

Rather than removing computers from schools, those wishing to resist corporate influence on education might find more challenging ways to mobilize technology to facilitate that resistance. Robertson is correct in her observation that technology sets the stage for action, but this need not limit the forms of action that may be subsequently undertaken. Although cultural tools such as technology may set the scene within which human action will occur, even the most complete account of these cultural tools and the forces of production that give rise to them cannot ultimately determine their use. Indeed, computer technology fosters communication between teachers and students sharing concerns over environmental issues, corporate involvement in education, dismantling of social programs, and a range of other urgent educational and social issues. Rather than resisting technology in a Luddite fashion, a program that in spite of Robertson's romanticized account was largely unsuccessful, we may be able to appropriate the technological tools of corporate oppression, and employ them to promote the intellectual and vocational emancipation of teachers and students.

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Stromquist, N. (1997). *Literacy for Citizenship: Gender and Grassroots Dynamics in Brazil*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 248 pages.

*Literacy for Citizenship* by Nelly Stromquist documents the Movimento de Alfabetização de Jovens e Adultos (MOVA), a literacy movement that took place in São Paulo, Brazil between 1989 and 1993. The aim was to discover how the particular needs and conditions of women's lives are addressed in this literacy program, and if and how an emancipatory literacy program benefits women. The lives and the experiences of the women were the central concern of the study. The MOVA movement was

initiated as a result of the São Paulo mayoral election of Luiza Erundina of the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, or PT), and the ensuing appointment of Paulo Freire as secretary of education for the municipality. These circumstances permitted the enactment of a literacy movement that had some novel characteristics: substantial financial support of the mayor and the secretary of education for a radical program that would be openly critical of the status quo economic and political arrangements; the central role of grassroots organizations, who were responsible for the implementation of the literacy nuclei around the city; and the guidance and support of Paulo Freire, whose work on emancipatory and critical education was the primary inspiration and source for the pedagogical method.

Although the study aims to understand the experiences of the women participants in MOVA, its findings on the outcomes of emancipatory, political education are also important for their respective fields. An emancipatory education that is influenced by Paulo Freire's concept of *conscientização* is overtly political in nature, rather than individualistic, and premises that the creation of a critical consciousness – the understanding of the political, economic, and social contexts, and the relationships that perpetuate these contexts – will enable individuals to demand and practice their full citizenship rights by resisting oppressive elements. Thus conscientization leads to active citizenship, which in turn drives individuals to participate in the struggle to construct a better society.

It seems unquestionable that as marginalized populations are shown the light by popular educators, and they finally understand why their lives are constant struggles for basic necessities, that they should want to participate in the struggle for their own liberation. But Stromquist's findings indicate that this assumption is false, at least in most cases; in fact, she finds that literacy is used for multiple reasons to satisfy personal, emotional, and occupational needs, and that most of the women participants are uninterested in participating in or even talking about politics. In addition, many of the teachers in the nuclei neglected political content in their teaching or were insufficiently prepared to introduce political content. Thus there is an inconclusive and tenuous link between emancipatory education

and literacy skills, and the democratizing of Brazilian society. This finding is particularly interesting because of the great deal of publicity that is generated by the politically conservative opposition, in reaction to the supposedly subversive and radical claims made about emancipatory education.

Stromquist's research does not undermine the usefulness of political education but calls into question its effectiveness as a motivational force for political activism. It is important to recognize that in a context of popular participation, there is the risk of what W. Nylen calls "benevolent vanguardism" – the understanding that only a minority of people can be expected to participate in politics, particularly those populations that have been experienced extreme poverty and deprivation (Nylen, W., 1995, "The workers party in rural Brazil," *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 29, p. 32). The task then of political education is to give people the skills and knowledge necessary for political participation so that they may autonomously make the decision to participate or not, rather than having their choices circumscribed by social and economic conditions. Stromquist did not push her analysis of MOVA beyond a recognition of the multiple uses of literacy by individuals; she essentially noted that this was the case, and left it there. This may be appropriate for her study of MOVA, but it is insufficient for the study of political and citizenship education. She does not offer suggestions to improve political education, or ways that politics may be linked with their lives and needs. Her findings indicate that the obstacle of poverty to political participation is certainly formidable, if not intransigent.

Another instructive finding is on the political nature of educational reform. The MOVA literacy movement was opposed by the entrenched educational bureaucracy and by the municipal councilors, of whom 77% were not members of the PT, and were likely hostile to the PT. When the Partido Democratico Social (PDS) was elected in 1993, it acted quickly to eliminate MOVA precisely because of its political content. This type of political opposition is neither uncommon nor surprising; it is, however, important to an internal debate on whether the PT should pursue the grassroots approach, namely the strengthening of its social movement base, or the institutional approach, to achieve

influence through electoral politics. The findings here illustrate the weaknesses of attempting radical social change through electoral means in political institutions that contain embedded bureaucratic bodies. I think that these findings give credence to a pluralistic approach by the PT, in which neither path is pursued to the exclusion of the other. The PT's relationships with social movements, both more traditional ones such as labor unions and newer ones such as the *Movimento sem Terra* (MST), an agrarian reform movement, can be further developed.

Stromquist's research is very thorough and complete. In fact, it is quite difficult to make a substantial critique of her research. Particularly well done is her connection of the micro and macro issues related to the MOVA program. The micro issues include the practice of literacy instruction at the classroom level and from the perspective of the women's lives. These were done with interviews and observations over a three-year period. The macro issues include the social and political context, in which the grassroots groups and party intellectuals acted to create participatory political institutions. In the case of MOVA, the translation of an emancipatory ideology to sustained classroom practices was incongruent, and the teachers received little help beyond the initial impetus to begin the program and provide the material requirements, such as a classroom and minimal supplies. This too is not surprising when compared to the factors of failure for other educational reform programs. A common condition is the lack of funding and resources, felt most acutely by the teachers.

In conclusion, the cross-disciplinary nature of this book will make it particularly useful to students and researchers with a variety of interests. It is highly recommended reading for the areas of gender and education, political education, adult literacy, and state-civil society partnerships.

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