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Introducing Critical Pedagogies, Deepening Service-Learning Practices

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A Review of:

Critical perspectives on service-learning in higher education

By Susan J. Deeley. London, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015

Critical Perspectives on Service-Learning in Higher Education walks readers through service-learning from theory to praxis, offering an overview that proves useful for novice and seasoned practitioners alike. The book offers theory on critical pedagogies, service-learning, and critical reflection; it also provides recommended methods for reflection, writing, and assessment. Susan J. Deeley sought to create a service-learning resource for students that introduces the critical theory she believes is necessary for students to truly understand and engage with service-learning work. Deeley also noticed that the service-learning literature depends heavily on research and theory from the United States, and intended to supplement her perspective from within the University of Glasgow in Scotland. Having participated in service-learning herself while introducing the pedagogy into the mainstream of her home institution, Deeley draws upon her experience as a service-learning participant, teacher, and researcher.

Rather than a “how to,” Deeley integrates service-learning theory with empirical and anecdotal example for an “in-depth and critical perspective of service-learning.” The book moves from the theoretical to the practical, offering summary but comprehensive descriptions of service-learning as a critical pedagogy. Importantly, whereas much service-learning literature takes its pedagogical nature for granted, “Critical Perspectives” dedicates significant time and space to the pedagogical theory underlying service-learning all the while remaining accessible to those without a background in educational theory. And unlike many other theoretical explorations, “Critical Perspectives” does not dwell too long on the theoretical, moving towards practical considerations with chapters on critical reflection, academic writing, and assessment.

Chapter 5: Critical Reflection lies at the heart of the book, serving as an artful segue from sections on critical theory and pedagogy as the book move towards applications. In this section, Deeley offers evidence of the importance of critical reflection and providing guidance on how to structure and facilitate effective reflections. The chapter further elucidates key themes and processes within critical reflection, including important concepts of change, discomfort, and meaning-making. Concluding with suggested methods and practices, the next chapter seamlessly transitions into an exploration of academic writing within service-learning.

Though Deeley argues that this book is for students to contextualize and enhance their service-learning experiences, it may be better suited to faculty and administrators looking to start or build service-learning courses and programs. Those teaching service-learning oriented courses would benefit from the wealth of literature Deeley includes in her brief but comprehensive summaries, making for rich chapters that will be useful for theoreticians and practitioners. This book will provide grounding for those teaching or considering integrating service-learning in to their courses.

References

Deeley, S. (2015). *Critical perspectives on service-learning in higher education*. London, England: Palgrave Macmillan.