

Book Review

Hope in a Collapsing World: Youth, Theatre, and Listening as a Political Alternative

By Kathleen Gallagher with Andrew Kushnir.

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Kathleen Gallagher reimagines education through the pedagogy of radical “Hope in a Collapsing World”. The author seeks hope in performing arts through the lens of listening and care, utilizing the powerful medium of drama and theatre in monotonous present-day schools ubiquitous in both the global North and the global South.

In this multi-scalar ethnographic study conducted in Canada, England, Taiwan, Greece and India, the author rigorously investigates youth, hope, and listening to foster ideal democratic citizenship in a collapsing world. Gallagher, a veteran curriculum theorist, informs her readers in a postlude with Andrew Kushnir about the blasé schools, linking them to literal caves where, if care is imparted to youth soulfully, it may not only aerate not their future hope but also present hope as a political alternative. The duo advocates dramaturgically for educators, policy-makers, and administrators to infuse hope holistically in the youth who are embroiled in both existential crises and global dilemmas in “schools [that] can feel like caves (p.273)”. In this context, the book artfully draws the attention of readers to the absence of youthful imaginations and persuasively encourages traditional educators to shift from conventional pedagogies to those of hope, listening, and care via performing arts. This reinforcement of drama and theatre as a critical

meta-space may create more opportunities for significant, expansive, transitional and transformative learning (Rogers, 1969; Engeström, 2001; Alheit, 1994; Mezirow 1991).

The author uses “critical race theory, critical pedagogy, critical literacy, and feminist theory” (p.18) to examine the significance of silence in active listening, which can catalyze meaningful dialogue and drive social change within educational contexts. In other words, the book disrupts the ways with which institutionalized schooling and oppressed pedagogy (Freire, 1982) contaminates our youth, and instill in them retrogressive listening habits intolerant of each other in extremely polarized world. Gallagher puts listening to theatrical ground in her dramatic praxis, highlighting the insular nature of traditional education, where students may be confined to narrow perspectives or limited experiences. This book truly positions an innovative curriculum approach that reinvigorates stale pedagogy in times when culture wars are globally present permeating all walks of life.

The book is divided into two parts that offer ample space for critical theory and innovative practice for both teacher educators and student teachers who are looking to indulge in innovative pedagogies at a critical juncture in a post-truth era (Chinn, Barzilai, & Duncan, 2021). Part one is theory-driven, unpacking the affordances of drama and how it can serve as a meta-space to help misrepresented or underrepresented students regain their lost voices in global diverse contexts. This part deals philosophically with the themes such as radical hope, care, and democratic citizenship to build agentic self for insecure students whose confidence is displaced within the four walls of schools, and they are suffocated by their curriculum choices. For instance, the researcher proposes the critical role of drama as a meta-space in school settings for not only academic purposes but also for its immense public health benefits and social impact. Invisible students, who are using drama as a vehicle to amplify their suppressed voices, can demonstrate how to help peers desperately in need of assistance with mental health issues, emotional trauma, and psychological distress. The book critically examines the drama classroom where students can grow from insecure to secure and confident selves to practice the art of listening in a world that is fraught with dangers and offer less opportunities. Undoubtedly, the psychological aspect of pedagogical commitments explored in this book may give in-service, pre-service, and teacher educators a revitalized perspectives on both drama and theatre. The *pièce de résistance* of part one emerges in the author’s masterful comparative analysis of five distinct research locales of education systems, elevating the ethnographic narrative to unparalleled heights of scholarly insight and analytical prowess.

The second part, a brainchild of Andrew Kushnir, utilizes the play as an ingenious triangulation technique for empirical purposes than just a drama that may engage the readers for mere aesthetic enjoyment. Readers will “meet the theatrical storytelling ... drawn from interview transcripts... (p.10)” from where the entire drama, *Towards Youth: a play on radical hope*, has been composed. Admittedly, this serves as a creative research approach for upcoming research students who want to conduct ethnographic research in the field of education with vulnerable populations. For example, one of the drama actors recites the opening lines based on their cross-cultural vulnerabilities owing to the language barriers. Active listening emerges from these lines where radical hope, and care converge to “[re]-invent the theatre as a workshop for its dilemmas (p.252). As a result, the complex process rekindle hope in dark times set against the drama scene.

Finally, this transnational research brings home the role of ecology in curriculum studies where human interacts with nonhuman environments in teaching and learning (Wearing et. al., 2019), illuminating the critical role of playwright, drama and theatre in school settings. It shows how teachers and students could carve out a fresh vision for their oppressed curriculum embedded in local politics, and cultural restrictions challenging audaciously normativity knitted around the emotional, psychic, physical, social and cultural practices. Gallagher, to all intents and purposes, re-envision education, schooling, curriculum, pedagogy and above all human agency via drama and theatre in profound ways not only for teacher education programs but also for all disciplines. One of her collaborative ethnographers maintains “That is why her entire school, the curriculum for every subject, uses theatre methodologically to teach (p.10)”. This is what the researcher is proposing in this book; a curriculum of hope through listening and care where the youthful dreams will find a new lease of life in constrained, and suffocated classrooms. Finally, the tensions, that grip the classroom and its ecologies as caves, may be alleviated if educators altruistically stoke a feeling of hope, and care with active listening as a new curriculum for youth.

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