

based on the program complexity and intensity of collaboration. This leads well into the last chapter that addresses the dynamics of collaboration and program planning. References to related literature are provided in conjunction with some principles for conceptualizing collaborative programming, a few of which have been mentioned in earlier chapters. In so doing, the concluding section provided a logical closure to the central theme of the book.

If one is not overly concerned about logical flow of ideas, nor the conventional format of merging empirical evidence with conceptual framework, this book certainly serves some useful purposes of identifying some key features critical for the success or failure of collaboration among organizations. It can be used as a source reference for practitioners interested in undertaking collaborative ventures. It can also be used by researchers as a hypothetical framework for more empirical verification or modification.



Collins, Michael. (1998). *Critical Crosscurrents in Education*. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, Pp. 201.

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We need to understand critical pedagogy in a way that will yield sensible strategies for everyday practice. (p. x)

One of the original hopes of critically minded educators is that critical theory would move out of the universities into the practices of everyday life. As the quote from Michael Collins at the top suggests, this is his aim in offering this text on “critical crosscurrents.”

In the introduction to his book, Michael Collins blames the inaccessibility and obscurity of academic writing in critical theory as a significant stumbling block to realizing critical practice in educational sites. He wants to provide a more accessible reading and explication of the major “crosscurrents” in critical theory and pedagogy so that “busy schoolteachers, adult educators, teachers in training, community-based educators, public service workers who see their work as educational” (p. 10) may develop the ability to practice critical pedagogy.

To the extent that Collins provides a readable overview and critique of some of the major strands of critical theory in education within the context of current social, political, and economic difficulties and challenges, the book may be considered a useful resource. However, to the extent that Collins does not achieve, at least in my reading of his text, a satisfactory discussion of possible “sensible strategies for everyday practice,” undermines the book’s laudable intentions.

While he does identify urgent and relevant educational concerns, such as the deskilling of teachers’ work, and the assault on public education, Collins’ discussion remains at a rather abstract level in terms of suggesting strategies for practice. However, rather than a failure of intent on his part, I would argue that in his desire to make critical theory more accessible to non-academics, Collins has not been critical enough of important theoretical issues within critical educational theory. Indeed, a major shortcoming of the book, despite its usefulness as an overview of the field of critical educational theory, is that it fails to deal adequately with the issues that may be stumbling blocks to the development of critical practice.

In a way, reading this book was an experience of recollection for me. Collins identifies the major themes and issues in education from several strands within the broad theoretical field of critical theory. In doing so, he recalls a kind of journey many of us experienced, as we moved from the heady and utopian hopes of 60s radicalism to a more sober, if not entirely skeptical or perhaps even cynical, relationship with the aims of emancipatory education. Such skepticism is evident, for instance, in some “postmodern” educational theory circles, something that Collins deplors, although his reference to postmodernism, and the effect that it has on theory is too dismissive, and misrepresents the intent of at least some postmodern theorizing. This is a point I will briefly return to in concluding the review.

Collins’ discussion does encourage a re-evaluation of critical educational theory as it has evolved particularly since the 1960s. Especially in terms of problematizing the relationship between school and society in terms of current social and economic conditions, it is to Collins’ credit that he attempts to posit a more complex relationship than, say for example, the reproduction theories of earlier critical theory. Recognizing the complex and ambiguous relationship between schooling and society, and accepting the Habermasian critique of the “colonization of the lifeworld”

by an instrumental, and increasingly business rationality which constrains emancipatory possibilities, Collins nonetheless expresses genuine hope for developing a critical practice in educational institutions.

For example, through his re-evaluation of Ivan Illich's "de-schooling" thesis, Collins makes the argument for defending public institutions of education counter to neo-liberal/conservative attacks. Collins begins his discussion about Illich as a way of building his argument that critical practice has to occur in the context of existing institutions, not in their demolition. He correctly points out that the de-schooling thesis has actually played into the new rights' attack on public education, and has become a rationale for home schooling and charter schools. Thus beginning with a criticism of de-schooling as a critical and emancipatory strategy, Collins clearly signals that the terrain of critical practice is existing public institutions of education, and one of the tasks of critical educators is to defend and improve them. From that perspective his argument is a timely one, given the erosion of support for public education, for instance, and the decline of public funding for postsecondary educational institutions.

However, in his "dimensions of critical pedagogy" Collins does not inquire sufficiently into issues that are central to the possibilities for "critical pedagogical practice." Such issues include the relationship between theory and practice, the question of participation and collaboration, the nature of institutional restraints, and the question of subjectivity and agency. Further, although the historical review of various strands of critical education theory is informative, the discussion lacks a coherent and consistent view of what constitutes an appropriate critical theory for education. As well, I would take issue to some extent with Collins' critique of the language of critical theory, and whether or not it is possible to achieve greater transparency of understanding through simplifying ideas.

Given the restraints of a review, I will focus on one major issue, that of practice, which is pivotal to questions of transformation. Although Collins explicitly wants to address practice, he has not sufficiently addressed the question of how we may *understand* practice. In the book, practice is identified as the work of practising educators, while various critical theories come from without, so to speak. Thus, there is still a tendency to see theory and practice as a binary opposition. Despite the effort to make the language of critical theory more accessible, the overall message of the book tends to be framed in the language of theory *into*

practice. While reference is made to Habermas' critique of instrumental rationality, Collins does not inquire further into the nature of modern professional practice. Donald Schon and Hans-Georg Gadamer, for instance, have both argued that modern practice has been devalued as an application of theory and technique. Especially in the case of professional practice, such as the work of teaching, a richer view of practice is one that sees it as an embodied form of practical judgement, hence incorporating theory in a lived way.

A criticism that can be made, then, of Collins' view of practice is that he neglects to take up the question of the knowledge implicit in good practice, and by extension what constitutes good practice. While he does focus on work as the primary site of understanding for practitioners' critical understanding, and makes a helpful distinction between employment, and meaningful, purposive work, he does not attend sufficiently to developing critically reflective dispositions in relation to work. It is the way that work is experienced and understood, from a phenomenological perspective, for example, that provides the possibilities for further understanding. In reducing human endeavours to work, admittedly the reality for most of us, carries the danger of reductionism. Here Hannah Arendt's distinctions among *labor, work and action* may be helpful: the notion of action carries with it not only work, but also how that is lived, experienced, and indeed theorized. And as Arendt argues, to understand action, which has both symbolic and embodied qualities, a narrative form is required for its understanding.

Collins' rather narrow, and at the same time bifurcated view of theory and practice is most evident in his brief discussion about teacher education. Here he discusses the responsibility for colleges of education "prepare students for the world of work" (p. 107), meaning teaching and learning as it is actually experienced in classrooms and schools. He argues, much as we know our students do, that teacher education programs in university see practica and internships "as peripheral to their main academic interests" (p. 107). However such a view gives in to a hardened distinction between theory and practice, and moreover views professional learning simply as non-theorized practice, something that has been extensively criticized in the teacher education literature in recent years. While there is a valid critique to be made of professional teacher education, it revolves precisely around the question of what

should constitute good practice, something that cannot be raised to awareness simply through more practice in schools, as Collins suggests.

Perhaps part of the problem is Collins' too hasty dismissal of postmodern thinking. While I agree with his worry about the absence of grounding emancipatory goals, and postmodern's impulse to skepticism, if not cynicism, about progressive "metanarratives", there is a positive side to the postmodern critique, on at least a couple of levels. In his *Cosmopolis. The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (University of Chicago Press, 1990), Stephen Toulmin maintains that we are moving away from the modernist conception of the primacy of theory and a concern for establishing universal, decontextualized rules for moral and political action. Instead, he points "to a renewed acceptance of practice, which requires us to *adapt* action to the special demands of particular situations" (192; italics in original).

It's arguable whether this is a particularly postmodern view or not. But in its skepticism about theory *apart* from practice, some postmodern thinking has spurred a renewed interest in the Aristotelean notion of practice as phronesis — or practical wisdom — which requires the practitioner to develop an attunement between broader, ethical and political knowledge and goals, and the demands of particular situations. Such a view of practice, which entails the nurturing of interpretative dispositions, also requires putting into question the "who" of action and practice, as Paul Ricoeur, for instance, has suggested. Without such questions of agency, and without the ability to engage interpretatively within sites of practice, critical theory by itself will remain perhaps helpful in utopian terms, as Ricoeur has suggested about critical theory, but wanting in terms of transforming practice.

It is to Michael Collins' credit that his book raises these important kinds of questions. In his hope to foster life-long learning in a critical engagement with public institutions of learning, I hope he will also take Toulmin's advice to take seriously a renewed interest in a much more human deeper sense of what constitutes practice.

