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Book review: Community education, learning and development

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Community education, learning and development by Lynn Tett published in the Dunedin Series 'Policy & Practice in Education' which reflects on contemporary policy, practice and some aspects of Scottish education.

In the seven chapters which follow the Acknowledgments (p. viii) and Introduction (p. ix) Tett paints a picture of shifting territory and introduces the most important current dimensions of community progress. Her study focuses mainly on the Scottish experience in community education and development, but it can be used for comparative studies by making analogies, looking for differences based on Tett's ideas. Tett explains the overall aim of the book is to analyze the conceptual, policy and political ideas underpinning community education as well as the varieties of practice in which community educators are engaged (p. ix).

The author discusses the dilemas: the boundaries that the definition of 'community' can construct when it is seen as only comprising of people living in a particular geographical area; community education, its development which is much influenced by changing educational priorities on a local, national and global level.

The contents are organized in a way which invites us both to look back at the historical tradition and at the same time to examine the present and speculate about the future of community education. The first chapter deals with *Community education: Antecedents and meanings* (p. 1-15) and it is followed by *Community education in Scotland* (p. 16-33). In chapter three (p. 34-50) there is a critical analysis of the conceptualization of *Lifelong learning and community education* and then *Learning, knowledge and development, the key theme of Chapter four (*p. 51-68). The fifth chapter by Ian Fyfe, *Young people in and community engagement* (p. 69-85) turns our attention to active citizenship, the participation of young people in the communities. In the sixth chapter *Community education, risk and education of desire* (p. 86-99) Tett directs the reader's mind into the future. The final chapter *Community education, democracy and equality* (p. 100-107), expresses a strong wish for, as well as a vision of a 'more democratically just society' (p. 107).

I am now going to examine shortly the ideas and the empirical materials used by the authors to support their arguments in the discussion.

In the first chapter *Community education: Antecedents and meanings*, Tett builds a bridge between the past and the present interpretations of community education by introducing two traditions that started at the beginning of nineteenth century. When Tett explores the antecedents of community education in Scotland she mentions the organizations which used to involve both young people and adults in community educational activities; amongst these organisations were the Young Men's Christian

Association (YMCA) founded in 1844. In London by George Williams, the National Organisation of Girls Clubs, the Boy's Brigade, the Scouts and Guides, the Woodcraft Folk, the Cooperative Youth Movement, the Young Socialists and the Socialist Sunday Schools. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to the exploration of the variety of ways in which 'community' has been understood and interpreted. According to Apple, Tett argues that 'the best way to understand what any set of institutions, policies and practices does is to see it from the standpoint of those who have the least power' (p. 15 after Apple, 2006, p. 229).

In *Community education in Scotland*, Tett argues that both traditions described in the first chapter are still present in policy and practice today (p. ix). She explains the role of the national program Working and Learning to Build Stronger Communities (WALT) that defined new national priorities. The results of the national program of Community Learning and Development (CLD) have been described more detailed.

The revision of different conceptualization of the Lifelong Learning idea is presented in chapter three, where Tett argues that Lifelong Learning becomes a double edged sword. She reveals the ambiguity of some official documents and compares two of them; One is Faure's (1972) text where lifelong learning is seen as an inherent aspect of democratic life as well as important for personal growth. However, thirty years later in EU Commission paper (p. 34 after Van der Pass, 2001, p. 12) 'it is seen, as about the formation of human capital and as an investment in economic development' (ibid). These policies have four main faults: 1) 'education and training are commodities in the market' (p. 44); 2) 'economic success equals eradication of deprivation and exclusion'; 3) 'failure is the fault of the individual' (p. 47); 4) 'access to education is fair' (p. 48). Tett concludes that a number of paradoxes are hidden in the policies of Lifelong Learning, but these paradoxes can create spaces for challenges and alternative actions (p. 50).

Learning, knowledge and development (chapter 4) the reader is presented with two examples from practice – one focuses on family literacy and the second on health education. The aim is to illustrate how people can be excluded from participation in the decision-making processes and how they might take action against these excluding practices (p. 52). The chapter finishes with some ideas about the alternative discourse of learning, knowledge and development. Tett supports Martin's standpoint that 'community educators claim to work with people – not for them' (ibid, after Martin 1987, p. 17).

Chapter five by Ian Fyfe *Young people and community engagement* is about working with young people, who he describes as a 'vehicle for the development of the knowledge' (p. 85). Fyfe underlines the gap between the practical dimension of young people in public and the declarative level, which is visible in policy objectives. In the following part of the chapter the reader will find some data analysis, as the typologies of youth in contemporary Policy, young people 'at risk' or viewed 'as trouble' in the community as well as young people as 'active citizens' together with their 'work and community engagement' (p. 77). The chapter finishes with a description of the workings of the West Lothian Youth Participation Network, whose aim has been engagement through collaboration. Finally Fyfe concludes 'Youth policy is designed in response to a range of conceptions of young people, and as a result has an ambition and responsibility for their reconstruction' (p. 85).

The most interesting part of the fifth chapter is the deconstruction of the often hidden potential of youth, which the author calls a 'stimulating arena' for young people to learn informally and exercise their role as citizens through community participation and engagement and ensure their 'great promise' is realized (ibid).

In chapter six *Community education, risk and the education of desire* (p. 86) the focus shifts from acquired knowledge and engagement into risk capacity, developing citizenship and desires for future education. Community educators can find support for working in partnership, building community capacity and promoting active citizenship in policy areas. Their role is 'making sure that the complexities of the intellectual, emotional, practical, pleasurable and political possibilities of learning are not reduced to the apparent simplicity of targets, standards and skills' (p. 98 after Thompson, 2000).

One of the most important things is working not only with active groups, but building collaboration with subordinated and marginalized people, which Tett analyses in the last chapter of her book (p. 99).

She points out the important transitions passed by the Scottish Parliament since 1999, for 'democratic renewal' which also tries to be compatible with Scottish generalist tradition. Tett introduces some basic 'curriculum' and emphasis long term goals such as increasing individual and collective self-confidence, developing people's critical awareness, helping people to recognize their capacity to learn and to generate new knowledge etc. (p. 104).

One of the final conclusions of the book is a very optimistic claim that 'rather than seeking to minimize risk, community educators should be 'educating desire' through challenging and supporting marginalized people, allowing them to define and solve their problems for themselves' (p. 107).

I must mention Tett's dedication which she addresses to her close relatives but what is the most poignant and moving is her gratitude not only to her parents but to their generation for 'all the sacrifices they made to support' Lyn's generation (p. V). Similarly she addresses the dedication to her own grandchildren and she hopes 'that they will be able to experience a more socially just world' (p. 107).

In my opinion, the dedication perfectly illustrates Lyn's concept of community education, learning and development within the individual and collective life. She describes the development of community as a 'relay race' in which we consciously take from our predecessors and look forward to our descendants having a better understanding of 'both self and society that leads on to a more equitable life for everyone' (p. 107).

The most important value of the book by Tett is her questioning not only of Scottish social and educational practices but the questions she leaves the reader to ponder on long after the last page has been turned.

PS. I want to express my gratitude to Agnes Kerrigan for reviewing this text.

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