

Recycling Discredited Pedagogies

**THE LONDON FILE:
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**David Buckingham (Editor).
CHANGING LITERACIES:
MEDIA EDUCATION AND MODERN CULTURE.
28 pp., £3.95.**

**Graham Haydon (Editor).
EDUCATION AND THE CRISIS IN VALUES:
SHOULD WE BE PHILOSOPHICAL ABOUT IT?
25 pp., £3.95.**

**Clare Hake (Editor).
PARTNERSHIP IN INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING:
TALK AND CHALK
36 pp., £3.95.**

**James Tooley (Editor).
A MARKET-LED ALTERNATIVE FOR THE CURRICULUM:
BREAKING THE CODE.
42 pp., £3.95.**

Edward Lederman recently wrote that education-ese has always done a good job of camouflaging the recycling of discredited pedagogies. This is the case with these essays. However, educational thought is in such a state of desperate destitution that it was a pleasure to read them. All four are well-written, cogently argued and clear in conviction regardless of the redressed heresies they espouse. At least they were forthright and easy to contend with.

I write in the order which I read them. Haydon writes about the crisis in values, or, rather, he posits that something has happened in education "which lends itself to talk about crisis." John Patten, the British cabinet minister responsible for education, is cited about the decline in religious belief and observance and so is his call for "a religious revival." This something is the plurality of standards in education and the coexistence of differing values. Haydon says there is a diversity which was always there but hidden, and which has not been

made public by the media. This proliferation of values is not a decline, it is only a new "lack of faith in moral discussion." We do not need normative philosophy on education, but "a practical philosophy *in* education." We need applied philosophy done by teachers as neutral chairpersons implementing method on practical disagreements and issues. Why? Because philosophers are not throwers of lifelines but swimming instructors.

In the 1960s Mao Zedong was quoted about not serving a plate of fish, but rather teaching one how to fish, thus providing not a meal but food for life. Today it is swimming instructors.

Haydon's argument turns into another appeal for critical thinking to cope with diversity. This is a rewarmed version of Dewey and McLuhan. The process is the thing, the medium is the message. (Haydon is another example of the fact that the English are no good at philosophy. They really don't need it because they have etiquette.)

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David Buckingham's essay is about the teaching of English versus something called media studies. It is about high-brow and low-brow culture. His essay is the case for media education or low-brow culture as a fundamental educational entitlement for all. This is because through media "our identities are formed."

Literacy is formed, he says, in the interaction between technologies, institutions, texts, and audiences, followed by a discussion of each of these elements.

Technologies are interactive but have "contradictory consequences" because they are "gendered and classed." In other words our identities are formed by our response to the media, Buckingham's version of reader response to literature. In this approach, of course, all responses are valid and equally valid. There is no best response or interpretation; there is no ultimate common meaning.

Institutions are the locus of control of the means of production but also more importantly the locus of the "control of the production of meaning." They produce a meaning that viewers should respond to skeptically. Deregulation cannot automatically be equated with greater "choice and diversity." In other words the messages of capitalist television must not be trusted or assented to regardless of the response of viewers.

Buckingham does not really want viewer response to media. He wants viewers' positive responses to be re-educated into negative ones.

Our response to Oliver Stone's *JFK* or to Warren Beatty's *Reds* should be positive. Our response to Charlton Heston, Ronald Reagan, William F. Buckley, and Pat Buchanan should be negative.

In his discussion of text there is expressed a "fear of Americanization" which contradicts the confidence that viewers will respond to texts as they see them. Buckingham talks about the content of Americanized text as infused with violence, sexism, consumerism, and merchandizing. In other words, infused with capitalist themes and not the socialist ones of pacifism, androgyny, scarcity, and bureaucratizing. If media texts celebrated sodomy, socialism, and surrender Buckingham would have no "fear of Americanization." It would then be a case of sensitive and caring "Sweden"-ization.

On audiences, Buckingham says they have been fragmented, diversified, and there are alternative social identities. In other words, with cable, broadcasting has become "narrow"-casting. This is no good, because leftist broadcasters have lost control. Dan Rather is no longer a secular pope.

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Clare Hake talks about teacher training and the role of the practicum in it. The essay discusses theory and practice in teacher education and the place of the university and the school in teacher preparation.

For the Conservatives, the teacher training system in universities embodies the idea and methods which have made British education the laughing stock of Europe. It is based on half-baked sociological and psychological theories. Therefore, there have been onslaughts against theory-heavy teacher education. But, "the balance between university-based and school-based training has shifted in the latter's favour." The simple and obvious point the author does not make is that university theory has been in favour of school-based training for the past generation. It has been learning by doing for the past thirty years.

The author says that the theory manufactured and applied in schools model has failed. Yes it has, but the theory has been a theory of praxis. Theory as such has not failed; a particular theory has failed.

The author then argues that "professional activity has an epistemology of its own." In education this is known as "reflection in action," otherwise known as "reflective practice," in which theory is not dichotomized from experience.

I was happy to learn, and I did learn that reflective practice comes from where everything else about modern education comes from, John

Dewey. In 1933 Dewey wrote *How we think: A restatement of the relations of reflective thinking to the educational process*, where he first proposed the notion of reflective practice.

The author then describes the Oxford Internship Scheme, in which there is an assault on Aristotle's Second Law of Thought – the Law of Contradiction, which says that something cannot be and not be at the same time. This, we learn, is crude and disabling. The way to transcend Aristotle is through collaboration, compromise, consensus, partnership, interdependence, and empowerment.

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After I finished James Tooley's essay, I thought, "Poor fellows." This essay, however, is slightly different. It is against a standard "national curriculum," and for entrusting the curriculum to the market because a market-led curriculum would be liberating and empowering and would facilitate egalitarian ideas. But, he says, "I do not mean privatizing educational provision, selling of schools, instituting fee paying and so on. I mean liberating the demand and supply sides of education within a state-provided service." He proudly continues: "Note. . . that it is not parents and students who decide the curriculum. This is still up to professional educationists – teachers, head teachers, textbook writers, curriculum visionaries, to decide what we teach. It is circumscribed professional control."

Tooley is an educational Gorbachev who still can't shake his affinity for something called a socialist market.

But, for the most part I enjoyed the essays, because they represented an attempt at an ordered retreat – the most difficult of military manoeuvres.

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