

Reviews

Peter Kraftl

Geographies of Alternative Education

Polity Press 2013

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£70 (hbk)

pp. 304

Paula Connaughton

THE EXISTENCE of this book points to the central position of social-scientific disciplines that currently prioritise social learning processes over learning spaces within the study of education. Inspired by the study of human geography, *Geographies of Alternative Education* provides an additional dimension as it proposes that social processes and spatial processes are intertwined in the learning environment. The book goes beyond simply looking at the attributes of the teacher, motivation of the learner, curriculum design, teacher–learner relationships, and learning materials, by incorporating theories of autonomy, emotion, habit, and life-itself. However, readers looking for a book particularly concerning alternative education philosophy and approaches will be disappointed as the author concentrates on the contradictory ways in which ‘alternatives’ intersect with ‘mainstream’ education.

The study of children’s and young people’s learning spaces is no easy task since alternative education covers a wide range of definitions, approaches, aims, and settings. Until now, the profile of ‘alternative education’ has concentrated on ideas that learning can take place in any setting, including small areas of woodland, makeshift cabins, old buildings, and on a bus journey. This Peter Kraftl does not dispute, but a number of theories on human geography inspire his conviction that the study of alternative education should be based on the premise that a ‘good education’ might also be understood in spatial terms. In the case of this book, spatiality incorporates a creative environment to enable children to interact on a level with adult educators, but, more importantly, it helps to foster a sense of the ‘good life’ as an alternative vision of life-itself. Kraftl uses case studies to explore examples of spatiality, including connections and disconnections with local communities. His research also looks at the potential for creative atmospheres and learning materials to the importance of bodily movement in learning.

The book is divided into nine chapters, with the first being an introduction that outlines two principal aims of the book. The first aim is quite straightforward: the author compares a range of

alternative approaches to learning in the UK from outside mainstream education by using case studies including Steiner schools, Forest Schools, Care Farms and homeschooling. The second aim is less straightforward. The exploration of what makes alternative approaches ‘alternative’ highlights a number of complexities because of the variegated and contradictory ways in which educational alternatives intersect with the educational mainstream.

The author adopts and expands on key theories, such as Hanson Thiem’s (2009) argument that neoliberal restructuring should not be the sole concern of academics who study educational processes. This means recognising the range of collaborations in the social process of learning, such as the interrelationships among homeschoolers who are also part of food-growing cooperatives. It is based on acknowledging the importance of ‘nature’ as a learning resource and the virtue of instilling loving habits in pupils in order that they see themselves as part of a broader ‘community of practice’, which supports them to move beyond a neoliberal state of ‘being’. Kraftl terms this an ‘outward-looking’ vision of education rather than the ‘inward-looking’ vision that is identified in conventional modes of governance and socio-economic structures of neoliberalism, which perpetuate dominant assumptions of individualism outside schools.

Particularly stimulating are the later chapters that illuminate the extent to which policy directives have an impact on alternative provision. As Kraftl demonstrates, ‘alternative’ learning spaces are multiple and shifting because of the many intersections with ‘mainstream’ schools. For example, in the case studies Forest School educators had spoken of using the National Curriculum as a ‘moral guide’ for their curriculum content. This account reflects the historical shift from informal learning to predetermined outcome-led practice in youth work to meet funding and government policy directives. In this sense, Kraftl argues that alternative spaces should ‘aim less to be fully “alternative” but rather “autonomous”’ (p. 113), perhaps, taking inspiration from the social movements of South America and drawing on Illich’s notion of ‘de-schooling’.

Kraftl does not aspire to provide simple solutions to complex problems, but he provides a clear and coherent basis for ethical inquiry. His view reflects Steiner’s (2003: 260) argument that good teachers demonstrate the capacity to address ‘the intellect, the imagination, the nervous system, and the very innards of the listener’. As Kraft asserts, ‘habits are important to the production of alternative versions and visions of life-itself’ (p. 251). This brings to the fore a fundamental aspect of education that advocates the ‘unlearning’ of habits of possessive individualism and competition, based on conceptions of love that are integral to the production of habits of generosity, care, and responsibility to others. As Peters (1967:55) acknowledged in the classic *Ethics and Education*, normative aspects of ‘education’ ‘ignore matters to do with individual differences of the pupil... [and the] personal bond which must exist between teachers and taught’.

The entire book provides examples of the author’s ability to combine a range of theoretical writings from sociology, education studies and philosophy that, when read via a geographical lens, will

offer something to readers from all backgrounds. In all, the uniqueness of this book is precisely the way that the author is able to knit themes together. It is unfortunate, however, that Kraftl leaves it until the conclusion of the book to scantily mention recent curriculum innovations in the UK that have expressly drawn on alternative educational philosophies in the promotion of Free Schools and academies. This is a missed opportunity to explore critical questions on educational policy and the state's agenda to explain the diversification of mainstream education in terms of alternative provision. That said, the book's appeal is its recognition of diverse economic and autonomous practices, non-representational geographies, and the politics of life-itself, which, combined, dismantle any sense of a simple binary between 'alternative' and 'mainstream' education.

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Alan Rogers and Mark Smith (eds.)

Journeying Together: Growing Youth Work and Youth Workers in Local Communities

Russell House Publishing 2010

ISBN: 1905541546

£13.95 (pbk)

pp. 154

Fionn Greig

READING THIS book has, for me, put into perspective the changes that have occurred in youth work in the last 5 – 10 years and highlighted the dire need for growing local community based youth work. Since the neo-liberal takeover of the New Labour attitudes to targeted youth work, increased monitoring, the Coalition's drive to fix 'broken Britain' in the form of the National Citizenship Service (NCS), and the Positive for Youth strategy, local, community driven youth work has seemed more difficult to explain and, importantly, to fund.

This book confidently makes the case for more youth work and more locally driven, locally grown youth work. At times, as a local community youth worker I struggle to find the language and

confidence to describe my work and its importance. When I tell people that I am a youth worker, the response is often along the lines of ‘oh that must be so hard’ and or, ‘oh that’s good, keeping young people off the streets and out of trouble, that kind of thing?’ A combination of the media and government demonizing of young people and populist schemes like Duke of Edinburgh and the new NCS has impacted on the minds of the population to inform them that a) young people are bad and need controlling and that b) youth work is about making them ‘good’ and keeping them controlled. As Rogers and Smith point out at the beginning of their conclusion to this book, this is not just about youth work, but that now is a time ‘when fundamental choices need to be made in the way we, as a society, think about youth work – and education and welfare more generally’ (p.134).

The authors write in various ways about members of communities who grow up feeling nurtured and valued by their peers and elders, and who want to continue that cycle by becoming involved in community and youth work themselves. We read in various examples that this is a very common experience all over the country and that people are becoming involved with the young people who share their lives in all sorts of ways. However the book also explores the definition of youth work as having a distinct focus on young people and their experiences. This shows the importance of youth work and particularly of growing local youth work and workers as being work and even a political act.

The authors explore the importance of doing youth work in young people’s own settings and grounded in their day-to-day experiences. This is in stark contrast to the recent and current direction of what Sarah Lloyd-Jones calls ‘issue-based’ work, namely ‘NEET to EET’, gang work and teenage pregnancy work to name but a few, essentially a reactive rather than proactive strategy. The essence of this book in my view is about local youth workers who take a holistic approach to building relationships with young people, going on a ‘journey together’, not about fixing one element of a young person’s life and then leaving.

Politically the book champions the power of local organisations having the knowledge and connection to those around them in their communities. This has historically been the foundation of working class and oppressed people’s victories; having a feeling of solidarity and ownership when you are connected and have local knowledge, history and, importantly, places to meet. At the current time of attacks on working class communities, women, young people, disabled people, Black and immigrant populations, local community organisations can be the key to resistance and fight back. The book draws this out through the authors’ different angles, some more subtle than others. Essentially the book talks about the development of workers who are informed, supported and nurtured to bring themselves and their knowledge to youth work in the community to create the local strength needed to empower themselves, individuals and organisations.

One of my favourite aspects of the book is the acknowledgement that workers must have a commitment to self-awareness and transparency in our humaneness when embarking on local

community youth work. What I love about this is how it could be seen as an ethical blueprint for a different type of world than the one that the neo-liberals, capitalists and target-driven policy makers have created. By committing to looking at ourselves and admitting our mistakes and needs, youth workers can say to young people, you don't have to be perfect, brave, get things right all the time and most importantly, you can make mistakes and people will still accept you. As local youth workers, who 'stick around' and are about the relationship, not keeping you to a pre-determined target, we have to show more of ourselves. We don't have a task we can keep focused on and hide behind whilst consistently highlighting what the young person must improve. We are with them, in their lives and ours, journeying together, in our community.

Reference

Lloyd-Jones, S. (2010) Chapter 2 The experience of growing work, (pages 13 – 24) in *Journeying Together: Growing youth work and youth workers in local communities*, Dorset, Russell House Publishing Ltd

Fionn Greig is a part-time youth worker in Hackney in East London, part-time community activist, full-time thinker and dreamer.

Sarah-Jane Dodd and Irwin Epstein

Practice-based Research in Social Work: A Guide for Reluctant Researchers

Routledge 2011

ISBN: 0415565243

£24.99 (pbk)

pp. 224

Jan Huyton

ACCORDING TO the authors, if you have 'groaning', 'moaning', 'eye-rolling', 'bad-mouthing', 'waiver-strategizing' students on your research module (p.4), or if you are such a student, then this book is for you. Whilst this may seem like hyperbole, many of us will be familiar with the challenges of demonstrating the relevance of research methods for the practice context. The purpose of the book is 'to demonstrate the many ways in which research concepts and simple and ethically-acceptable research projects can contribute to the quality of your practice'. Indeed 'our purpose is to make research more "practice-friendly", help you see it as such and, in so doing to reduce your reluctance to use it' (p.4). Spot on thought I, and naturally approached this book with great expectations. The twin concepts of practice-based research and a guide for reluctant researchers sounds ideal and, whilst the context here is social work, often the social work literature is applicable to a range of other professional contexts.

The most engaging part of the book is the introduction in which the authors focus on practice-based research (PBR), which they describe as a pragmatic approach that starts where the worker is. Referring to the failed yet ‘unending pursuit of just the right way to integrate science and social work practice’ (p.6) they are dismissive of the evidence-based practice (EBP) movement for its inappropriate emphasis on scientific method and narrow, formulaic practice prescriptions. Instead the authors seek to ‘emphasize the primacy and complexity of the practitioner’s role – much of which extends beyond narrowly assessing, intervening and evaluating client problems’ (p.7). Add to this the authors’ emphasis on consultation and collaboration, throw in their statement that research could be fun, and this begins to sound quite promising; the text of which we have all been dreaming, an accessible and motivational guide to practice-based research.

The book draws heavily on the previous work of one of the authors, Irwin Epstein. Epstein has written prolifically about the limitations of EBP, which he describes as one model of research-based practice (RBP). Chapter 1 is devoted to the evolution and definition of PBR. The authors state that they seek not to oppose what they describe as the scientific movement of EBP, but to ‘assert an appreciative understanding and respect for what practitioners do...a more collaborative and mutually appreciative approach whereby social work students and practitioners can become independent producers of social work knowledge and whereby practitioners working together with academic researchers can become co-creators of social work knowledge’ (p.14). The stated strengths of PBR, including its applicability and benefits to practitioners and clients, arise out of its mixed-method approach and practice-based starting point. The book does well at promoting this approach, but detracts from this somewhat apologetically when it lists PBR’s limitations as ‘not “gold standard”; less generalizable; less fundable; less publishable’. This ought to be an opportunity to make a case for persuading funders and publishers of the specific worth and value of PBR. Instead there is a brief statement advising us to learn from rejections and send our work to a practice-oriented journal instead. This is decidedly disappointing, and unlikely to persuade academics and practitioners of the benefits of this research approach.

Part 2 of the book focuses on the designing, planning and execution of PBR. Each chapter has a stated purpose in a box at the start, and there are a few (but not enough) step-by-step practical guides to some stages of the research and analysis processes. Although there is a short summary of the key concepts at the end of each chapter, Part 2 is not particularly accessible in style or register for those unfamiliar with the academic context, and one is left wondering what type of potential researcher and what type of reluctance the book is designed to address.

Perhaps my great expectations were a trifle optimistic. The authors are heavily wedded to distinguishing PBR from EBP, with welcome and valuable arguments to make in terms of emphasizing the importance of PBR to groups such as policy-makers who may be sceptical about this approach, but I can already hear the ‘groaning’, ‘moaning’, and ‘eye-rolling’ from the reluctant researchers I seek to work with – conscientious youth and community practitioners and other

education professionals for whom the concept of research can appear alien and irrelevant. This book makes an excellent case for PBR, but is simply not accessible for those without a strong research background.

The introduction and chapters 1-3 can be drawn on effectively to argue the case for research grounded in practice, but I have seen these arguments made more eloquently elsewhere (for example, Schostak and Schostak, 2007). The 'how to' chapters which follow are dry, complex, and highly academic. Practice-based research guides such as Bradford and Cullen (2012) give more accessible and motivational guidance applied to the practice context. I'd recommend Dodd and Epstein's book for post-graduate practitioner-researchers, but surely research reluctance, where it exists, is more frequently found amongst undergraduates.

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Phil Jones and Gary Walker (eds.)

Children's Rights in Practice

Sage 2011

ISBN: 9781849203807

£23.99 (pbk)

pp. 256

Sean Murphy

THE STYLE AND presentation of this book makes it refreshingly easy to read, and the editors and contributing authors have worked hard to produce a mix of case studies, conceptual models, prompt questions and policy extracts to enable the reader to explore key themes and issues surrounding children's rights. It is most definitely suitable to a broad readership, including undergraduates from a range of disciplines, as well as professionals and those undertaking multi-disciplinary training courses.

The text uses a socio-legal framework to explore the application of a rights-based approach to child protection and well-being, and presents a number of scenarios that challenge the reader to consider

and question key ethical and other implications for practice. Chapters help the reader to develop a sound understanding of the UN Convention on The Rights of the Child (UNCRC) through the application of its core principles and Articles to a variety of practice contexts.

The book is divided into two main parts. The former provides an overview of the historical and legislative development of children's rights, including the right to play and the voice of the child, as well as exploring child protection, safeguarding, and social exclusion. What is most useful is the way it contextualises the rights agenda, by providing international, European and UK perspectives and establishing links between the UNCRC and the broader human rights agenda. This approach provides the reader with an introduction to key themes and debate, particularly exposing systematic failings in the traditional child protection and welfare approaches. It articulates a strong case for a shift in our thinking and approaches to practice by developing a sound argument for a move from protective regimes towards a more preventative and safeguarding model, which is allied to a stronger voice of the child.

The latter section of the book explores the children's rights approach in practice and the chapters provide a rich variety of theoretical perspectives, research evidence and policy implications, which extend the reader's knowledge within a range of contexts. It considers how a rights-based approach is increasingly becoming a common language within the emerging multi-agency working arrangements. It uses youth justice, youth work and social work settings as case studies to demonstrate how professional values and principles can be evoked to place children's rights at the forefront of practice interventions and approaches. In seeking to contribute towards such developments the text offers insightful models that integrate thinking, for example, blending Bernard Davies' key principles of youth work with the UNCRC articles. It also presents some challenging and contested scenarios within youth justice practice in the context of street based interventions, custody suites and institutions.

The book is relatively jargon-free and instead prefers to examine the subject in a realistic and measured way and in doing so it succeeds in bridging the gap between theory and practice. It therefore makes a valuable contribution to both academic and practitioner learning as its use of case studies and prompts encourage the reader to consider some ethical dilemmas in different contexts. Overall, it presents a strong case for children's rights and youth participation as a buffer against policy failures and inadequate welfare approaches. A very well structured book, contemporary and designed to develop deeper understanding of the subject, it is engaging, thought provoking and challenges practice and should certainly form part of key reading on children's rights undergraduate modules, applied practice modules and multi-disciplinary training.

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Gary Craig, Marjorie Mayo, Keith Popple, Mae Shaw and Marilyn Taylor (eds)

The Community Development Reader: History, Themes and Issues

Policy Press 2011

ISBN: 978 1 84742 704 5

£28.99 (pbk)

pp. 352

Emilia Ohberg

THE COMMUNITY Development Reader chronicles selected parts of the history of community development in the United Kingdom since it first emerged as a profession in the 1950s and the ongoing debate that exists around it. According to the introduction, the goal of the book is:

to reassert the identity of the occupation of community development in a UK context by drawing together key readings from the past 50 years from a range of sources... which have helped to shape this identity [but not to] provide a definitive 'official' history of community development in the UK (p.17-18).

In this, I believe the editors have been ultimately successful. The book provides a broad foundation for anyone who wishes to know more about the evolution of community development in the UK. Though it is not a comprehensive guide, it provides many interesting insights into the practice and profession of community work throughout the last 50 years.

The book is a collection of 28 essays and articles from various authors and sources. They are in chronological order and split into three parts: the 1950s to the mid 1970s, the late 1970s to the early 1990s, and the mid-1990s to the 2000s. Each section begins with an introduction which helps put the section in its political, economic and cultural context. The editors all have extensive experience in the field of community development and are long-standing members of the editorial board of the *Community Development Journal*. As a student of youth and community work I found the writing accessible and free from jargon but nonetheless educational and thought provoking.

This book is especially relevant at the moment considering the current 'Big Society' agenda of the coalition government. It provides a deeper understanding of the historical aspects of community development and how we ended up where we are now. It is equally relevant to students of community development as it is to professionals, activists and 'Big Society' politicians who glean a better insight into the workings of successful community development and the non-tokenistic, bottom-up approach on which it is built.

Many of the articles in the book focus on the empowering and participatory nature of good community development and the need for a 'bottom up' approach. In particular, I found the article entitled 'The politics of participation' by Suzy Croft and Peter Beresford (p.163-169) enlightening

and useful. Another major topic of the book is the difficulty in defining ‘community’, ‘community development’ and ‘community organisation’ and how this affects the debate. The book is critical of the way the language has often been re-appropriated by various governments, including the current coalition government, and attempts made by governments to use community development to manipulate communities.

As a long time anti-racist campaigner, activist and feminist I was pleased to see how much space had been devoted to discussing these topics. I was especially happy to see the focus given to the feminist contribution to community development and the chapter on the pitfalls of anti-racist community work for workers from the majority culture. However, as the book itself states (p.19), many areas are not covered sufficiently (or at all) including the environment, arts and culture, rural communities or the church and its influence on community work.

The book was published in 2011, not long after the last election, and because of this it already feels a bit dated. The afterword speculates about what the future may bring with regards to how coalition government politics may affect community development and organisation. A second edition with a couple of additional articles describing how the current government is changing the nature and landscape of community development in the UK, specifically regarding the impact mutuals may have on the profession, would be very interesting to see.

Despite these criticisms I would recommend the book to anyone who wishes to learn more about the historical context of community development in the UK. I think it is an essential book on the reading list of any youth and community work undergraduate degree and equally interesting and inspiring for those already working in the field. It is current and relevant, it provides a broad understanding of the development of community work in the UK and it offers many interesting insights and ideas.

Emilia Ohberg is currently undertaking a bachelors degree in youth work and community development at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Justine Howard and Karen McInnes

The Essence Of Play: A Practice Companion For Professionals Working With Children and Young People

Routledge 2013

ISBN: 13:978-0-415-67808-7

£22.99 (pbk)

pp. 155

David Palmer

AS A COMPANION for play practitioners, this highly accessible, encouraging and optimistic

book inspires confidence, both in those new to the profession and in those seeking to re-affirm their understanding of the foundations and imperatives of their current practice. It usefully and effectively melds two areas of childhood that currently promote much debate. Firstly that of the value of play in a society that seems at every turn to be structuring the playfulness out of play, and secondly the increased debate over the emotional well-being of children that grew from the UNICEF (2007) child well-being analysis of twenty OECD countries that saw the UK embarrassingly lowly placed.

In a country where the increased bureaucratisation of all aspects of education seems to be leaching the joy, spontaneity and humanity from the classroom, playgrounds, and importantly for those closest to the child, play has and will have battles to fight. In this book, Howard and McInnes begin that fight by rearming practitioners with the ideas, fundamental values and beliefs and, crucially, the self confidence to elicit the very best outcomes for children within recreational, educational and therapeutic settings.

One of the key tenets of this book is the idea that children learn and develop best when they perceive an activity as playful; what an activity feels like to the child is the most important consideration. Implicit in this is the need to listen to what children say about play. Rather than being a passive recipient of (inherently limiting) adult constructions of what they see play as, the authors emphasize the child's agency in the process of learning and development. The centrality of communication is also fostered by a plea for increased opportunities for, and willingness of, practitioners to learn from each other and to share good practice.

That this plea has sometimes been unanswered in the past is attributed to the diversity of theoretical frameworks that have underpinned practice, both historically and in the last few decades. While recourse to references in the first two chapters will reward the more assiduous reader, there is sufficient depth and breadth to promote understanding of the commonalities and divergences of theoretical accounts. Seminal theorists such as Vygotsky, Piaget and Froebel lead the discussion onto ideas of whether children are 'becomings' (lacking competencies) or 'beings' (social actors), a central discussion in childhood research (see Uprichard, 2008). A fairly complex web of ideas is usefully tabulated by Howard and McInnes although some examples may have helped the reader gain a stronger grasp. Importantly, the reader is invited to review their own ideas stimulating the examination of opinions and of received wisdom. Each chapter in this book concludes with a 'now that you have read the chapter section which poses excellent questions that prompt individual and collective reflection on understandings and practices. This technique offers an effective conduit for ideas and validates the wishes of the best practitioners to constantly appraise and refine their practice.

Chapter Two is also theoretically based, looking at how theories of learning are complemented by theories of play. It is a fascinating read, usefully and engagingly illustrated (although colour

photographs would have been preferable), and often pauses to summarise key points in a highly accessible, coherent way. It succeeds in convincing any practitioner who is questioning the value of what they bring to young children's lives that their work is vital.

Howard and McInnes go on to present, in chapter three, their theories around the value of *playfulness* against play and the significance of the child's voice within this as well as the importance of the context within which activity takes place. It is a challenging chapter as it largely militates against accepted practice and invites creativity and intellectual curiosity. Over seventy years ago, Dewey first drew distinctions between play and playfulness, defining the latter as an 'attitude of mind' (Dewey, cited in Howard and McInnes, 2012: 41) and it is this assertion that the authors explore further. Their view is that playfulness involves a high degree of affect and as such is difficult to observe, hence the need to see activity from the child's perspective. There are links here with what developmental psychologists term subjectivity and intersubjectivity and this would be a worthwhile avenue of research for the interested reader. An examination of some recent and apposite work on the value of playfulness is complemented with suggested methodologies that aim to overcome the inherent difficulties of measuring playfulness. We are introduced to 'Leuven's Involvement Scale' as a measure of emotional well-being, and to the 'Activity Apperception Story Procedure' as a measure of a child's view of play. This challenging chapter benefits from the use of scenarios which help ground the practitioner in familiar territory.

Engagingly presented scenarios are a key feature of chapter four, which heralds the beginning of the more practical thrust of the book. Ending with a four stage reflective process that once again highlights the genuinely companionable nature of Howard and McInnes's book, Chapter Four seeks to identify what practitioners can do, and be, to encourage the playfulness of activity. Readers are encouraged to see themselves as children might see them and to question their role within the play cycle, constantly evaluating and reflecting upon practice. Again summaries help bring the reader back to key principles and the distinction between those related to therapeutic, recreational and educational settings and how these principles impact on how the adult may be viewed by the child.

In their examination of the interaction between environment and development, the authors draw on Jennings' (1999) 'Embodiment, Projection and Role' paradigm to demonstrate the play stages we all pass through and the different opportunities each presents. Reference is made to play environments that are 'as safe as possible' and 'safe enough', encouraging the reader to consider the corraling of children that practitioners can feel compelled to employ. Further thought is given to the institutionalisation of play, with affluent children being taxed from one organised activity to the next. As with all the chapters, useful further reading is identified with a short outline of its value to the forgoing chapter.

Refreshingly, the thoughtful and thought provoking chapter six, on inclusive play practice, opens

up some fascinating avenues of exploration with an excellent tabulated look at specific conditions and possible adaptive practice. There is possibly scope for a more extensive exploration of the role of play for children in, or emerging from, emotional turmoil, especially given the overarching emphasis in the book on emotional well-being and the importance of positioning play in the ‘here and now’. The importance of observation in understanding children’s play benefits is emphasised. This well-constructed chapter employs several example scenarios and attendant interpretation, all of which will chime with the daily experience of play workers. The book concludes with a pragmatic look at issues that affect that daily experience such as safeguarding and working productively with parents.

This valuable and highly readable book should be in every play setting. It is by turns practical and thought provoking, stimulating and inspiring.

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Nikki Giant

E-Safety for the I-Generation – Combating the Misuse and Abuse of Technology in Schools

Jessica Kingsley Publishers 2013

ISBN 9-781849-059442

£15.99 (pbk)

pp.144

Roy Smith

E-SAFETY IS undoubtedly a hot topic for those of us working with young people. With the internet and new technology central to many aspects of modern life, it is vital that educators have a good understanding of how young people experience it, and are in a position to offer informed guidance.

Giant gives a clear summary of the current state of play, assessing risks and discussing how young people use the Internet and social networks. She also provides some good examples of school based

policy for e-safety and tackling cyber bullying. The sections on cyber bullying and responding to incidents are probably the strongest elements here, giving advice to teachers and school policy makers, with practice based models that relate to online and offline bullying.

That being said, much of the material would be fairly standard for anyone who has a reasonably grasp of the internet and there is little on offer for those experienced in working with young people and technology. Although Giant attempts to give a rounded view of the subject, the negative curriculum is dominant here and more than once I could hear Maude Flanders crying 'won't somebody please think of the children!' This is symptomatic of the public discourse around the internet, treated by government and the media as the latest threat to young people who 'cannot escape the continuous slew of sex.' This grates, with alarmism reminiscent of the demon rock and roll of the 1950s. There are real threats to young people online and educators have an important role in protecting and informing young people, but by dwelling on the risk narrative we miss the opportunity to educate young people on the 'how to' rather than the 'how not to'.

The 'curriculum activities' section starts with a promise to rectify this, including some initial worksheets on communication, but the vast majority of tasks serve only to illustrate the dangers lurking around every corner. The tasks feature some uncomfortably stereotypical and sometimes judgemental case studies, with the football-playing boy, and the girl who just wants a boyfriend, so commits the cardinal sin of wearing too much make up and not having any hobbies or interests. The activities themselves are fairly standard for this type of resource, including some agree / disagree, true or false and sorting activities, which may be useful, but offer little out of the ordinary. Given this is a book about 'new' technology, some online resources or innovative content would have been welcome.

E-Safety for the i-generation is a useful starting place for the uninformed and is correct in calling for educators and institutions to form clear policy and curriculum dealing with e-safety. Although Giant only aimed to tackle issues relating to e-safety, isolating this issue risks distorting the online world, reinforcing negative views. Educators pursuing this strategy could alienate young online-natives, who have integrated these technologies into their lives and may feel their teachers are out of touch. Further resources are needed that can support educators to work with young people on subjects such as: forming positive online identities; effective communication; e-participation; and managing the connection between on and offline worlds.

From a youth work perspective, permission to engage with young people online has long been an issue. Having used social media as part of our youth work in Medway for a number of years, our experience has been incredibly positive, with youth workers engaging through Facebook and other platforms. This I feel has put us in a better position to highlight and discuss issues relating to e-safety, as well as improving communication in general. Despite this, many youth projects and local authorities still prevent their workers engaging online, due in part to the dominance

of negative and risk based narratives associated with the internet. A more positive approach is essential to move on and ensure we are able to educate and relate to young people, for whom the Internet is a normal part of life.

Roy Smith, area manager with Medway Youth Service, recently completed an MA in European Studies of Youth Work and Social Disadvantage, writing a dissertation on online participation.

Peter Kraftl, John Horton and Faith Tucker (eds.)

Critical Geographies of Childhood and Youth: Contemporary Policy and Practice

Policy Press 2012

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£24.99 (pbk)

pp. 296

Graeme Tiffany

THE INTRODUCTORY statement, ‘that researchers, policy-makers and practitioners working with children and young people should be aware of how spaces are important in/for their work’, is identified as one of the key challenges emerging from children’s geographies. This book takes on this challenge passionately and effectively. On reading, those who work with children and young people will undoubtedly conclude *geography matters*. It matters because, as is convincingly argued, this work is better understood when it considers the spaces and places in which it takes place, and, especially, how, and by whom, these spaces are controlled. Other concepts, such as scale, networks and mobilities, also feature. All can have a profound significance in the lives of young people. But there’s complexity also, which is why geography has engendered so many sub-disciplines: from the human, to the social and the cultural, and beyond. A strength of the book is in showing that these geographies act as windows to other understandings, from how time works, to politics and economics too. This means the reader does not need to be a geographer to value its findings. But its greatest contribution is in bearing witness to the realities of childhood and youth in society, and how these lives are affected by policy and practice.

Several chapters expose worrying effects; others are testament of the good. As might be anticipated, the former outweigh the latter. Notwithstanding, they enlighten us, which is important when the drip, drip, drip of policy affects practice in ways we may not have recognised. Most startling is the impact of neoliberalising trends across the education and welfare landscapes. Neoliberalism is, without understatement, extraordinarily difficult to pin down and has some immunity to criticism because of this. But, as Gus John (2006) persuasively argues, it is by analysing examples of what actually happens in practice that the workings of power and hegemony can be revealed.

This book offers examples aplenty. Contributing geographers show how the abandonment of Building Schools for the Future (BSF) was synchronous with the promotion of Free Schools (in effect, a deliberate strategy to liberate the state from spending on new educational spaces). Free Schools' use of existing buildings might seem like a virtuous take on austerity, but what happened to the rationale that classrooms can be profoundly important in shaping the lives of individual children and young people? Then, evidence of how policy increasingly moves youth work into school. Isabel Cartwright illustrates a consequence: 'informal education may be constrained by the policies embedded in formal education settings'. (If it looks like a duck and walks like a duck...) Yet more examples demonstrate policy's preference for a future-oriented conception of childhood. Based on constructions of the child as in deficit, as an incomplete adult, in need of development, a person not yet realised as human capital, the rationale is created for the ever more stringent control of children and young people's education, invariably through the governance of the spaces they inhabit. Even the linguistic turn in policy from 'enabling aspirations' to 'raising aspirations' is, when subjected to geographical analysis, revealed to have these behaviour management tendencies.

The book also takes us further afield: to the externally influenced youth policy environment of Malawi, to policy on HIV/AIDS affected children in South Africa, and to young offender institutions in America. Nowhere escapes these neoliberalising trends. Closer to home, consider the euphemistically labelled school 'stay-on-site' policies: are they a defensible response to the 'junk food mothers' who incurred our opprobrium as they, seemingly, put two fingers up to Jamie's School Dinners in passing food through the school fence? Or, as often happens when the threads of detail emerge, was this a desperate response to the lack of participative geographies in 'institutions characterised by hierarchical, disciplinary and ritualised relations in enclosed sites' (p.31)? (In this case, parents were excluded from the space of the 'School Nutrition Action Group').

What is not better informed by the geographical concepts of space, place, territory and mobility? And yet it's the identification of 'spatial injustices' that is most disturbing. Talk of social mobility clearly masks social *immobility*: what does it say about efforts to widen participation in our universities when less than a fifth of entrants come from disadvantaged areas and fully sixty percent come from the most advantaged? Conversely, youth homelessness policies insist the vulnerable move from their localities, with the effect that support networks are fractured and the stigma of problematic outsider is cast upon them. Stigmatisation is compounded by place; many 'locals' distance themselves from consultation regimes, and retreat into the private sphere (Slater, 2013). How authentic then is the claimed commitment to regeneration and community development, especially when neoliberalism's subliminal narrative, that you 'have to get out to get on', works its magic?

We see how school choice policies influence the leap-frogging of local provision; walking to school becomes a thing of the past as the car becomes needed to get there. Fear and authority conspire to constrain children's freedom to play outside, the youth's mere presence in public space now a

problem. How ironic then that the ‘macro spatial effects’ of these restrictive policy geographies are likely to contribute to, rather than prevent, the obesity time bomb, inhibit the development of street literacy, and exacerbate other social ills? We can conclude: social exclusion is a geographical concept. Which makes it all the more worrying when we realise that, whilst policy has a centrist, national, spin, the scale of operation of youth participation is invariably the local. Have we been seduced, has our capacity for influence been diminished, by localism?

Thankfully, we are treated to examples that remind us that ‘local engagement is never just local’. There is some solace in that. But are these examples too few in this book? Might it be a little ambivalent? Certainly it offers hope. But this appears, somewhat ironically, to be limited by an apparently self-imposed geography of ambition: in its concluding remarks the book asks if we can find and create new spaces but also opportunities within existing policy frameworks that enable progressive values to flourish and ‘find moments of joyfulness or compassion within them’. Therein the frustration, might we have to settle for only moments and the occasional space within all of this to act in a progressive way? A greater play of the conclusion that policy is, at best, inefficient and, at worst, detrimental to young people could have laid the foundation for where we go now. But perhaps it is there in this important book. In exploring the many geographical wrongs (and some rights) the signal exists to make geography public, social, participative and democratic. Thus, the citizenship education of (and that is) informal education comes out peculiarly well-placed to inform a more hopeful future. It has the potential to resist, challenge and reclaim the policy spaces in which participation has been reduced to mere taking part in an economic project judged inviolable by its adherents. Informal education can, and does, work through the local, by encouraging and enabling mobilities and an ‘outward-looking education’. And it can, and does, inform and affect that beyond. A concluding, if perhaps odd, injunction is made: ‘in whatever form might be appropriate in whatever contexts’. This seems to invoke the spirit of both radical geography and informal education, that nothing is definitive and that the world is all the better for that.

References

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