
Article  (Accepted Version)
This is a useful and timely book. On the one hand, the academy has seen a growth in the teaching of content relating to popular culture, youth culture, (post)subcultures, countercultures, DIY cultures and resistance studies. On the other hand, university teaching is being quantified and weaponised in numerous agendas. In the UK context these agendas are simultaneously related to ‘value for money’, ‘transferable skills’ and ‘slipping standards’, while at the same time reflecting state-led initiatives such as Prevent (The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015) or the Teaching Excellence Framework. Here is a collection that helps us think about the implications of each for the other, which raises important discussions about the relationship between what it is we teach, how we teach it and the institutional contexts in which we teach. This is not a simple ‘how to teach punk’ toolkit. It is an engaged and engaging series of analyses, drawing out the complexity of ways, subjects and institutions in which we work.

Across a variety of disciplines, the reader is invited to explore how punk might work beyond a subject of study, but also as an autodidactic community, a reflexive approach to the self behind the tutor, and what it means to teach punk as a process: “Punk learning and learning from punk, punk teaching and teaching punk, and theorizing (from) punk pedagogical practice.” It grows well out of earlier work in the field of punk pedagogy, some of the groundwork of which has been done by contributors to, and editors of, this collection (Furness 2012, Dale 2012, Beer 2014, Cordova 2014, Dines 2015). Much of this important previous work has either been published in pedagogical journals or has offered useful teaching models rather than disciplinary or analytical spaces (Alexander 2002, Ramos et al. 2016, Graham & Rees 2013, Relles & Clemens 2018). It is fitting to be reviewing this collection for this journal, as it one of the few spaces that has resisted the artificial binary of research and teaching (Astley 2017, Campbell 2017, Dines 2015, Sormus 2015).

Unlike a lot of earlier work on punk as a subject, the collection includes more work by women then you often see, and a geographical and disciplinary breadth. It moves across North America and beyond Europe, and is informed by experiences in Iran, US, the Iberian peninsula and Hong Kong. It builds on lessons from within and beyond university departments including public learning environments and draws together diverse subjects; Music, Graphic Design,

I was struck by the importance of the title’s second clause; Music, Culture and Learning. It is learning rather than teaching that matters here. This includes what we learn as teachers as much as what our students learn from us. The collection is broken down into three themes; music, aesthetics, ethos. These themes map the different ways in which subcultural identities are produced and leave their traces behind. These are also ways in which we can learn from each other. Popular music, youth cultures and the ephemera and ways of being around DIY cultures are all ways in which we have learnt about the world and ourselves, have shared ideas and in some cases questioned, or even challenged the systems around us. Subcultures teach themselves, sharing their own icons through sleeve notes and lyrical allusions, t-shirt slogans and badges. As ‘affective communities’, subcultures build a DIY citizenship through the skills, ideas and aesthetic values that they share (Pilkington 2012, Chidgey 2013). The line between our subcultural identifications (I know... we might want to problematize the idea of subcultures... but I'm going to stick with the term) and education has always been dynamic. We might think about Kidz Liberation and school strikes in the 1970s. Or we might think about Dick Hebdige’s MA dissertation ending up in the Cultural Studies canon. Or we might think about zine makers like Karen Ablaze, who turned their term papers into fanzines. All of these moves trouble the traditions of learning.

The first chapter in which the editors map out their lines of inheritance is in itself an important contextualized intellectual history that demonstrates that how, when and where we teach matters as much as what we teach. It stands as a fascinating applied intellectual history produced by editors and scholars whose personal, political and activist lives have lent them credentials and led them to thoughtfully reflect upon their life experience. In the troubling tradition of subcultures and learning then, Punk Pedagogies is a self-consciously self-destructive project: after all, as the editors explain, the ultimate goal is the ‘total dismantlement of education systems’. That’s a high impact goal. The irony of Punk Pedagogies is that, rather than getting bogged down in abstract intellectual thought, it’s a collection that grows around praxis – which is after all – a highly transferable skill. This book is therefore of interest to those not necessarily interested in punk at all. It aims a keen eye at our conceptual starting points, whatever they may be, by starting from how they are actually used, in practice.

Throughout the collection education is simultaneously and tautly both a business and a public good. Punk is after all a contradiction that can work through the fault-lines of universities as
contradictory spaces. But it is also a model of support; don’t get sucked into competing, instead ‘support each other’. Do It Together. Some chapters act as self-help guides; they blur the line between the writer and the reader, in ways akin to punk’s problematizing the performer and the audience. Diéguez’s contribution is particularly illuminating here, written from the subject position of the graduate scholar who is already positioned as both producer and consumer. Harness’s punk education did what punk has done for so many; it blended the ‘academic, applied and technical’ aspects of learning’ (p59).

Some contributors are more sceptical of punk as a ‘philosophical approach’ or lens, such as Russ Bestley. He explores the possibility of both punk and graphic design being both subject and approach in the punk classroom. Just as subcultural and post-subcultural studies have taught us to be wary of easy definitions of subcultural rituals as resistance, Bestley has an important point to make. A ‘narrow version of punk’ resting on an uncritical sense of its own ‘inherent radicalism’ has become a ‘vehicle for the dissemination of ideological vested interests and academic posturing’ (p16). Whereas in a later chapter Harness explains ‘of course I have an agenda!’ (p63). The tension between these two positions is, for me, the heart of what makes this collection so potentially and creatively useful. Rather than simply taking our punk affiliation and performing it at work, this collection reminds us to do the reverse move too; to shine our own critical faculties back onto our lives.

Punk is never clearly defined, and this collection suggests why. It is laden with too many emotional investments, competing cultural capitals and blurred moments between the self and the subculture for an easy lexicography. It is not surprising then that a number of varied positions emerge. What is so enjoyable about this book is that it puts the tensions to the front. One of the troublesome things that punk pedagogy can do, it seems, is to refuse to be one thing. It is a bricolage, with some spikey corners. Punk’s autodidactic process can be used to infect, negotiate and persist in the contemporary academic context. As the quality of this collection shows, punk pedagogy invites critical thinking, questioning the context of one’s own structures, doing it yourself as an autonomous learner – which all fits rather nicely with our marking criteria. When our teaching is about to become yet another quantifiable stick to marketize our value, divide and discipline our workforce, punk pedagogy’s malleable, iconoclastic and evasive rubric, especially one that invites the reader to pick up and drop whatever bits they fancy, could be just what we all need.
References


Pilkington, Hilary (2012), "Vorkuta is the capital of the world": people, place and the everyday production of the local', The Sociological Review 60.2, pp.267-291.

