DANGEROUS TERRITORIES: STRUGGLES FOR DIFFERENCE AND EQUALITY IN EDUCATION


by Sheila Cavanagh

Dangerous Territories: Struggles for Difference and Equality in Education is an exciting piece of work. The editors (Roman and Eyre) tell us that the idea for the book emerged from a panel presentation, at the 1992 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. At this meeting, questions were asked about the “limits and possibilities of meeting, exclusionary framing of the agendas of the latter. As a result, what gets ignored “on the ground” are the many diverse communities of Leftist and feminist practice that, in the search for social justice, articulate different versions of equality and radical difference.

Following this more critical discussion of backlash comes a broad range of interdisciplinary work in the areas of feminist, anti-racist, postcolonial, gay/lesbian/bisexual and queer studies. What unites the contributions to this volume is an uncompromising belief in the radical, subversive, democratic, and/or queer potentialities of education. As Roman and Eyre explain, the contributors to this volume are “informed by their respective disciplines but not imprisoned by them.”

What I like about this book is that it is not constrained by one theoretical orientation or model of education. As mentioned, it captures the exciting developments in progressive education and sets the stage for important debates—one of which is about the utility of the term backlash. The essays attend to questions of power, identification, and social difference in a vast array of educational sites. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in critical pedagogy and democratic education.

The only real critique I have of the book is that it provides an account of progressive education only from the position of teacher. Chandra Talpade Mohanty explains, in the preface, that feminist educators are responsible for the “creation of truly democratic public spaces where people of all races, classes, genders, and sexualities are authorized to act as citizens—to understand, organize, and demand justice and equity.” How does this sentiment apply to the student of our radical and democratic classroom? As Roman and Eyre note in the introduction, it is often the case that we collude in the Right-wing agendas against which we define ourselves. It seems to me that the critical student is well positioned to comment on the contradictions of activist work in the university because she is often subject to the incongruity of our rhetoric and practice. If we are wanting to tread on “dangerous territory” it will be necessary to subject our own pedagogical explorations to the comment of progressive students. This has yet to be done!

KNOWING WOMEN: ORIGINS OF WOMEN’S EDUCATION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AUSTRALIA


by Susan Archer

When I read the title of this book, I was immediately intrigued. As a history buff with a particular interest in the Victorian era, I jumped at the chance to learn more about Australian women of the same time period. Approaching this book as a naïve reader, I hoped to fill in some of my