In her new book, *Community Development in Action: Putting Freire into Practice*, Margaret Ledwith continues her quest to provide the theories and tools needed to create a socially and ecologically just world. Ledwith builds upon her prior community development work and offers us a palatable synthesis centred on the work of Paulo Freire’s ‘Critical Pedagogy’. More than just a book, this manual lays out processes that can assist teachers, students, community organizers, and concerned citizens in understanding their own positionalities and localities in relation to larger social, political, and economic forces—thus providing us with a guide for building solidarity and fostering positive social change in our communities. Ledwith largely achieves these goals by engaging with Freire and other activist-scholars, and weaving rich stories of action and theory that show how communities and individuals can deconstruct the hidden, taken for granted, common-sense views of everyday life that reinforce unequal power relations.

The book has foreword by Nita Freire and opens with a glossary of important terms that help establish the language and thinking used to construct this narrative tool-kit. This helps all readers, regardless of their backgrounds and experience, become grounded in the common tongue of critical theory, emancipation, and collective theorizing for action. The book progresses logically, with the first chapter introducing the principles and a brief history of community development. This is followed by an in-depth review and synthesis of Freire’s ‘Critical Pedagogy’, the lived experience that helped him develop his radical approach to education, and a discussion of how community development is a form of Critical Pedagogy. Once these foundations are laid, in Chapter 3 Ledwith illustrates a variety of tools, concepts, and processes that aid the reader in ‘Kick starting Freire in everyday practice’.
From an integrative perspective, Community Development in Action is strengthened by the incorporation of the ideas of other important scholars and activists. Chapter 4 introduces the work, experiences, and concepts of Antonio Gramsci, Stuart Hall, and Michel Foucault, with an emphasis on their original texts as well as interpretations by Peter McLaren, Richard Hoggart, and other contemporaries. Chapter 5 adds anti-racist feminism and eco-pedagogy to the mix, critiquing, and repositioning Freire through the work of Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, and Chet Bowers. Chapter 6 focuses on poverty and child poverty in the United Kingdom. Here, Ledwith draws upon Peter Townsend, Brian Abel-Smith, the Child Poverty Action Group, Oxfam International, and Nelson Mandela to understand modern poverty within the framework of neoliberal globalization, Thatcherism, the policies of the International Monetary Fund, and the unquestioned faith in ‘the market’. Chapter 7 brings in Imogen Tyler’s ‘Social Abjection Theory’ and the concept and caricature of the ‘Chav’ as additional advancements to this Freirean tool-kit.

Ledwith begins to wrap up the book with Chapter 8 as she recounts her own journey, and the importance of Participatory Action Research and reflexive journaling as integral parts of community organizing and development work. She draws upon Michelle Fine, Peggy McIntosh, and Stephen Kemmis to move us towards Emancipatory Action Research and into the development of our own critical living praxis. Finally, Chapter 9 is about the importance of staying critical and reclaiming the radical agenda, with examples from the Occupy Movement and the National Community Activist Network. Ledwith references Wilkinson and Pickett’s idea that our quality of life should not be dependent on the economy. Drawing on Freire and Naomi Klein, she calls for dissent against inequality and the ecological degradation that our neoliberal policies are having on mother earth.

The strengths of this work are 3-fold. First, the book is written in a way that renders its usable in classrooms and in communities. Its glossary and step-by-step processes are helpful from both a theory and an action point of view. The stories of community development’s challenges and successes help bring concepts and theories to life. Second, the book’s style of presentation engages readers on several levels: there are shaded boxes for definitions and related side stories; wonderful pictures and diagrams depicting Freire enacting his concepts, often with bubble quotes; bordered ‘Pause for thought’ asides; and each chapter ends with a ‘Theory in Action’ section. These differentiations break up the book, providing the reader with visuals and activities related to the content. Third, Ledwith has created a layered tapestry for practitioners, using Freire as a base, and peppering it heavily with the many scholars and activists mentioned above. This variety of
related concepts, theories, and practices is one of the reasons why the book is well-suited for a wide range of audiences.

While this book is recommended for students and community development practitioners there are two main critiques. The first is that the book is repetitious and many of the ideas are discussed and defined again and again within each chapter. To some extent this makes sense as each concept is rewritten and each tool revisited within the varying contexts of each chapter and story. Nonetheless, for seasoned educators and scholars, this seems unnecessary. Second, and perhaps more importantly, Ledwith makes the claim that this book is focused on the intersection of community development and environmental sustainability. There are occasional references to environmental sustainability, but this reviewer cautions readers not to expect any new theoretical or practical advances along the lines of environmental justice. This being said, the tools and concepts laid out can be applied to environmental justice work, but this book does not provide these kinds of examples.

Overall, Ledwith achieves her goal of synthesizing Freire with and into the field of community development. Readers will find this manual helpful in their social justice endeavours. If practitioners adapt these processes, work with others in their communities, apply the tools that make sense in their given contexts, and draw from the ideals of Participatory and Emancipatory Action Research, they will be successful in challenging and changing many of the unequal aspects of our culture.

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