

Learning and Education for a Better World: The Role of Social Movements

Budd Hall, Darlene Clover, Jim Crowther & Eurig Scandrett (eds),
Sense Publishers, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 2012, 204 pages

Jennifer Chernega

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The editors of *Learning and Education for a Better World: The Role of Social Movements* established for themselves an ambitious goal. As indicated in the introduction, they intend for the book to offer ‘new insights into the theories of how social movements work, deeper insights into the theory and practice of adult education in the context of political struggle, and new resources for hope’ (p.x). Each contribution to this edited volume investigates a different aspect of the intersection of adult education and social movement work. The volume is divided into three parts. The first is focused on theoretical and historical perspectives, the second on learning through cultural struggle and the third on ‘changing the world’.

The interplay between education and social movements/ social change is the theme that ties the chapters together. While some chapters focus on education as a part of social movements (such as in the opening piece about an adult education program for South African militants), others show how education is the target of social movements, as demonstrated in Steinklammer’s piece on Austrian kindergarten teachers protesting for better education funding.

Liam Kane provides a primer on popular education and a nice history of the popular education movement in Latin America. Darlene Clover’s and Stephen Brookfield’s respective articles both describe how art is an educational tool that is specifically appropriate for social movement work. In one of my favorite articles of the compilation, Astrid von Kotze describes a grassroots-based adult education system in South Africa in which the ‘students’ set their own curriculum and build the radical imaginings of an alternative social world. The examples von Kotze describes provide excellent lessons for teachers of all kinds about how to involve students in their own education. In addition, the ‘bottom-up’ model of freely available education described by von Kotze could provide a fascinating contrast with the largely ‘top-down’ massive online open courses or MOOCs that have been touted as democratizing higher education. Likewise, Budd L. Hall’s article describes the grassroots training and educational processes at the heart of the Occupy Movement, and how Occupy’s use of the

online social media website, Twitter, extended these educational processes beyond the groups directly involved in the protests. Mark Malone's article also investigates the use of Twitter and Facebook as organizing tools during the Egyptian Revolution. Catherine Etmanski uses her own experiences to argue that organic farms serve as sites of simultaneous education and social movement organizing in response to the environmental and social dangers of industrial farming practices.

Learning and Education for a Better World could be useful as supplementary reading in classes on social movements or the sociology of education. Essays from the initial section could also be used as good examples of applying critical and Marxist theory in courses on social theory. The theoretical ideas of the book draw heavily from the work of Paolo Friere and Antonio Gramsci. Students reading the text will find it easier to understand if they have some familiarity with these theorists' work on critical education and hegemony.

More field note or interview excerpts throughout the volume would have strengthened and clarified the authors' arguments. Many of the articles felt heavy on theory or argument but light on evidence. This deficit was even more jarring given the focus of the volume on the creation of meaning, a focus that meshes so clearly with the well-established goals of observation and interview research techniques.

Although it is not immediately clear from the title, *Learning and Education for a Better World* is one installment in a series of volumes on international issues in adult education and, therefore, is focused on adult learners and adults in education (i.e. teachers, professors, etc) and does not investigate how younger students may engage with social movements.

Learning and Education for a Better World begins with ambitions of providing a 'new resource for hope', which is an admittedly lofty goal. Crowther and Lucio-Villegas' contribution provides a more moderate assessment of the impacts of this work and one appropriate for summarizing this text: 'Adult educational work at the level of communities does not, of course, transform global capitalism and the kind of movement it generates may not easily scale up to become such a threat. But it does begin to turn people into critical and active agents who are less easily managed or manipulated and it provides an opportunity to make visible alternative values and visions which animate people', which is certainly an excellent place to start.