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Book Review

Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning (Revised Ed.), by Henry A. Giroux, Bloomsbury Academic, 2025, 288 pp., $39.95, (ebook). ISBN 9781350458628

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"More, Faster"

Since the 1980s, Henry Giroux has been a leading critical voice in conversations surrounding education. His contributions have pointed out many of the issues faced by contemporary teachers and by education systems more broadly. As two scholars of education and former public-school teachers, we have often turned to Giroux for incisive analysis of the problems we've seen in our work. We, thus, saw the publication of the revised edition of *Teachers as Intellectuals* in early 2025 as an invitation to think through the current educational situation in our province—Nova Scotia, Canada—as well as the ways that situation is manifest globally.

Locally, that situation can be described in two words: "more, faster". While this phrase is most commonly associated with the Nova Scotia progressive conservative government's approach to health care (Gorman, 2023)—which has, among other things, featured a reduction in the length of some nursing programs—it has also been explicitly applied to education and the Premier's desire to reduce the entry requirements for Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programs from a four-year degree to two years of university study (Henderson, 2024). The "more, faster" approach to education has also seen shorter B.Ed. programs throughout the province, with some universities moving from 20 to 14 months, and others condensing the entire degree down to eight months (Ayers, 2024).

While the current conservative government might have put it most bluntly, "more, faster" has a long history in Nova Scotia. Indeed, as with many places globally, efficiency has been the order of the day since at least the 1970s (Rogers, 2018). Things have, however, ramped up recently. In one study, 77% of teachers surveyed stated that they felt emotionally exhausted by their work (Agyapong et al., 2024). The Nova Scotia Teacher's Union's 2024 survey stated that 84% of teachers had considered leaving teaching within the past 5 years; 76% gave the reason as burnout. In a recent qualitative study, several high-school teachers in Halifax, the capital city, noted that the big change came when their teaching load increased from six courses per year to seven, replacing valuable preparation time with more instruction time (Legge & Downey, 2025)—"More, faster" indeed. The push for efficiency seems to be exhausting those who are called on to make the slogan a reality.

"More, faster" isn't unique to Nova Scotia. Indeed, it is precisely a marker of the insidious influence of neoliberalism on education globally (Kumar, 2019). As such, it deserves a substantive critique from all corners of the wide and diverse field of education. In this brief review, we turn toward Giroux's recent edition of *Teachers as Intellectuals* to help us in that critique. We begin with a summary of the contents, then offer some thoughts on the text before highlighting the ways in which Giroux's arguments still precisely apply to our educational context and to many others globally.

Summary of Contents

The central thesis of Henry Giroux's *Teachers as Intellectuals* is that teachers must actively reclaim their role as transformative public intellectuals to resist the forces that reduce education to mere training for the labour market. To make this argument, Giroux begins by defining the notion of "technocratic rationality" as "…modes of reasoning, inquiry, and research … modeled on assumptions drawn from a model of science and social relations closely tied to the principles of prediction and control" (p. 12). Intimately related to this technocratic rationality are the language of efficiency and scientific management; all are frequently used in educational discourse, and Giroux contends that all mask a conservative ideology. The net effect is to separate knowledge from human meaning and position students as passive recipients of knowledge. Giroux critiques various curriculum traditions and philosophies for applying this technocratic mindset and proposes an alternative centered on non-authoritarian individualism, achieved through sharing power and fostering collaborative learning.

Giroux further develops his critique by connecting two major educational philosophies, behaviorism and humanism, to the same foundational problem. Behaviorism, a direct application of technocratic rationality, reduces learning to measurable outcomes. While humanism seems like a better alternative, it ultimately falls short on Giroux's view because it ignores the sociopolitical context of schooling.

In response to these systemic restraints on embracing the teacher's role as an intellectual, the second section begins by suggesting literacy, writing, and voice as critical tools for social transformation. These tools enable students and teachers to move beyond simply consuming knowledge and toward using it to critically engage with and change the world. Literacy is about more than reading and writing in a technical sense—it involves understanding how different forms of knowledge are shaped by power and connected with class, race, and gender. For Giroux, writing is a political act, a way for both teachers and students to engage in "ideology critique" (p. 96) of dominant social structures and to uncover and challenge hidden oppressive practices embedded in texts, institutions, and society. To be truly literate is to reveal the purposes behind texts and who they benefit—to make visible the relationship between the text and power.

Political voice is central in Giroux's vision for education; it is developed through pedagogies that emancipate and validate the diverse voices of marginalized students. This challenges the dominance of the sole voice (the teacher's), shifting authority away from a single source, empowering different voices, and helping students develop the necessary sense of agency to become active participants in society. This emancipated voice leads students to praxis—to political action based on a solid foundation of critical theory.

Shifting focus from student empowerment to the role of educators, the text's third section examines teachers' intellectual work and education's role in cultural politics. It begins by

describing how neoliberal policies deskill teachers, reframing them as trainers rather than educators. Those policies mandate methods to produce "the best" students, separating concept from execution and ignoring differences between students' backgrounds and interests. Facing these pressures leaves teachers with key questions about what can be done: While teachers may have emancipatory goals, they are often constrained by their employment for the state or state-adjacent institutions.

Giroux extends this critique of institutional constraint to the organization of academic knowledge itself, arguing that cultural researchers are arbitrarily pushed into different disciplines, reducing collaboration. This argument includes a critique of the way university are structured, as well as an examination of the relationship between mass culture and education. Giroux is looking for spaces of counter-disciplinary study—spaces to question the formation of disciplines and knowledge. Contemporary critical educators, he says, are trapped in a discourse that connects schools to social domination, leaving educators without an obvious path forward. His response: the creation of counter-hegemonic spaces and alternative public spheres will create new social relationships from which new critical discourses might emerge.

Against a backdrop of global neoliberal proliferation, Giroux defines resistance as the gap between the widespread forces of domination and the condition of being dominated. While Giroux's articulation of resistance often lacks a specific political program, it is based on the tension between that which dominates and the agency of the resisting person. In other words, resistance is always particular. Teachers must not be disconnected from everyday life. Indeed, for Giroux connections between education and daily life should be reinforced as a way of strengthening horizontal ties between citizens and an ongoing discourse of democracy.

The final section returns to the themes of discourse and ideology. It begins with an analysis of the crisis and possibilities in public education. The crisis involves the push to remove state welfare under an alignment of neoconservative and neoliberal ideologies. Giroux's answer to this alignment is the need for critical education to provide students with an understanding of how social reality actually works—to help them understand the power dynamics that affect their lives and society.

To further his critique, Giroux turns to Gramsci's work, particularly the concept of cultural hegemony, because it adds a new cultural dimension to Marxism. Both Giroux and Gramsci understand that the ideology of education is inherent not only in curriculum content, but to the cultural organization of schooling itself. Gramsci's goal in education is the formation of students capable of advancing Marxist ideals. By contrast, Giroux's goal is the cultivation of a student body capable of the critical thinking required to create counter-hegemonic ideas and to challenge unfair social structures. Gramsci links educational praxis to a broader philosophy of praxis; Giroux broadens Gramsci's view, positioning educational praxis within schooling as part of a "public pedagogy".

Giroux concludes by emphasizing the importance of critical theory, not as a tool of empirical quantification and verification, but as a method to imagine new social relationships. Giroux calls upon educators to form closer connections with folks they align with from outside the academic tradition. The book closes with a discussion of the role of hope as both a referent for social change and the foundation of a liberatory philosophy, which requires a participatory component.

Discussion

Most content from previous editions of *Teachers as Intellectuals* is maintained, though this most recent edition also contain several new sections. Specifically, this edition addresses the role of digital media and corporate power in shaping public discourse, defining this external influence as a "public pedagogy" with which teachers must contend. The new material is also highly focused on modern political challenges, linking the original fight against "deskilling" teachers to contemporary assaults on critical thought (e.g., the backlash against critical race theory and honest history; see also Weingarten, 2025). Giroux's new analysis frames the current crisis not as incremental policy change (as in 1988) but as an escalated, full-scale attack on the democratic mission of public education itself. While these additions do much to bring Giroux's foundational thinking into the 21st century, some aspects might be further elaborated.

For example, Giroux highlights but does not develop a robust account of the relationship between neoconservatism and neoliberalism. Both seek to limit public involvement in education, but the reasons why are rooted in different ideological assumptions. A more detailed exploration could show why a market-driven system requires the moral legitimacy of neoconservatism to enact its unpopular educational cuts, and such a contextual analysis might show where the moral justifications crack under the demands of market logic (for an example, see David Graeber's [2018] *Bullshit Jobs*).

Moreover, Giroux states the importance of public intellectuals getting their message out to the public, but there is little discussion of effective public messaging strategies. The need for new strategies is high today because, as Brain Massumi (2015) has noted, "affect is now much more important for understanding power, even state power narrowly defined, than concepts like ideology. Direct affect modulation takes the place of old-style ideology" (p. 32). Moreover, Massumi says "alternative political action does not have to fight against the idea that power has become affective but rather has to learn to function itself on that same level—meet affective modulations with affective modulation" (p. 34). In today's fractured media environment, how does the public intellectual "breakthrough"? What is the educator's recourse within the current affective landscape of power? These questions and others linger after reading Giroux's work.

Conclusion

Back in Nova Scotia, we find easy applications of Giroux's thinking to our context. For example, concepts like "technocratic rationality" describe the ways conservative ideologies lead to the desire for "more, faster" through an obsession with efficiency. There are, however, also other areas where Giroux thinking is less helpful. For example, his commitment to writing as a way for students and teachers to critique ideology remains a worthy aim; now faced with the proliferation of generative artificial intelligence and short-form video content, however, we lament the growing number of obstacles in the way of teaching such critical writing. We also wonder whether there might be new possibilities enabled by these forms—new ways of engaging ideology, discourse, and affect that subvert the dominance of "more, faster" thinking in our province and elsewhere.

Ultimately, it is Giroux's commitment to the teacher as a public intellectual that we find most useful. As above, Giroux argues that teachers must actively resist the forces that would reduce education to mere training and defend the spaces for critical education. We agree, and we see this manifest in many of the classrooms we observe throughout the province. Even faced as they are

by eroded working conditions and the continued pressure of "more, faster", teachers continue their work. The Nova Scotia Teacher's Union remains one of the strongest dissenting voices in the battle against "more, faster", as it continues to point out that the answer to the "teacher shortage" is not more, quickly-trained teachers, but improvements to teacher working conditions (NSTU, 2024). Teachers who speak publicly about this, such as Grant Frost (2025), support the union's argument, showing that teachers in Nova Scotia *are* public intellectuals doing the work of challenging the government's technocratic rationality. Giroux gives us language to identify what is happening in our province and the ways these local debates are prefigured in other jurisdictions—indeed, the ways they have played out over the last 50 years globally.

In her recent book *Why Fascists Hate Teacher*, Randi Weingarten (2025) writes "in recent years, the job of being a public-school teacher has become infinitely more challenging" (p. 3). Weingarten is referring to the ways that some on the "far-right" have launched attacks on public schools and the "woke ideologies" that they teach. She's not wrong; that *does* makes things more difficult for teachers, but so do the more subtle workings of neoliberal ideology manifest in the push toward "more, faster"—a push we maintain is not just localized to Nova Scotia, but is actually manifest globally (Kumar, 2019). Giroux gives us the tools to be able to name and push back against these more subtle threats to the teaching profession, and for that reason, this book remains relevant today and is still well worth reading.

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