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[Review of the book The right to learn: The struggle for education in South Africa by Pam Christie]

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CHRISTINE, Pam. The Right to Learn The Struggle for Education in South Africa. Sached/Ravan Press, 1985

The Right to Learn, as its sub-title, 'The Struggle for Education in South Africa' suggests, is a book in which issues, debates and questions that the notion 'education in South Africa' brings to mind are addressed.

The book is 'A People's College Book' and thus would appear to be aimed at a student/learner audience.

The first chapter, entitled 'What's Education About' dispels any myths about Education being a neutral activity. It shows us how education is part of the wider society, heavily influenced by and interacting with political, social and economic forces. The political stances of the Conservative, Moderate and Radical are clearly defined and their views on education and the aims of education clearly stated. This division as a device for portraying different interpretations of facts, events and conclusions about education is employed throughout the book. Other chapters such as 'A short history', 'The Church and education', 'Reading facts and figures', 'White education: The worldview of C.N.E' and 'Resistance in Education' place education in South Africa in context attending to the many complex concepts involved in gaining critical understanding of education.

The book should succeed in reaching its audience. This is first because it raises and demystifies many issues that the average student has probably been unaware of; the interpretation of inequality

of education being as a result of considerations of class and not race and that inequality in education is not only a result of apartheid ideology, the hidden curriculum, the area of work and certification and alternatives to formal education. A second factor which recommends the Right to Learn is its presentation. The language is simple, 'unjargonised' and accessible. The layout is clear and impressive. Points indicate what the chapters will cover, headings and provocative questions introduce central themes, concise summaries are often provided. A useful reference section ends each chapter.

Tables of abbreviations and of chronological events also appear. Original source material is used.

Thus, overall, The Right to Learn is worthy of praise in that it has managed to gather together so many of the complex issues in education in an organised and accessible fashion. It also succeeds in being a source of a 'total' picture of education in South Africa (black and white) in readable style and in only 272 pages.

However, the division of opinions into Conservative, Moderate and Radical is often stereotypical and questionable. Does South African society fall really into these camps?

Furthermore the use of pictures as teaching devices to ask various questions, while often serving to clarify matters, also ironically serves to patronise the learner and sometimes appears simplistic. Who, one wonders, is the "voice" behind the question? Whose opinions inform the question? What bias is being transmitted

to the reader?

A few further criticisms include the following:

Many of the statistics included seem dated - 1982. However, given the nature and task of printing current statistics, this is understandable.

Sometimes a little leftish/radical nitpicking, which seems out of place in a generally balanced text, appears. For example:

> Dr. J. Pasques, who has been an important thinker on Veld Schools, has this to say:
>
> Urbanization is one of the most important revolutions of our time. Many factors arise from this which have a detrimental influence on the child's ability to become mentally and morally prepared for life. Various social studies have revealed that these detrimental factors can be eliminated to a large extent by allowing the child to make intimate contact with nature. It is, therefore, essential to provide accommodation for youth groups in remote places in nature still unspoiled. He *sees* the stars twinkle, he *smells* the scent of a bloom, he *feels* the wild fruit and he *hears* the wind whistling through the mountain peaks. By focusing his attention on the wonders of nature - the beauty of the spider's web, the symmetry of the flower, the wonder of the cosmos - the Child's attention is centred on the wonders of creation
>
> (TED *Educational News Flashes*, No. 61, 1981:28)

> You'd think from Pasques's speech that girls didn't go to veld schools, wouldn't you? But that's not true! They do!

In conclusion, this is a worthwhile addition to one's shelf. It is a useful source book, combining a breadth of content in manageable form.

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