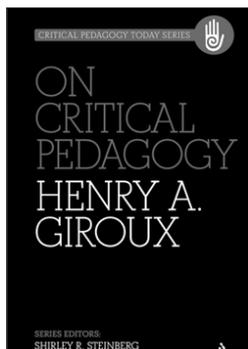


## Book Reviews



Giroux, Henry A. (2011), *On Critical Pedagogy*. New York: Continuum. (186 Pages)

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*Reviewed by Parul Batra*

Henry Giroux is the Global TV Network Chair in English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University, Canada. His publications, spanning over three decades, vouch for his important contribution in the field of critical pedagogy, cultural studies, influence of media on the youth, among others. This collection of Giroux's essays (2011) is a complex and important contribution in the field of education. Through his essays, Giroux raises questions on the traditional pedagogical system that relies on memorizing tasks for tests and rote learning. He suggests that since the 1980s, the right-wing conservative educational theorists have attempted to contain the influence of teachers by reducing the educational system to an establishment that promotes "unthinking", "anti-intellectual" and "outcome-based" practices, in which the educators and students remain mere stakeholders. In fact, by charting the detrimental effect of neo-liberalism on educational technologies, Giroux fixes the significant role of education in democracy. He emphasizes how the free ideas of neo-liberals that address social issues, are in fact more harmful. Giroux's assessment pivots on the theory that for a democracy to thrive, education must be central to it, and must also provide stimulus for critical engagement and debates. Apart from some fairly significant takeaways from the book, the main issue that gets highlighted is the sense of immediateness and urgency in wresting education from the immutable clutches of neo-liberalism.

Over five sections, Giroux moves from discussing the immediate need for critical pedagogy in what he calls "dark times", to suggesting techniques of rethinking education as sites of struggle and political resistance against the status quo. Giroux says, "As a form of provocation and challenge, critical pedagogy attempts to take young people beyond the world they are familiar with and makes clear how classroom knowledge, values, desires, and social relations are always implicated in power" (p. 6). The book urges the reader to participate in altering the hegemonic regime of a civic culture of anti-intellectual, banal education policies

and practices such as statistical marking or grading system and punishments, etc.

In observing the education-culture-power triad, Giroux turns to Harold Entwistle and E.D. Hirsch, who in turn look at the work of Antonio Gramsci. While Entwistle and Hirsch look to Gramsci to derive that students must be endowed with skills as part of education, Giroux looks further and concludes that Gramsci's intellectual theories actually support critical pedagogy. According to Gramsci, pedagogy cannot be understood outside of power politics, and it is here that Giroux states that culture and pedagogy may not be seen as independent of politics, but actively engaging with it.

In subsequent sections, Giroux refers to seminal figures of critical thought on education and pedagogy such as Paulo Freire, Adorno, Horkheimer and Habermas, among others. In the modern/postmodern world, Giroux highlights the significance of education as a form of political intervention that creates the possibilities of debate, and consequently, self-definition and agency. He is also quick to alert the reader to the inherent flaw in this promise of bringing about democratic critical intervention—it prevents students from seeing how pre-existent systems may be better suited to adapt to the “promise of radical democracy”. Calling this idea utopian, Giroux underlines that there is a need to see the role of critical pedagogy as one that provokes deliberation, resistance and cultivation of capacities beyond knowledge, among the students. This, he seems to suggest, can only be culled from a rigorous deskilling.

Giroux claims that in order to hand over critical pedagogy to the youth of the twenty-first century, higher education must be seen as more than just an investment opportunity where the educators are mere technicians, and the classrooms, uninspired spaces for rigour and unquestioning suffering. Students must be encouraged to question the institutions, policies, and values in the world by intellectually stimulating the educators with the simple motive that academia must recognize the impact that students will have on a generation of young people twice removed from the university.

It is this foresight and attentiveness that fills the reader of this book with inspiration to critically engage with the hegemonic discourse, question, derail it, and create a new language of critique and possibility. I would recommend this book as an essential read for all educators so that they can deeply imbibe the sense of urgency in debunking the controlling regime in order to create space for a radical democracy.

*Parul Batra* is Assistant Professor at Motilal Nehru College (Evening), University of Delhi. Her areas of interest include Victorian novels and Women's writing.

*parulbatra.in@gmail.com*