

Reviews / Comptes rendus

Promises of Freedom: Citizenship, Belonging and Lifelong Learning

by R. H. Fryer

(England & Wales: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, 2010, 271 pages)

There are two possible introductory sentences for a review of *Promises of Freedom: Citizenship, Belonging and Lifelong Learning*. One is succinct: *Promises of Freedom* explores a policy framework for contemporary citizenship. The other is circuitous: *Promises of Freedom* dives into the Möbius strip of citizenship, belonging and identity, social cohesion, democracy, globalization, civic renewal, emancipation, and adult and lifelong learning to isolate principles of lifelong learning worthy of a national dialogue as a foundational step in the policy-making of states and other parties to promote active and critical citizenship. The first sentence is short and succinct, and makes the focus of *Promises of Freedom* seem clear. The second sentence is very dense and assumes the reader can hold a multi-layered subject in mind while a nuanced and qualified predicate is carefully and slowly rolled out. It is also a much more revealing representation of *Promises of Freedom's* style and tenor.

The scope of *Promises of Freedom* is laudable and ambitious—policy on adult and lifelong learning for the formation of citizens in an inclusive, pluralistic, reflexive, and active democracy. This ambition is so sweeping that only innocents and idealists would attempt it. Fryer is anything but an innocent; fortunately, he is a thoughtful idealist who brings sagacity, deep experience, and verve to a very difficult task. *Promises of Freedom* is an insightful, wide-ranging, nuanced, and inspiring guidebook to adult education with a social purpose.

Promises of Freedom has three components. The first is a review of common, central, and highly contested concepts in the literature on engaged critical citizenship and belonging. The second component is an assessment of the potential within critical lifelong learning to advance radical citizenship. The third part is an articulation of principles to inform policy development on lifelong learning to generate engaged critical citizenship. The first is brilliantly accomplished; the second, valiant in its attempt to locate the gelatin in the jelly of lifelong learning that could “set” radical citizenship; and, the third, familiar material for adult educators who took the critical turn in adult education.

Even for seasoned and scholastic adult educators, the review of concepts underpinning citizenship and belonging is reason enough to buy the book. Fryer provides an unparalleled, trans-disciplinary appraisal of key concepts, carefully noting multiple meanings that seem subtle

but that are highly differentiated in their implications for implementation. Think of the slipperiness of community, social cohesion, diversity, critical thinking, autonomy, civil society, reflection, democracy, difference, social movements, liberalism, and universalism. Then consider how few career academics would dare step outside their disciplinary boundaries to review these together in one essay. Most importantly, Fryer works through these chameleonic concepts to pinpoint variants that serve citizenship when the critical intent, or context, is made transparent. In *Promises of Freedom*, the context is radical citizenship for this fluid contemporary time.

Fryer does not trash any interpretation of these concepts by pedantic means, but discriminates among them through the pragmatic lens of impact and effect in planning or policy (that is, utility for practice or application). For Canadian adult educators, his selection of belonging and identity as a foundational concept in substantive democracy and critical citizenship—instead of multiculturalism—is especially refreshing and illuminating. He concludes that constructive policy on learning (from the state or any influential body) will not happen unless the political meaning of freedom, liberation, and emancipation is exposed and made explicit.

Since Fryer is adamant that richness in learning for critical citizenship is grounded in context and particulars, readers should note that *Promises of Freedom* is a British publication. It expands on a submission Fryer made to a 2009 Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning in the United Kingdom, an inquiry commissioned by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE). Generally speaking, NIACE is the UK version of the now-defunct Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE). The original submission was enriched and shaped by Fryer's close collaboration with British education scholars already known in critical Canadian adult education literature (John Field and Raymond Williams, to name just two) as well as similarly-inclined scholars from Australia (Griff Foley), the United States (Stephen Brookfield and Henry Giroux), and Canada (Will Kymlicka and Michael Welton). Therefore, with only a few exceptions, the "British-ism" presents few intercultural challenges for Canadian readers. Indeed, some—unusual words like "instantiate"—are bonbons.

In summary, *Promises of Freedom* is an erudite repudiation of the proliferating variant of lifelong and adult education dedicated to the production of human capital in the service of a global economic imperative. Accordingly, this monograph is invaluable for university continuing educators who conceptualize their practice as one strand among many in the panoply of lifelong learning/education when the latter is understood as life-wide, socially progressive, and for substantive democracy. University continuing educators who see professional development as occupying the full bandwidth of lifelong learning will likely experience *Promises of Freedom* as a slow and complex, although potentially revelatory, read.

Robert Fryer has been the UK chair of the Campaign for Learning, Chief Learning Advisor to the UK Department of Health, National Director for Widening Participation in Learning, founding Chief Executive for the Northern College for Residential Adult Education in South Yorkshire, Assistant Vice-Chancellor of University of Southampton, and Chair of the UK government's National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning.

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