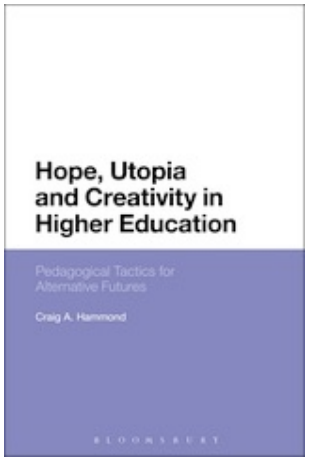


Hope, Utopia and Creativity in Higher Education: Pedagogical Tactics for Alternative Futures

Hammond, Craig A.
Bloomsbury Publishing Inc. , 2017

Book Review

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Educators who value the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, bell hooks, and Peter McLaren will be stretched and stimulated by Craig Hammond's *Hope, Utopia, and Creativity in Higher Education: Pedagogical Tactics for Alternative Futures*. Hammond is critical of "institutional structures that have ossified around familiarity and academic routine" (35) and that tend to reproduce "a rather drab journey towards a perdition of apathetic inaction and uncritical conformity" (186). Instead, he advocates for "creative and democratic academic engagement" (11). Or, in more effusive rhetoric, Hammond writes: "The tyranny of … the academic warder, replete with encased frameworks of functionally categorized shells of knowledge, can be transformed to a context where knowledge is collaboratively resituated and revived, inhabited, and co-produced in multiple new and fresh directions" (53). His book includes autobiographical reflections, theoretical interpretations, practical teaching resources, and examples of artifacts created by students in Hammond's courses at Blackburn College in the UK.

Following an introduction, the book consists of ten chapters organized in three parts. The three chapters of Part 1 develop the pedagogically-relevant theoretical insights of Ernst Bloch, Roland Barthes, and Gaston Bachelard. The level of theoretical sophistication Hammond provides is rare in pedagogical texts. Part 2 begins to put practical substance to a critical, utopian pedagogy. In these three chapters, Hammond draws on Guy Debord and the Situationists to develop pedagogical strategies for creative engagement, illustrates the utopian potential of an alternative pedagogy via an autobiographical example, and provides practical teaching resources (autobiography assignment, peer-assessment framework, and syllabus). In

Part 3, Hammond shares artifacts, commentaries, and narratives by learner collaborators in his utopian pedagogy.

The pedagogy offered here – articulated as hopeful and utopian – is more Marxist than religious in its ideals. Nonetheless, given the widespread concern with diversity and inclusion in higher education settings in recent years, professors of theology and religious studies with an appreciation for critical pedagogies will benefit from reflecting on the theoretical ideas and pedagogical strategies offered here. Perhaps the easiest entry point for adaptation of Hammond's ideas to the religious studies or theology classroom is via his discussion of Guy Debord's (1970, Detroit: Red & Black) *Society of the Spectacle* (80ff.), with its clear renunciation of consumer society and the commodification of education. A more hopeful, utopian pedagogy is merited to respond to these societal pressures and allures.

Hammond's book – with its autobiographical elements, theoretical summaries, and pedagogical materials – combines disparate materials, all conveyed in evocative language (as suggested by the quotations offered above). This is not a book to be skimmed quickly. And this is perhaps as it should be. One of Hammond's students, quoted in Part 3, comments on the incongruity of sitting in courses in which "the lecturer outlines the ills of didactic teaching and learning, from the front of the classroom, with no sense of irony" (166). By suggesting possibilities rather than delineating best practices, Hammond's book is better aligned with the pedagogy it champions. Readers will likely find some aspects of the text more stimulating than others. Depending on the reader, perhaps it will be the theory, perhaps the autobiographical reflections of Hammond, perhaps the description of the creative autobiographical project, perhaps something else. As long as some creative and contextually relevant pedagogical intervention in the standard practices of our classrooms arises from this encounter, Hammond will have succeeded in his project of advancing a utopian pedagogy.

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