

Book Reviews

LOOKING INTO EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

After-education: Anna Freud, Melanie Klein, and psychoanalytic histories of learning. Deborah P. Britzman, 2003, New York: State University of New York Press; ISBN 0 7914 5674 9, 214 pp., £15.75.

‘What is education that it should give us trouble?’ This is the question that this book revolves around, tracing differences in the ways psychoanalysis and particularly Anna Freud’s and Melanie Klein’s work has dealt with the problematics emerging in its discussion. Such differences have been discussed previously; however, what Britzman’s contribution offers is a proposition for a synthesis of these differences or rather for making connections between them. In the context of this debate, psychoanalysis and education have been perceived as either incompatible fields to be kept apart, or as overlapping areas, influencing, supporting and even undermining each other. In charting the map of the Freud–Klein controversies, Britzman articulates her own questions: ‘where does education come from?’ and ‘does it work to repair its own harm?’ To speak of reparation, however, something must have been broken first: ‘this something which breaks’ is the trouble of education, Britzman argues, further noting that ‘perhaps that something, its fragments of historical truth and its kernel of madness, is what make education, for both children and adults, so difficult, so subject to aggression, and yet always promising for reparation’ (p. 69). Britzman further reflects on the issues of conflict and anxiety, contextualizing them in her own work of introducing Anna Freud’s ‘Four lectures on psychoanalysis for teachers and parents’ to the undergraduate students of her teacher education course. In looking into this experience, what Britzman values more from Anna Freud seems to be the latter’s strategy of respecting the anxiety that ideas can arouse. She discusses a wide range of questions her students have raised for Anna Freud and indeed for herself and in commenting on the richness but also harshness of these questions, she poses a difficult pedagogical question: ‘what does it mean to meet the autonomy of the other without trying to shape it?’ (p. 81).

This question of autonomy is further developed in Britzman’s consideration of how group psychology can possibly become a kind of after-education in terms of perceiving autonomy as relational and of becoming reflective of the ways human beings influence each other. Britzman’s fourth chapter on group psychology offers illuminating insights into the importance of emotional ties and individual/group

interactions. Issues around conflict also come into the discussion of this chapter; they are, however, further elaborated in Chapter 5, where Britzman considers the interrelation of phantasy and theory, looking in particular at destruction and reparation. Drawing on both Klein's and Sedwick's work, Britzman examines unsettling questions around anxiety, learning, aggressiveness, curiosity, creativity and theories we never 'step foot in', to ultimately address the question: 'why do we have theory at all?' (p. 134). Loneliness is the last theme of the book and Britzman draws here on Klein's essay 'On the sense of loneliness' and Sedwick's self-analysis deployed in the 'Dialogue on love'. Loneliness is indeed the theme where the Freud–Klein controversies find a point of convergence, since in the work of both analysts, loneliness was thought of as an analogy relating phantasy to reality. In Britzman's conceptualization, revisiting loneliness in their work is a process of bringing together 'the psychoanalytic archive from which we can construct histories of learning after the experience of education' (p. 156).

I found myself being drifted away while reading this book and while I had a sense of not everything being coherent in the way the six chapters connect to each other, there was something of the pleasure of roaming the incoherent, a transitional space formed between 'what we can learn from the book' and what is pleasurable about it, albeit difficult to be identified as strictly educational or educative. Something, I suppose, of the taste of the elusiveness of after-education.

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CLASS BACK ON THE MAP

Class, self, culture. Beverley Skeggs, 2004. London: Routledge; ISBN 0 415 30085 1, 215 pp. £19.99.

Not much has been written recently about class. It appears to be a topic that has been missing from the research agenda over the past few years. This book successfully redresses the gap and, it claims, 'puts class back on the map'. Skeggs theorizes and explores the possible conditions associated with the concept of class. She sets out to show how class is constructed and given value through different cultures and categories and the many ways that culture is distributed and deployed as a resource and form of property.