

divergent views is to shift the theoretical platform from (structuralist) neo-Marxism to pluralism.

Our concern with this text is not with some of the points it makes. In fact, to keep the focus on the last chapter, we heartily agree that historians do need to engage with sociologists to help shape our collective understandings of educational change. And we fully support the argument that "left" educators need to be held accountable on their own terms. We also agree that the main way for historians to facilitate this in relation to recent change in New Zealand (and other western countries) is through a closer scrutiny of "the New Right." But where we depart from neo-liberal history is that we would urge historians to let go of (positivistic) illusions of purity and do this in theoretically informed ways.

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Daniel Murphy. *Tolstoy and Education.* Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1992. Pp. 292. \$39.95 U.S. cloth.

At a time when education in general and teachers in particular are experiencing economic downsizing and strident calls to redefine "the basics," it is a rare treat to read a well-written book about a committed, inspirational teacher. Daniel Murphy has provided us with exactly that in his *Tolstoy and Education*, a study in which he seeks "to fill a lacuna in Tolstoyan scholar-

ship" by providing a comprehensive assessment of the great novelist's life and work as an educator. Skillfully interweaving salient passages from the novels with specific educational writings, Murphy provides a rich, evocative account of a fascinating human being. Tolstoy emerges as one who truly sought to live his ideas and whose life and work, as a result, maintained a deep, unflinching integrity. Murphy clearly cares a great deal about his topic, and if at times the account appears remarkably uncritical, even hagiographic, the wealth of pedagogical wisdom stored in Tolstoy's educational writings soon convinces.

After a brief critical review of some recently published perspectives on Tolstoy's educational beliefs and activities, Murphy commences his study with an overview of education in Tsarist Russia. Then, as now, schools served as arenas in which the opposing principles of equalitarianism and entrenchment were played out. Entrenchment in this case favoured a style of pedagogy characterized by "mechanical instruction, learning through rote memorization, the stifling of individual creativity and strict, regimental styles of discipline."

It was against this background that Tolstoy evolved his essentially "aesthetic pedagogy." We are given a penetrating account of the pedagogical influences in his life and the artistic and religious philosophies that informed and permeated his educational ideals. One of the great strengths of Murphy's book is the rich potential it offers to diverse areas of educational thought. The notion of the teacher as

first and foremost a person is well drawn here.

Having provided a concise yet comprehensive sketch of the man and his time, Murphy proceeds to the main purpose of his study, a definition and elucidation of the ruling principles of Tolstoy's educational philosophy. Four thrusts are developed here: the basic principles of his pedagogy; his policies on aesthetic education and specifically on the teaching of reading and writing, art and music; his policies on moral and religious education; and finally, his views on social, community, and adult education. A chapter is devoted to each.

Because he espoused so deeply the importance of individual freedom in education—the vital recognition of the individuality of the learner—Tolstoy has sometimes been seen as cut from the same cloth as John Dewey and A.S. Neill. Reginald D. Archambault in his introduction to *Tolstoy on Education* (University of Chicago Press, 1967), for example, speaks of his “creating a pedagogy of extreme permissiveness.” And he concludes that Tolstoy justifiably could be seen as a “precursor of A.S. Neill who came to strikingly similar conclusions to Tolstoy's in his experiments at Summerhill.” Neither is it difficult to understand how such a view might arise. Art and artists long have been associated with a kind of wild, romantic freedom, so Tolstoy's educational ideas, emanating as they do from a great and renowned novelist, are easily cast in such a mold.

Views such as these, says Murphy, “not only misrepresent the ideals put forward by Tolstoy in his educational

writings but grossly distort the values and beliefs on which all of his work was founded.” In other words, they misunderstand “art.” Murphy explains how Tolstoy's artistic creed allowed him to embrace wholeheartedly both the values of individual freedom and tradition without, however, sacrificing one to the fulfilment of the other. The crucial importance of both of these notions in the learning experience is exemplified beautifully in the more detailed sections on Tolstoy's teaching of reading and writing, art, and music. His insistence on the right of access of every child to great literature is acknowledged, but so also is his equal insistence that the instructional process be rooted in what Paulo Freire a century later described as the “thematic universe” of the learner. Ideologues on either side of the phonics/whole language debate would do well to study Tolstoy's approach, which so tellingly does justice to both their central contentions. Modern educators, struggling with the incommensurable claims of conflicting pedagogic traditions, will also find much wisdom in Tolstoy's aesthetically based pedagogy. Finally, artists will be delighted to see at last the rigorous and exacting nature of their art forms aptly and eloquently acknowledged.

It is in the latter part of the book that we begin to appreciate that extraordinary sense of coherent purpose that permeated Tolstoy's life and work. Here he is depicted as an educator not just through his espousing the role of schoolmaster and educational reformer, but also through his conceiving the role of the artist as having a

distinct educational purpose—the revelation of truth, especially religious and moral truth. The potential of an aesthetically based pedagogy to speak to issues in religious education is skillfully drawn. And in the final chapters Tolstoy's social activism is explored, its ramifications for modern education delineated.

In summary, Murphy has written a very important book about a very important educator, one that is comprehensive, thoroughly researched, and perhaps most important, "a great read." It has something to offer to almost any area of educational thought.

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