Reviews / Comptes rendus

Trust in Education: Truths and Values

edited by Jerome Satterthwaite, Heather Piper, Pat Sikes, and Simon Webster (UK: Trentham Books Ltd., 2011, 170 pages)

As growing global political and economic unrest coincides with an apparently inexorable diminution of liberal arts programmes at universities and colleges throughout Europe and North America, the publication of the collection of essays *Trust in Education* seems timely. Each essay pushes, to greater or lesser degree, for a recognition that trust in the Western educational system has been eroded, and that more generally "there is a long history in Western European culture of decaying confidence in our ability to reach out with our minds to grasp and know the world around us" (Satterthwaite, p. 7). The book contends that to regain this trust in education is to participate in a veritable revolution, and the book does not shy away from the sense of urgency that the title suggested.

In this challenging collection, Satterthwaite, Piper, Sikes, and Webster advocate moving away from the dominance of end productivity and toward a systems-based approach to education. Essays range from the densely abstract and theoretical to the anecdotal, and the discussion moves from philosophies of communication to how to make them work in certain contexts. The book essentially calls attention to the challenges people and institutions face when trying to communicate, and to the importance of formalizing the communication process to ensure that information is shared in an inclusive and transparent manner. As Ruth L. Smith argues, for instance, "people make arguments and they're never done," (p. 57), meaning that information, passed back and forth, is always fluid; for Smith, "[n]otions of never" in communication are problematic because they tend to preclude or, at the very least, discourage critical enquiry (p. 54). Instead, the essays argue collectively that learners and educators need to embrace the uncertainty of communication in order to produce what Howard Gibson and Jo Backus call a "genuine encounter" between people, as well as between people and cultural institutions (p. 139). Kamila Kaminska calls attention to the importance of looking critically at one's own culture in order to produce this "genuine encounter," but also acknowledges the difficulty in doing so: "where can we stand, apart from our culture – so as to inspect its values? There is no such place but there has to be one" (p. 120). These questions are incredibly difficult to answer, but the more anecdotal essays, such as Sieglinde Weyringer's account of fostering intercultural communications at EU summer youth camps, make them somewhat less daunting, because one can see how these philosophical problems might be addressed in real-life situations.

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If some of the essays are frustrating in their open-endedness, others tend toward the overly clinical, occasionally making the book a difficult read. For instance, in her outline of a successful model for intercultural dialogue, Weyringer identifies useful modes of communication "between agents": "(1) implementation of a trustworthy communication, (2) phasing out of threatening actions, (3) targeted development of trust" (p. 98). What tend to get lost in these scenarios are the actual individuals responsible for implementing them: The "agents" might be legislative bodies, but they can also be single people. Likewise, the vagueness of terms such as "targeted development of trust" makes their execution more problematic. While I concede that policies need to be generic in order to broaden their applicability and that the openness of terms such as "threatening actions" allows these fields to be defined by context, such clinical terminology occasionally obscures the human factor in the communication process—an element that is in fact its heart.

The book implies that the acts of self-reflection and critical thinking equal resistance, and the attendant assumption is that the development of these two skills have actually disappeared from education, a contention with which many intellectuals may well disagree. I certainly agree with the book's statement that these skills are key to the development of good citizens, but I am not convinced that they are entirely absent from education today. It is difficult to critique a book that places such high "value [in] resistance," since concerns about the efficacy of such a position inevitably carry the taint of a conservatism that seems unwelcome here (Kaminska, p. 122). However, if calls for "resistance" were tempered with strategies for critical thinking, for instance, it would open up many more possibilities for employing the ideas found in the book. Living at the edge of revolution is unsustainable in the long run, as exemplified by Smith's question about linguistic and social contracts: "Is it safe to cross the street?" (p. 54). But if we take the call to intellectual arms as a call to critical thinking, a call to de-familiarizing social hierarchies and modes of communication by questioning their naturalness, the book's message becomes more accessible and its execution more possible.

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