work, as Smyth acknowledges, requires, amongst other qualities, passion, persistence and courage. However, at its heart should be a debate about inequality, how it is constructed and maintained, and how to challenge it.

Chapter 5, *Continuing the Struggle*, uses Joe Kincheloe's concept of 'evolving criticality' as its touchstone. It is argued that, above all, an inclusive 'co-generative dialogue', which not only confronts injustice but offers alternatives, possibilities and hope, should be at the heart of critical pedagogy. This is perhaps the most powerful lesson to be learned from this book – strenuous opposition to neo-liberalism's corrosive 'reform' agenda is necessary, but so too are alternative narratives of hope, empowerment and social justice.

http://dx.doi.org/10.5920/till.2013.4238