

Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

Simon Springer, Marcelo Lopes de Souza and Richard J. White (eds), *The Radicalization of Pedagogy: Anarchism, Geography, and the Spirit of Revolt, Vol. I*, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. ISBN: 9781783486694 (cloth); ISBN: 9781783486700 (paper); ISBN: 9781783486717 (ebook)

“The world is your classroom” my colleague explained as we hiked alongside the Pini-Pini River, one of the many Amazon tributaries in the Peruvian rainforest where our field school is located. He was explaining the premise of the program, to integrate experiential learning as the fundamental praxis of the school’s educational approach. However, simultaneously he was practising that approach, as he periodically interrupted our conversation to invite me to feel the differences in the river by dipping my hand into the waters at various points, or to look at the unusual colour of a plant growing successfully in the shade, or to listen to the screeching of the macaws overhead signalling their unease with our presence. And in turn, I found myself sharing traditional stories about the rivers, the plants, or the animals of the forest, and how they contribute to the unique worldviews of the local Indigenous peoples. The world around us had become our classroom.

Encouraging this type of situated pedagogy, which relies on a place-based curriculum delivered in a creative, non-coercive, practical learning space, is one of the key messages of Simon Springer, Marcelo Lopes de Souza, and Richard White’s edited volume, *The Radicalization of Pedagogy*. The collection focuses on the premise that if the decentralizing, non-hierarchical, autonomous, and cooperative qualities of anarchism could be applied in an educational context, Foucault’s (1979) knowledge-power vortex could be dismantled, and students would be encouraged to engage in more critical thinking, politicizing the process of education, and leading to social transformation. Embracing the Freirian ideology of critical

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pedagogy as a dialogic, dynamic, emergent, and experiential learning process, anarchy is seen by the editors and authors of the contributions as a means of both liberating education and promoting revolution. Thus, by exploring the role of anarchy in pedagogy, Springer, de Souza, and White are challenging educators-as-co-learners to develop “new forms of socialization, social interaction, and the sharing of ideas in ways that might contribute to revolutionary changes in peoples’ perspectives on society, encouraging broader social changes” (p.10-11).

The 11 chapters they have included in their collection are organized to forward this revolution and can be roughly divided by their primary contribution to the project, as historical, theoretical, empirical, or practical, although for many there is significant overlap. The editorial introduction and the chapter by Federico Ferretti on libertarian pedagogy (Introduction; Chapter 2) provide the historical context for the foundations of anarchy and geography in radical pedagogy. Drawing on the work of 19th century anarchist geographers Élisée Reclus and Piotr Kropotkin, the authors demonstrate how the educational system was implemented as a means of oppressing the population as a mechanism of hierarchy and hegemony, and connect this history to the present day neoliberalist education system. While these chapters offer relatively little for the advancement of anarchist geography, they provide a solid foundation for the rest of the authors to build upon, in particular through the theoretical components of the collection, which together form the majority of the book.

This theoretical exploration begins with Joe Curnow’s introduction of the concept of prefiguration as an essential principle of praxis, participation, engagement, and consciousness (Chapter 1). Arguing that through joint activity and action, learners are acquiring the ability to behave as community members working together to “radically restructure a system that works in the interest of a few” (p.36), she suggests that to resist hegemonic social relations, we need to eliminate the distinction between how we fight, and what we fight for (p.40), by both envisioning

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different futures, as well as through practical actions. Indeed, the other three theoretical chapters of the book engage in this prefigurative practice as they encourage the shift towards the radicalization of pedagogy. For example, Erik Taje's (Chapter 7) and Simon Springer's (Chapter 10) contributions on "free schools" and "unschooling" respectively offer parallel ideas of the need for schools to be more student-driven, cooperative, and libertarian, consequently promoting critical thinking skills in learners, while Richard McHugh's chapter on informal pedagogy (Chapter 6) similarly explores how this situated learning occurs outside of formalized education environments. Together, these authors suggest that by encouraging anarchic practices of pedagogy, "learner potential" is realized rather than societally defined "student success", and radical systemic change can be both envisioned and acted upon.

While these chapters are valuable for the theoretical contributions they make, the real strengths of this edited collection emerge from the empirical and practical components. Francisco Toro's review of ecopedagogy (Chapter 8), while engaging strongly with the historical and theoretical elements of anarchist geography, focuses on the potential of a radicalized environmental education, one which shifts away from the individualistic, consumeristic, careeristic, and anthropocentric versions currently taught in schools, towards a program of "earth consciousness" (p.197), wherein the social-nature divide is erased and replaced with a paradigm of justice, equity, and cooperative communities. Similarly, Levi Gahman's exploration of a "pedagogy against oblivion" (Chapter 3) embraces these relational practices through a recognition of dignity and the interdependency of all beings grounded in the Maya worldview of communal praxis. By establishing anarchic practices in transformative case studies, Toro and Gahman concretely demonstrate the potential of radical pedagogy, thus offering a real possibility of hope.

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This hope is further ignited through the remaining chapters, which offer practical methods of engaging with anarchic pedagogical practices in geography. Ronald Horvath reviews the usefulness of Bill Bunge's geographic expeditions as a means of recognizing the importance of experiential, situated knowledge (Chapter 4), while Kye Askins and Kelvin Mason offer the reader notes on their involvement with the Theatre of the Oppressed as a means of illustrating the effectiveness of "academic seminar blockades" in practising democracy (Chapter 5). Combining both Horvath's expeditionary pedagogy and Askins and Mason's experiential participation, Ferdinand Stenglein and Simon Mader provide a very personal account of their own collective unlearning through the autonomous geographies encountered on their anarchist field trip (Chapter 9), and in doing so practise the project of "see-feel-learn" (p.232) they suggest as necessary for revolutionary becoming. Indeed, these three practical chapters may prove to be the most valuable for anarchist geography educators, as examples of how to radicalize their learning environments.

Certainly for me, as a co-learner at an experiential field school, these practical offerings are a clear insight, without being formulaic, into how other geographers are engaging with radical pedagogy. I imagine that, similarly, as an initial exploration of radical pedagogy, this "anarcho-geographical pedagogy call to action" (p.19) should prove useful to those who initiated the inquiry into anarchist geography and to those who raised questions about how to move forward with these types of projects (see special issues of *Antipode* [1978, 2012] and *ACME* [2012]). As such, this edited collection will be of interest not only to geographers, but also to co-learners in the fields of sociology, cultural studies, international studies, development studies, social theory, political sciences, international relations, economics, and anthropology.

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