

**Marjorie Mayo, (2020) Community-Based Learning and Social Movements: Popular Education in a Populist Age, Bristol: Policy Press, paperback, 208pp, ISBN 9781447343271, £26.99**

I recommend this book to adult educators, academics, community professionals and students interested in making connections between community-based learning, popular education, participatory action research, social movements and community-university partnerships, with an interest in challenging right-wing populism and social injustice. The book is a resource providing hope to such educators working against an upsurge in populist governments and movements that have given rise to xenophobia and nativism.

The central question the book addresses is ‘How can we understand the growth of Far Right populism in contemporary contexts, taking account of the divisive effects of increasingly authoritarian forms of neoliberalism, continuing austerity, increasing inequalities and mounting insecurities on an international scale?’ (Mayo, 2020, p.2).

The chapters of the book are organised thematically. The first section explores different definitions and approaches to understanding Far Right populism and its theoretical and ideological roots in increasing authoritarianism and inequality that are translated into social conflicts, cultural chauvinism and hate crimes. The second section reflects on constructive approaches in responding to this dilemma through popular education and participatory action research, both in theory and practice. The author takes into account the tensions, challenges and limitations of practising popular education, yet remains convinced that it is an invaluable tool in tackling regressive forms of populism.

The theoretical perspective of the book is drawn from the writings of Paulo Freire and other popular educators. Mayo points out that popular education starts from a critical understanding of the structural causes of people’s experience of exploitation and oppression. Taking into account ‘feminists critiques’ (Mayo, 2020, p.33) of Freire’s

writing, she develops her argument in recognising that Freire places too much emphasis on class and that class intersects with race, gender, sexuality, disability, faith, culture or a combination of these, all of which need to be factored in if oppression is to be overcome.

The author outlines the processes and practices of popular education which need to start from where people are at, taking account of their emotions, their hopes and fears and concerns which ‘start from the real and systematic inequalities and injustices that currently exclude many people...[and] listening to and articulating those voices which have been silenced’ (Crowther cited in Mayo, 2020,p.20). Mayo, recognises that Freire’s pedagogy is still as relevant as ever, if not more so, in the contemporary context. Popular education approaches are based on Freirian methods of dialogue, consciousness raising and relationships of mutual trust to bring about a more just social order through democratic change processes based on an analysis of the causes of social inequalities and power relationships. In doing so, there is a need for ‘democratic, participatory approaches to teaching and learning in practice’ Mayo (2020, p.20).

Through case studies, the book provides multiple illustrations of how popular educational initiatives found in social movements and community-university partnerships can become an essential part in community struggles for social justice. Educational processes that ensure that different voices can be heard and that the less articulate are not silenced can help to transform the lives of learners as well as their communities.

The study, in capturing the complexity and diversity of social movements that are formal and informal, recognises that, like communities, social movements have their own differences and their own varied organisational cultures which include different, and often contested, approaches to learning. Popular education is one of these approaches as members of social movements, through informal learning and activism for social change, learn collectively how to challenge social injustice.

Community-university partnerships through popular education and participatory action research are explained. Beginning with valuing what people know, enabling them to

acquire research skills, people become co-researchers in the production of new knowledge for social change. Such partnerships educate communities to build a collective understanding of social issues and to develop strategies for social justice and community solidarity.

One educational initiative that particularly impressed me is that of ‘Imagine-connecting communities through research’ (2019), which was a community-university partnership in de-industrialised areas of North East England. Through participatory action research, a significant theme emerged of ‘territorial stigmatisation’ that had a detrimental effect on people’s lives. In challenging this image, residents became agents of social change as they replaced far right populist thinking of alienation and hopelessness, with a pride in the past achievements of their cultural heritage and a collective will to forge a more equitable and inclusive future.

The author draws on insights from a Marxist analytical framework in addition to a feminist and psycho-social approach that ‘recognises the value of exploring the interconnections between the personal and political’ (Mayo, 2020, p.156). Mayo draws attention to the significance of the ‘hidden injuries of class’ (Sennett cited in Mayo, 2020, p.158) as popular educators develop their understanding of people’s feelings and emotions. In addition, educators also need to ‘understand their own emotions if they are to cope with the feelings of others’ (Hoggett cited in Mayo, 2020, p.161).

Mayo’s reason for a Marxist analytical framework to analyse popular education and its development in challenging the socio-economic, political and cultural context of our times is that Marxism starts from exploring the conflicting interests of the class-based power structures involved in any given context. Marxism helps us to understand a whole range of key ideas: the concept of class struggle; the fragmentation of workingclass family life and communities; the polarisation of society between elite and people; the embedding of short-term, low paid work that increases anxiety in the population; the deserving and undeserving poor, the stigmatisation of welfare claimants; the ‘othering’ of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) peoples; the effects of austerity that have

intensified poverty. These issues all need to be challenged so that more humane policies and practices replace the neoliberalism that has given rise to Far Right populism.

Although written prior to the Covid 19 crisis, I found this book essential reading in these critical times. Neoliberalism, rising socio-economic inequalities and Far Right populism remain with us, despite a temporary shoring up of the welfare state by the Conservative government to hold off a catastrophic economic disaster. If people's social and economic needs are not met by institutional actors, Far Right populism will intensify. I urge scholars to read this book and educate themselves on what popular education and participatory action research can do for communities in understanding the complex times they are living through. As resources of hope, they can help to develop radical social change and community cohesion, offering a lifeline to communities in crisis.

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