

Book Reviews

DANGEROUS TERRITORIES: STRUGGLES FOR DIFFERENCE AND EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

Leslie G. Roman and Linda Eyre, eds. New York: Routledge, 1997.

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 emerges 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 'anti-oppression' pedagogies" in the context of higher education. It was suggested that progressive educators have been confronted by a Right-wing "backlash." This backlash was perceived to be a threat to progressive education. The book is meant as a follow-up to this discussion and attends to the important questions facing progressive educators in the university today.

The concept of backlash is central to the organization of the book. Roman and Eyre say that they have been forced to adopt a more critical understanding of the concept as it became clear to them that they had originally

accepted rather unproblematically the transhistorical and binary oppositional framing of such terms as backlash/progressive, Right/Left, and so on, allowing them to function as "keywords"—words that legitimated some radical social change struggles for equality and delegiti-

mated others battling within them.

It is also suggested that the conceptualization of backlash, informed by the work of Susan Faludi, obscures the more complex divisions and crossovers between the Left and Right. Roman and Eyre explain that the

term backlash elide[s] the diverse constituencies of and divisions between Left and Right, focusing almost exclusively on the elaboration 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

Marjorie Theobald. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

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