

Reviews

Brian Belton

Radical Youth Work: Developing Critical Perspectives and Professional Judgement

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pp. 124

Sue Robertson

IN HER FOREWORD to this book Mary Wolfe explains that *Radical Youth Work* should not be read from cover to cover but rather dipped into so we have time to measure its argument. It is certainly not written as a clear narrative but it does present a series of thought provoking ideas. Wolfe argues it will help us to reconsider our practice. I started dipping myself and so didn't read these comments until later but I agree with her that 'the author's sense of respect – and of affection – for youth work and for youth workers is always worthwhile and always present' (p.vi).

However, I do feel the lack of structure of the book is a problem. Apart from Belton's text it includes an article by Tania de St Croix explaining what she means by radical youth work and a concluding article by Zuber Ahmed. These sections and their relevance are not clearly explained by the author.

Tania de St Croix does provide a definition:

Radical youth workers work informally with young people and take them seriously. Their daily work is informed by political and moral values; opposition to capitalism and authoritarianism, belief in equality and respect for the environment. They question 'common sense' and reflect critically on their work. They are aware that practising their beliefs will involve debate and struggle, but try to have fun too! (p.69).

The motivation and enthusiasm for youth work of de St Croix are clear, and she gives examples of her own practice. However, although I assume Brian Belton agrees with this definition as the chapter is included, he states many problems with youth work and youth workers and indeed their training and many fears for the profession. Belton feels the field has become moribund, eroded by state strategies in line with funding requirements based on getting a malleable workforce. This may

be borne out by changes occurring currently. However he does rather blame workers for this, for not being radical enough in asserting their profession, rather than laying the blame where it mainly lies, with government policy.

His method of writing is to pick a concept and talk around it, ranging from Foucault to Lockerbie to Edmund Spenser. It is an entertaining read and in conversation one could argue back, but his argument tends to get lost in the rush of ideas. Belton seems to see youth work as a vocation and a role which requires freedom from employment policies and practices, something many workers would not have. He feels youth workers are politically naïve and youth work texts banal. He uses his own biography to critique the whole notion of places for young people and the colonisation trend of obliging young people to get involved with youth work: 'As a youth the last place I or anyone I knew wanted to be was a place designed for "youth"' (p.3).

He aims to provide motivation for radicals to acquire critical perspectives and assert their professional judgement, but by knocking down the central tenets of youth work he seems to be arguing that youth work is not needed. In Chapter 5 entitled 'We don't need no education' he discusses his childhood in Montevideo and questions the notion of informal education as 'covert indoctrination' which only reaches a minority of the youth population in any case.

Although he states that he does not want to clutter the text with too much citation, more would be helpful on occasion. For example he uses Illich's ideas to extrapolate from medicine into youth work, to argue that professional intervention damages those 'targeted', but do these analogies work for youth work?

For instance the prognosis of poor self esteem is made as if the professional was dealing with an endemic condition or disease and that the appropriate treatment is to 'change' the 'infected' person – to bring them into line with acceptable forms of behaviour' (p.26).

Elsewhere he criticises the Chicago School, 'well known in the world of sociology before it became dominated by ideological fanatics, pointed out that freedom without power, just like power without freedom, is intolerable' (p.55) without explaining who the fanatics were.

There are some interesting challenges to practitioners such as the notion of youth workers as guerrillas. In Chapter 8, Belton explains his own theory under the heading RAC: Regard, Accompaniment and Consideration. He explains what he means by these and the book could usefully have built on these ideas for practice. Zuber Ahmed concludes the book with an interesting discussion which also describes education as colonisation.

Youth work currently needs a coherent defence and I do not feel this text provides this. Although

it is thought provoking it is too discursive and eclectic, and it is difficult to follow any coherent argument. Belton sets out to break down some well known concepts and sets out to tackle the current paucity of critique of current ideas related to youth work, but this left me feeling as though all our clothes have been taken away – what is left? If a youth worker does no more than a post-person (p.xv), what is the point of qualification or of courses such as that on which Belton teaches? Being radical must offer us an alternative, not just knock our sacred cows. Yes, we may have failed to keep youth work as a professional practice, but this book does not explain why that matters.

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Frank Coffield and Bill Williamson

From Exam Factories to Communities of Discovery: The Democratic Route

University of London Press 2011

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pp. 89

Nicolas Dobson

BOB DYLAN famously opined that ‘he who is not busy being born is busy dying’. It is not difficult to read this as an exhortation for a life of permanent discovery: a command, perhaps, to shake off ‘the dead hand of the past’ (quoting another icon of American culture) and seek meaning in the unknown, unimagined and unrealised. Frank Coffield and Bill Williamson, in this compelling but flawed survey of contemporary educational trends, are after something similar, seeking as they do to reinstate discovery and experimentation at the heart of our curriculum. However, unlike Dylan, they make it clear that what is at stake is less individual experience than democracy itself.

Individual enhancement, to be sure, is one of the educational rights they focus on, citing Basil Bernstein: ‘the right to be more personally, more intellectually, more socially, more materially’ (1996:7). But this is not enough – and, one might add, plays very easily to a view of the world in which consumer choice and material acquisition are seen as the apotheosis of freedom (and in which the alleged triumph of capitalist democracy has settled all questions about the fundamental organisation of society). It also evokes a narcissism and sense of personal entitlement which demean and unmoor demands for equality-based justice. Bernstein’s second and third rights, however, the right to be included and the right to participate, bring the crucial social and political dimensions of education into view, and it is with regards to these aspects of education, and their neglect, or deliberate concealment, that the thesis of Coffield and Williamson is primarily concerned.

One of the problems obscuring serious debate on education, argue the authors, is the language in which the debate is currently couched and which helps determine what possibilities we imagine for it. Coffield and Williamson demonstrate how an ideology evincing an irrational faith in the free market as the arbiter of progress has constructed a view of the modern school in which education has become a kind of commodity to be assessed and measured like anything else on the production line. The ‘junk language’ that makes up this ideology ‘corrupts our thinking and dehumanises our relationships’ (p.3). Coffield and Williamson cite as examples of this phrases such as ‘future-proofed’, ‘UK PLC’ and ‘inputs and outputs’, and the substitution of ‘line manager’ for ‘head of department’ and ‘customers’ for ‘students’ (pp.2-3). Such terminology, in their view, helps to sustain a fundamental misconception about what education is, or should be – that is, an incubator for democratic citizenship. Instead of a system run to the logic of business, which all but guarantees the reproduction of social inequities, we need a fundamental overhaul based on the logic of democracy.

Most left-leaning readers will find little to quibble with in Coffield and Williamson’s basic analysis, that highlighting the chronic failures of the education system (in which, for example, between a third and two-thirds of children since 1945 have left compulsory schooling with no apparent achievements, with the implied consequences of low self-esteem and alienation), and should warm to an admirable spirit of outrage and urgency. Conservatives will also sympathise with their complaints about over-centralisation, narrow teaching and the degrading of teachers’ professional autonomy. In recent years both right and left have united over the suspicion that standards have been hollowed out in one way or another, despite rising test scores, and that the system is not working as it should. It is to be hoped, then, that this book can find a large and receptive audience, because if it does one thing successfully it is to argue for a superior quality of debate, one that engages with basic questions around the philosophy of education and imagines alternatives to the neoliberal consensus.

However, it is a rather bleak commentary on the poverty of mainstream discourse around education that their book can claim a radical, rather than reformist status. Coffield and Williamson’s critique is familiar to anyone conversant with educational trends of the last thirty years, and at times seems merely to replace one set of platitudes with another, albeit more palatable to progressive instincts. The invocation in passing of familiar icons of the modern left (Noam Chomsky) or progressive causes (the Arab Spring) adds to the sense of pandering to an established audience, and in a book espousing the virtues of openness and collaborative learning the nod to a thinker as intellectually arrogant – and divisive – as Chomsky is somewhat ironic.

There is, of course, an argument for writing an inclusive book: one that approaches or implies potentially radical solutions without spelling them out, one that does the theoretical and empirical groundwork on which bolder proposals can be advanced. Its length – the text is only 76 pages – suggests that breadth and size of readership was also high up the authors’ agenda. But the style of the book occasionally veers close to a parody of liberal humanism – for example, the proposition

that ‘all educators are learners and all learners are educators’ (p.49) – so it is hard to be sanguine about it reaching beyond an audience already sympathetic to its ideas.

Because of this, it is unfortunate that Coffield and Williamson seem fearful to go where their analysis might take them – for example, in the section dealing with the limitations of fixed, compulsory curricula and other standard features of schooling as an institution. This would seem an obvious place to engage with the arguments of the de-schooling movement and Ivan Illich, or to offer a more detailed vision of how and why compulsory schooling might be retained but reformed in a more democratic fashion. They do emphasise such themes as the importance and success of informal education (including that taking place in the youth work and prison sectors); the function of extra-school resources (eg. travel experiences, books and other forms of cultural capital) in maintaining the advantages of the better-off; and the close relationship between schooling and the perpetuation of social inequities.

Illich is not the only one to be short-changed. John Dewey is passed over with a fairly brief comment, despite the relevance and force of his ideas, and the Liberal Educationalists – and their detailed, and important critique of progressivism – are ignored. To fulfil their aim of raising awareness of alternatives to the neoliberal consensus, Coffield and Williamson might have done better to survey the ways in which education has been conceived in different traditions, and to discuss how the problems of education have been theorised and debated by philosophers. For all their insights into the colossal failures of the current system, and the laudable motivations underpinning this project, *From Exam Factories to Communities of Discovery* feels a bit slight: worthy but undernourished, and lacking the philosophical backbone or aesthetic cogency to mobilise a broader constituency.

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Doug Nicholls

For Youth Workers and Youth Work: Speaking out for a Better Future

The Policy Press 2012

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pp. 274

Charlie Cooper

I KNOW OF Doug Nicholls' excellent work with the trade union CYWU/Unite and have met him a few times. What struck me most of all about him is that, despite the increasingly brutalising context of life in Britain for young people and youth workers, and calls from elements within the youth-work field for us to become more 'pragmatic' in these changing times, he has been unflinching in his belief that youth work remains a potentially powerful transformative force for social equality and justice. It is a belief I ardently share and so it was with great anticipation that I awaited the publication of this book.

As Howard Williamson states in his back cover, this is a passionate, polemical, provocative and partisan defence of critical youth work practice. The book is inspired by the late Shelley Giorgi – youth worker, socialist and trade unionist – and represents a call for youth workers to engage within a broad social movement of resistance to the forces of neoliberalism in pursuit of social change. Youth work here is not confined to providing 'positive activities' as promoted under New Labour and the Conservative-led Coalition but has a political purpose, especially at a time when 'society starts to relinquish responsibility for its citizens, particularly the weakest ones' (p.58).

Over the last three decades, UK Governments, equally wedded to neoliberal orthodoxies, have presided over the incremental dismantling of the post-war social democratic Keynesian welfare 'consensus', overseeing widening social inequality, the erosion of citizenship rights and the stifling of democracy. Young people, particularly those from working class and ethnic minority communities, are among those most disadvantaged by these changes.

Nicholls alludes to Giroux's analysis of the impact of neoliberalism on young people in the US to draw parallels with what is happening to young people in the UK. Social policy under neoliberalism requires a profound shift away from state interventions aimed at maintaining full employment and a democratically-controlled welfare system – measures seen as a burden to market efficiency – towards a new state authoritarianism where the inability of individuals to take responsibility for their own wellbeing under market conditions is redefined in terms of cultural deficit rather than structural failings. As a consequence, the pathologisation and criminalisation of human suffering takes precedence over progressive fiscal or welfare solutions. At the same time under neoliberalism, the irresponsibilities and crimes of the powerful – a profligate banking sector and dissolute corporations; and fraudulent politicians and cabinet war criminals in cahoots with a corrupt media industry – remain beyond scrutiny.

In explaining how such a brutally unjust and inhuman state of affairs is allowed to continue, Nicholls draws from Marx, Freire and Gramsci, and the notion of 'false consciousness that entraps subordinate groups into accepting their reality in passive and fatalistic ways, leaving the power and privilege of the dominant forces and power elites unchallenged' (p.60). Social status is increasingly discovered through what we consume as individuals in the market rather than what we create

collectively in the public realm. And if we fail as consumers there is little or no alternative for us. Those spaces where young people might have once found a sense of ontological security and solidarity with others – apprenticeships; workplaces; working men’s clubs; political associations; youth clubs; on the football terraces; parks and street corners – have largely been destroyed under neoliberalism. There is an urgent need, as Nicholls makes clear, to challenge this growing estrangement and ‘youth work must instil a consciousness about overcoming this fundamental form of social alienation’ (p.223).

So how is this to be done? The answer, for Nicholls, lies in ‘a radical tradition of education with an explicitly socialist dimension’ (p.231). Again here, we see the influence of Giroux in Nicholls’ thesis. Giroux argues the need for education to provide a public space where we can ‘learn, debate, and engage critical traditions in order to imagine otherwise and develop discourses that are crucial for defending vital social institutions as a public good’ (Giroux 2011:81). For Giroux, the task is to reconstruct the public spheres of civil society ‘where democratic ideals, visions, and social relations can be nurtured and developed as part of a genuinely meaningful education and politics’ (Giroux 2012:8). As Nicholls suggests, we need to reclaim education as a public good ‘committed to teaching young people about how to govern rather than merely be governed’ (Giroux 2012:7). We need to imagine education systems that not only provide the knowledge and skills necessary for the world of work, but also enable engagement in the public sphere as critical, responsible and active citizens.

Nicholls argues that youth workers ‘must know more of their own history and the social history of youth work, and relish in particular the fact that they are inhabiting a tradition that stretches back deep into the Middle Ages’ (p.227). This tradition has been a radical one where the class divide from feudalism to capitalism has been consistently contested. It was precisely because the early education of the working classes challenged the establishment – be it the teachings of the Lollards, Levellers, Diggers, Sunday School movement, trade unionists, socialist groups, Tolpuddle Martyrs or Chartists – that the state established elementary schooling for the working class for the first time in 1870 in an attempt to ‘subvert the radical potential that working-class self-education threatened’ (Jones and Novak, 2000:45). As Nicholls argues, ‘the rich seam of radical education that has been developed in Britain should be mined again, renewed and changed, recognising that education is the key to social transformation and human equality’ (p.234). The challenge for youth work is to bring together the ‘best of past thought, practice and action in a concentrated and determined form to enable more radical questioning of the world around us and therefore the potential for transforming it’ (p.221). Youth work is unapologetically a political process and part of a wider struggle for social change.

There is just one area of disagreement I have with Nicholls’ analysis and that is his assessment on ‘multiculturalism’. Nicholls sees multiculturalism as a licence for individuals to be left alone to do

whatever they like because this is justified by their cultural difference. Such thinking, he argues, ‘led to division and the ghettoisation of immigrant communities’ (p.195). Such arguments are consistent with those of centre-left anti-multiculturalists such as Trevor Phillips, Kenan Malik and Hugo Young, and the call to assert a core commonality of what we understand by ‘Britishness’, the corollary being, how do we design social-policy interventions to encourage ‘others’ to assimilate/integrate with this? Other than the question of why immigrant communities are ghettoised – best explained by examining processes of subjective, structural and institutionalised racism – ‘multiculturalism’ is a highly problematic and contested concept. However, the idea of multiculturalism as used by such commentators as Bhikhu Parekh is helpful in explaining how societies have many distinct identities, and that there is no single, fixed, homogenous cultural identity that is best. Culture is in a state of constant flux, with different cultures borrowing from each other and transforming themselves in the process.

With this one caveat, *For Youth Workers and Youth Work* is an accessible, essential and timely read for statutory and voluntary sector service managers, youth workers, educationalists, students and policy makers interested in the wellbeing of young people in Britain both now and in the future, and how best to promote youth work. I strongly recommend it.

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Christopher Uhl with Dana L. Stuchul

Teaching as if Life Matters: The Promise of a New Education Culture

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pp. 224

Graham Griffiths

WRITTEN WITH passion and concern about the effects of education within the USA, this book offers us an insightful critique of current US educational models and processes. Christopher Uhl,

with the support of Dana Stuchul, asks important questions about the purpose and direction of educational practice and analyses the situation on individual and societal levels. Too many of us have heard children and young people say ‘school or college is boring’ or words to that effect. With the average pupil or student in mind, Uhl searches for explanations and solutions. He argues that a new holistic and transformative approach to education is necessary and believes that a new culture must emerge and be adopted by educators to transform the educational experience for both students and educators.

Despite being based on the experience of living and working in the USA, this book offers the reflective practitioner in the UK the opportunity to draw parallels with their work and explore practical ways forward. Where it may be particularly valuable to UK readers is in the variety of techniques it shares to develop practice. Drawing on his lifetime experience in teaching, Uhl paints a picture where an educator can become disillusioned with the education system and their contribution to it. He argues that restrictions placed on educators by bureaucracy, a central curriculum and inspections have the effect of stifling creativity. In these circumstances an educator can be drained of energy and spirit.

Uhl explores his own philosophy and challenges the reader to understand their own style and approach. The book is underpinned by a call to recognise the needs of individual students and develop a positive relationship with the learner. He argues that the educator must have the courage to move away from a mechanistic approach limited by an imposed curriculum, and replace it with one supporting pupil independence and questioning: echoes here of the philosophy of youth and community work.

What leads this Professor with thirty years of teaching experience to advocate such a radical departure from his previous approach? Writing about how he initially struggled to find a focus for his book, he describes an ‘itch’ which came to be interpreted as uncertainty. He suggests that his own education encouraged him to be obedient, quiet and dependent rather than questioning, and his experiences of school caused dullness and loss of sparkle. In his view these experiences are shared by others who have lost their innocence and been overtaken by submission and melancholy. Uhl suggests that he accumulated a series of school ‘wounds’ during the educational process. His analysis of the consequences of these ‘wounds’ is supplemented by observations drawn from his career as a teacher.

Uhl’s analysis does not simply rely on attitudes to the individual in school. He highlights what he sees as ‘separation’ throughout society. An indication of this ‘separation’ is that the individual is not educated in a holistic way; pupils are simply educated to the planned curriculum outcomes in a mechanical and technocratic way reflecting the needs of a previous age. In an echo of our stance as youth and community workers, this book argues that relationships based on respect should be central to the educational process.

Uhl challenges what he sees as fundamental myths about education which undermine the educational experience. The myths are: that learning best takes place within classrooms and school; that learning is best accomplished through the direct transfer of knowledge from teacher to pupil; that learning is best when carrots and sticks are available to teachers; and finally, that learning should be grounded in objectification. Uhl sees these four myths about education leading to false conditioning and socialisation. To a youth and community worker steeped in the significance of experiential learning this has a strong resonance.

Uhl puts forward a case for adopting three new 'R's' of education: relationships with self; relationships with others; and relationships with the earth. Adopting this approach would counter the current separation between education and feelings and in turn produce a holistic approach to education. He goes on to explore what went wrong, suggesting that modern schooling ignores the body. Uhl argues that we need to know ourselves both inside and outside the classroom. Critically there is a need to question and ask questions rather than simply accept.

Observing and talking to his students at Pennsylvania State University he sees echoes of his own school experiences. Uhl argues that students are stifled by their education. He points out that many pupils are alienated and bored by their school experiences, some two thirds according to the US 2008 National High School Survey of Student Engagement (p.187).

As an ecologist Uhl argues that education is out of touch with the needs of the environment and planet. His central focus about the failings of education is set alongside a concern for the effects of human behaviour on the environment. In addition to this the individual effects of addictive behaviours, eating, rushing or worrying takes a negative toll. In Uhl's view the relationship between the body and earth needs renewing so that the individual can become self-actualising.

For educational commentators in the UK, and particularly for youth and community workers, often called upon to work with disaffected pupils on school sites or within pupil withdrawal units, there will be many resonances with his criticisms about the educational experience of young people, particularly his contention that education favours control and compliance rather than free thinking and critical awareness.

So does Uhl suggest a way forward? He draws examples from work undertaken with students on a short teaching course and focuses on five keys areas to develop practice, giving practical examples. His first call is for teachers to understand themselves and to love and through this accept their students for who they are, so that they can teach as if life matters. Secondly he wants students to become more aware of both mind and body through the environment created by teachers. Thirdly he wants questioning to be accepted and fostered as an aid to learning. Next he wants students to see through new eyes and with new perspectives. Finally he wants to encourage what he calls 'classroom kinship'.

I would argue that more analysis is needed about the influence of economic and class backgrounds. Uhl's approach could also be clarified by illuminating the central theorists who influenced his practice. The ultimate value of this book to a youth and community work audience lies in encouraging critical reflection and offering suggestions to deal with specific situations. Though the book may only reach a small readership in the UK it offers a practical and solution focused way forward for those willing to explore their own philosophy and practice.

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Michael Wyness

Childhood And Society

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pp. 330

David Palmer

THAT THE FIRST edition of *Childhood and Society* published six years ago should be followed so quickly with this admirable second edition not only pays tribute to its much cited forerunner but also does much to highlight the importance of the burgeoning field of the sociology of childhood. Six years is a huge chunk of time in a child's life and in terms of the challenges they face in a fast moving, increasingly globalised world, challenges mirrored in the theories, policy and practice that impact upon their lives.

The first part of the book focuses on opposing theoretical standpoints around childhood. Some considerable depth and breadth is explored which, whilst perhaps necessitating a re-read for those new to the sociology of childhood, is nonetheless thought provoking and fosters in the reader a willingness to challenge their own assumptions. The early chapters throw the spotlight on the sociological theories of childhood such as social constructionism and take account of historical influences on how children are positioned in society. Influences such as the feminist movement are examined and parallels drawn between how the dominant discourse in the twentieth century was centred around the 'best interests' of children, arguing that this echoes the earlier position of women within a largely patriarchal society.

Cultural imperatives are also explored with some fascinating examples of how the Western approach to childhood bears little resemblance to countries where economic production involves all members of a family. Wyness cites the work of Qvortrup et al (1994) and their attempts to bring children into view, to see them as 'dependent beings' rather than 'dependent becomings' (Lee, 2001). For example, where Western governments have promoted child care to help people back

into work, 'bringing children into view would mean that we would have to... measure the effects of child care on the children themselves' (p.53).

Chapter 3 begins to place theory into a modern context, giving a tantalising overview of how modern children's agency has been enhanced. Here Wyness touches on individualisation, consumerism, the Global Child, the prevalence of mental health issues among children, the drive for academic success and the impulse amongst adults to exercise more control of children as they seemingly adapt more quickly to a fast changing world.

Chapter 4 examines what Prout and James (1997) call the 'dominant framework', a series of broad principles that are common to developmental psychologists' and sociologists' interpretation of the nature of childhood. The author then deals succinctly with the differing approaches of developmentalism and socialisation to the process of growing up, citing, in the former, the influence of Piaget in the measurement of cognitive growth and in the latter, the work of Durkheim and Elkins amongst others. A very topical and stimulating analysis of current ways of thinking about childhood that challenge the dominant framework concludes this key chapter and cleverly sets the scene for Parts 2 and 3 allowing the reader to see current issues that impact on children's lives through a more analytical and discriminating lens.

Part 2 commences with a contemporary look at the age old theme of childhood in crisis and how this crisis cements the accepted wisdom of where children are placed in our society and how this is perpetuated by policy makers. Wyness draws on media demonisation of children and of teenage mothers to exemplify the 'problem of youth' and then widens the discussion into a global context with a look at street children. Excellent case studies on child soldiers and child carers help to bolster Wyness's argument that the child crisis theme 'presupposes a universal and naturalised view of the child' (p.129) and that children in these circumstances show a degree of agency that confronts enduring models of childhood.

The book's key theme of 'agency' runs through Chapter 6's analysis of the political response to the perceived crisis of childhood with particular reference to child abuse and child crime. The chapter goes on to present a series of models of child agency, for example in care proceedings where the wishes and feelings of the child in question are of real importance. The final chapter of Part 2 focuses on how in the West our understanding of childhood is bound to our understanding of schooling which acts as a vehicle for the positioning and regulation of children in society. Comparisons with developing countries are drawn and, aptly, a fascinating account of home schooling serves as a counterweight to the view that education and schooling can be readily conflated.

The third part of the book takes the discourse around children's agency further by examining a range of circumstances within which children can make a difference, where their ideas can be

taken seriously and where the political sphere acknowledge this. Wyness argues for the positive aspects of technology and seeks to mollify the fears of adults, proposing that far from isolating children, technology actually creates myriad new social groups. The author opines that this fact is not lost on advertisers who increasingly target young people as a discrete, sophisticated market. Some strong arguments are made that provide ample food for lively debate. Chapter 9 looks at how research into childhood is increasingly seen by researchers as an opportunity to work with children rather than on children. The chapter is of particular use to those considering a research project as not only does it highlight ethical and methodological considerations of research, it also exemplifies one of the themes of the book, namely that if one can cut through adult expectations one can more easily hear the voice of the young person.

This issue of voice is further explored through the chapter on children's rights and politics. Wyness highlights some of the criticisms of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), particularly the cultural ambiguity it throws up despite its effectiveness in helping establish a social ontology for children. Three excellent case studies of children's agency within the political sphere end this chapter; these actually merit a chapter of their own. The book concludes with a welcome addition to the first edition, a chapter that revisits some of the themes of the rights agenda by analysing child work and labour in a global context and using children's accounts as evidence. The issues raised include some that will be of particular interest to educationalists, for example the comparisons between what is pejoratively termed 'child labour' and the 'over scheduled childhoods' of middle class families in the developed world.

This is a highly accessible, hugely valuable book that undergraduate and postgraduate students across a range of social science disciplines will find by turns fascinating and provocative, stimulating and inspiring.

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