



**Unfit to Be a Slave: A Guide to Adult Education
for Liberation
By David Greene
(Sense Publishers, 2015, 174 pages)**

Book Review

By

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Influenced by a mainstream radical ideology, *Unfit to Be a Slave: A Guide to Adult Education for Liberation* is unequivocally a democratic pillar of human consciousness. Unorthodox slants encouraging adult education as the locomotive to fit human consciousness into a capitalistic design are dissed at best. The author unapologetically calls for embracement of a new and radically revolutionary tenet aimed to liberate from captivity the conscious minds of human beings and seriously question the very foundation of the role of education in the lives of human beings. Humanistic and libertarian adult educators alike including liberals to some extent, who uphold the dignity and the autonomy of human beings (Elias & Merriam, 2005), appreciate the language and the tone the author uses throughout the text in support to human empowerment.

The main core of this thesis is built upon an extensive examination of current offenses to education systems as well as a useful guide to support what is required in adult education to achieve a truly liberating educational experience for students. It also calls for current and new recruits in the field of adult education to change the society we live in and the world around us. The book starts with a foreword by Antonia Darder, who believes author is speaking with a “deep political view of language and its cultural relationship to the world (xi)” by engaging “revolutionary ethos of adult education” (p. xiv).

Chapter one seeks to persuade an audience in favor of individual empowerment and it starts with the enslavement life-story of Frederick Douglass, which later emerged as a leading figure thanks to literacy understanding. Although “education is not outlawed” (p. 1), author states, “today, we are enslaved because we are ignorant of our circumstances” (p.1). Obstacles to student empowerment and contextual struggles that

render students to a liberating educational experience are conveyed through many experiential stories and pedagogical teachings. Disparity of what popular education is thought to be and what it currently is opens up new opportunities to challenge the obstacles of student empowerment and to support millions of others for whom literacy has been out of reach. One of the main fundamental concepts set forth by the author is neutrality in education. "Education is not neutral" (p. 40), but it either serves both civic and active participations of teachers and students or it preserves the economic growth of a capitalistic slavery. Like McLaren (2007), the author believes that academic community is as culpable as corporations and employers for applying a business model to educational system. He does, however, unlike it is suggested by other critics of critical pedagogy (*see* Grey & Antonacopoulou, 2004), give a solution and instead suggests education supports and aims maximal development of intellect, culture and understanding of the environment and world around us.

Chapter Two is a review of adult education. As it is known that critical pedagogy is a highly personal lifelong journey (Christensen & Aldridge, 2013), the author organizes the chapter reflecting and portraying past experiences in the field of education. The author and the editor of the book are convinced that teachers and students alike belong to the working class. Even administrators are engaged in survival by everyday threats of program closure. Millions of adult students are in danger of untapped potential. That is, only a fraction of adult students are enrolled in adult education programs resulting in a vast majority unable to meet their individual educational needs. Enrollment rates and attendance of adult education programs are by far mere indicators to address education deficits among adult students. Calls for "active student participation" and "leadership" (p. 21) are strongly voiced. Another concern raised by author is the restraining roles of administrators and educators who are unable to serve millions of hard-working students who, too often, mistakenly misconceive adult students as unable to apprehend theory and create new knowledge. Many of these students have fallen prey of a defective and seriously flawed economic system led by government officials who are unwilling to compromise, let alone accommodate, their roles in a system from which they benefit the most. Needless to say, author does acknowledge the importance of statistical data but numbers are insufficient to assist educators understand the cultural knowledge that walks with every student. Accordingly, misinformation and ignorance of this cultural knowledge prevents exposure to the severity of the issue.

Chapter three depicts a disturbing picture and takes the audience back in time to slavery to question the conventional methods and teachers' practices in knowledge transference. In an anti-discriminatory style of any race, gender or class, educators are placed in between the working class sector and students' self-development through adult education. Educators are labeled gatekeepers. From a social perspective, gatekeepers may fray away and limit the educational opportunities among workers. This perspective stems from a system that encourages dependency and controls limited resources in ways that are minimally available to the marginally oppressed. Education is the means to human liberation or alternatively, to what is currently is argued throughout the chapter, alienation to society's limited resources. Needless to say, the lack of these resources is often endorsed by gatekeepers (educators), who unwittingly fail to recognize

opportunities within students. These missed opportunities go unnoticed in times of education marketization (Christensen & Aldridge, 2013); that is, the kind of education that domesticates and obstructs students from actualizing their potential and encourages those in power to maintain and sustain a dominant role in society. This chapter however is not an attack to adult educators and their failures to dedicate to social justice and find other actionable ways to increase effectiveness of the work field (Wiggins, 2011). It is instead assumed that institutions and organizations, including the field of education, are gatekeepers, who decide “which information will go ahead and which will not” (p. 56). This leads to a controversial political nonsense explained in the following chapter.

Chapter four delineates the most prominent issue that this book seeks to argue: that of political literacy. In critical pedagogy, political literacy is a tool of dominant forces exercised over the masses to exert control and obedience. This chapter lays the aura of educators who contradict the purpose of education by typically devaluing adult students as incompetent and thus, not worth of much revelation. In what Paulo Freire (2000), called “banking concept,” educators are exclusive bearers of knowledge and those who are excluded, too often are most impacted. This view is diametrically opposed in the book by popular education which addresses issues of power and trust in colonialism (Wiggins, 2011). The author is particularly a proponent of recognition and production of knowledge by both teachers and students. One way of acknowledging and valuing the experiences and perspectives of students and teachers in dialectic dialogue is by recognizing student knowledge and integrating actionable roles or critical thinking among student dialogues. Today, the need of critical dialogues is warranted more than ever before because of the political ramifications and the deepening economic crisis. Organizing with others is toxic, according to the author. Collective bargaining is no longer needed. Individual disenfranchisement is encouraged. In a democratic society, division of working class is a disservice to civic participation and citizen inclusion. Blaming oneself for all individual failures and disappointments alike are the expected norm. The author considers this type of rhetoric an “ideology...grounded [for] social order and control” (p.64). In a clear attack to corporations and employers, the author sets to underline labor exploitation, especially in the United States. To overcome these challenges, author gives a set of suggestions for critical practice in adult education with the hope to enable powerful tools of empowerment. The utilization of these tools is based in understanding the society we live in. Chapter five addresses just that!

In chapter five the stream of radical criticism follows by introducing the reader to political economy and calls for a full understanding of the complex politico-economic system to be able to change it. Class analysis and political economy are addressed. From multibillion corporations to government officials representing the largest working class—citizens—are proportionally criticized for their disruptive role in the empowerment of students. Educational institutions, and even K-12 systems, do not escape the criticism of a capitalistic system where the largest working class does not benefit from. Corporations are attacked for their lays-offs; universities are criticized for their service to private industry; government’s representation is questioned and schools and other adult education programs are at subpar attention for funding and individual engagement to conscious liberation. Critical transformational thought requires an examination of the

current political and economic system. The clearer the understanding of the system, the more effective the chances and the means of transformation are. Author maintains that critical education which guarantees equality and justice is discouraged and often polarized. This is especially true when there is a mal-distribution of wealth and knowledge among emancipatory system participants who seek to maintain the social status among other dilemmas in fear of losing education program and other economic privileges. The political power and economic wealth are all but liberating forces for the working class. Working class is often refrained from building structures that maintain equality and justice among people. These structures instead are built on capitalistic foundations driven to maximize profits and encourage status quo onto the expense of the working class sector. Class warfare *is* currently being waged against the working class. Author maintains that for a society, whereas the largest class is oppressed and deprived of basic liberties and kept illiterate, to function democratically, the only possible harmony the oppressed can find is to engage in the struggle for liberation.

Chapter six is divided in two sections: tools of theory and tools of practice. They both aim to arm readers with a variety of theoretically-bound tools for social change and social transformation. The working class can liberate itself. It does not need to wait for a savior or a great charismatic leader, author claims. Instead, its radicals can turn critical thinking and individual consciousness to reflect on tools of theory and practice they need to transform the world they live in. After all, critical pedagogy is a practice that makes and contributes significant gains (Monchinski, 2011). In author's words, this requires a "greater consciousness or understanding... [which is] the clearest reflection of the real world" (p. 103). Five theoretical tools delineated in this chapter are an analysis of experience accumulation that results in a more holistic view and understanding of relationships between people. Application of these tools comprises the second half of the chapter. This application focuses on the practice of popular education and other literary civic tools for liberation of consciousness. Liberation is not mere activities of classroom chair arrangement aimed to superficially engage students and learners in classrooms without the centerpiece of consciousness. Consciousness in critical pedagogy preaches "organizing and action" (p. 118). Swaying away from these two pieces is a blunt ignorance to the development of human consciousness. This brings us to question, *how can we liberate our consciousness?*

Albeit unknown in a single answer, this is what chapter seven addresses. Whether we educate our adult students in formal or informal environments, it remains essential to educate their consciousness. The key to educating students' consciousness is to foster and prepare advocates who preach social transformation and practice civic participation. It is in the hands of educators to create spheres of participation. Inferring from several state initiative examples nationally and multiple countries internationally, author explains the challenges of educators and education for liberation. It is the space inside the schooling system that educators create and the space outside the schooling system that allows an ideal fight to a system of oppression. As important as it is for educators and students to create internal and external spaces for dialogues in the schooling system, it is equally important to address that these "spaces serve the independent interests of the working

class” (p. 142). Anything else would rotten the progress.

Last chapter concludes with strong calls for popular education to bring liberation to people’s consciousness. Start by standing up for you rights, author suggests. Or start a “freedom school” to enable democratic participation in the economy and society. Whether or not you see challenges in today’s society, you are urged, “not to remain an inactive object in the history, but... a subject who makes history” (p. 148).

The author is a vernacular of his own. From Africa to South America and to the world’s capitalist capital of finances in New York, *Unfit to Be a Slave* is a “how-to” literary work focused on social transformation. It speaks the kind of education that encourages radical emancipation for justice.

The book starts off with a contextualization of the issue; that is education for liberation. However, there is no introduction whether there is prevalence in the current socio-politico-economic system in which we willingly choose to abide by. The author reveals startling information of disparity between the majority working class and minority privileged. In doing so, the much-appreciated technological advances, that arguably have enhanced the quality of our lives, are either largely ignored or peripherally clarified. If radical education is the main rhythm of driving a liberating consciousness for adults and students alike, why are the masses largely ignoring it? If economics is what people are valuing, why don’t we focus on enhancing the economic status of those who seek education for liberation? Or better yet, is it fair to assume that masses, including working class, who value and reap the economic benefits of their growing societies, are badly deceived and largely ignorant? Something relevant to current beneficiaries of popular education in the current economic and political system is clearly missing and it requires discovery!

The vast amount of work that went into the book is a clear dedication to the field of radical adult education and it comes highly recommended. The more shrewd readers will overlook the book’s shortcomings. The substantiated claims drawn from critical pedagogy and experiential learning are the essential key ingredients to theorizing education in a radical perspective. This book is by no means an introduction to radical pedagogy. Instead, it is a vast amount of dedicated work aiming to adequately equip and make educators more cognizant of hidden complexities and often *misperceived* educators’ roles in the educational system. *Unfit to Be a Slave* is a highly accessible and easily understood literary work that makes a special contribution to new and seasoned educators’ understandings of complexities in the field of education. Better yet, it gives you the tools to rise up and “make your own history” (p. 149).

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