



## **Unfit to Be a Slave: A Guide to Adult Education for Liberation**

Greene, David  
Sense Publishers, 2015

Book Review

Tags: adult education | liberative pedagogy | problem-based learning

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David Greene's *Unfit to Be a Slave* sets out to address the role that education should play in society. His argument rests on the assumption that current educational opportunities are limiting or exploitive of adult working students. He says, "today, the corporations and financiers benefit from the ignorance and silence of the population. The less information and understanding people have, the more they can be misled and controlled" (71; this criticism is borne out in more detail in chapters 4 and 5). The current trend towards "job skills education" is elicited as a prime example of inadequate higher educational opportunities which serve the interests of corporations and not students. Greene argues that "the duty of an educator is to broaden the horizons of learning and challenge the limitations they [students] face" (53). Thus, for Greene, successful education arrives at the "maximal development of intellect, understanding, culture, and awareness of the world around us" (9). Further, effective education must aim to develop students as leaders, and empower them for success, rather than giving them only skills requisite for low-wage or menial employment.

In an effort to ameliorate these problems, Greene presents an outline of a pedagogical system built on Paulo Freire's idea of "problem posing education." This model starts with the dissolution of customary boundaries between teacher and student, recognizing that both students and teachers need to learn, and both can teach. Greene builds on this model, advocating that education ought to be focused on the collective development of a set of central literacies: functional literacy, civic or political literacy, health literacy, environmental literacy, and financial and economic literacy (22). Each of these literacies includes competencies for both individual and corporate ends, and Greene's argument posits they can be gained through what he calls "central tools," which are: listening, the recognition of pre-existing student

knowledge, discussions about real problems faced in daily life, and the advocacy and organization of specific actions to combat those problems (71-77). Greene also strongly suggests that education not be confined to the classroom. He contends that higher education must empower students to change society and he provides examples from his own teaching that underscore this need.

*Unfit to Be a Slave* does not contain any quick fix techniques to import into your classroom to move towards a more effective classroom experience, rather it presents an idea of education that is much broader and more holistic. Throughout the book Greene strives to promote a broad educational model that is directed not to the acquisition of job skills themselves, but to an increased ability of students to function well in society and to live well. The book focuses on the plight of adult workers, and takes particular pains to explain the oppressive economic and social factors working against the thriving of adults in the workforce. Personal politics aside, faculty are reminded that life exists outside of the ivory tower of academia, and that student experience informs their perspectives on theoretical matters, and can be marshaled as an asset to an effective learning experience for both the instructor of record and the students enrolled in the course.

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