

BOOK REVIEWS

The Graduate Grind: A Critical Look at Graduate Education

Patricia Hinchey & Isabel Kimmel. New York: Falmer Press, 2000.

Reviewed by **Annabelle L. Grundy** and **Michelle K. McGinn**, Brock University

Abandonment, abuse, anxiety, betrayal, bitterness, breaking point, burnout, collapse, danger, death, desperation, discouragement, divorce, exhaustion, frustration, grind, hardships, hazing, hurdles, ignorance, impossible dream, isolation, killing the spirit, leaving, loneliness, murder, neglect, peril, ridicule, ritual, self-protection, sexual harassment, shock, snobbery, strain, strangulation, stress, suffering, suicide, survival of the fittest, trauma, and violence.

As Hinchey and Kimmel (2000) argue, “The culture of graduate study is rife with metaphors reflecting doctoral study as a perilous—a downright dangerous—enterprise” (p. 1). We extracted the alphabetical list above from the first three pages of their book, *The Graduate Grind*. Many similar words and metaphors are introduced throughout the book. For us, the powerful words and metaphors provoked an emotional, almost visceral response. Even though our own past and present graduate experiences have been more positive than the stories presented in the book, we found the portrayals credible and, unfortunately, too real. Graduate education and the culture of graduate schools can be oppressive and disheartening. Building upon a solid review of published literature and extended interviews with current and former graduate students, Hinchey and Kimmel use the lens of critical theory to question present practices in graduate education and propose a model for “how things might be otherwise.”

We feel that this book is a worthwhile read and we recommend it for students, faculty members, staff members, and university administrators as a means to raise awareness about institutional culture and the different kinds of power inherent in all levels of university education, most notably graduate education. For readers seeking work from a critical theory perspective, this book is an excellent example of careful scholarship. The authors present a clear description of the nature, purpose, and method of critical theory. As they explain, critical theory draws attention to power inequities and the ways that those inequities disadvantage the less powerful within a relationship. In graduate education, graduate students are obviously less powerful than faculty members or the institution itself. Hinchey and Kimmel proclaim that their goal

is “to promote more equitable and just power arrangements within graduate education” (p. 20) by exposing and questioning the (often implicit) inner workings of power within graduate institutions. Through the book, the authors attempt to raise awareness about power inequities within graduate education and to seek transformation of the institutional cultures that contribute to the oppressiveness of these power inequities. The book provides a clear and readable example of critical theory scholarship that can serve as a good model for other would-be critical theorists. Given that the focus of this study is graduate education, graduate students will be able to relate particularly well to the model provided.

Hinchey and Kimmel quote Paulo Freire’s definition, which states that oppression is “any situation in which ‘A’ objectively exploits ‘B’ or hinders his [or her] pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person” (cited on p. 21). Cases abound in graduate schools where students’ intellectual labours are belittled or devalued. Instructor feedback on course assignments may involve a derogatory tone. The overemphasis on grades and ranking may diminish emphasis upon other human qualities. Students’ contributions to class discussions may be overlooked or ignored. Limits may be placed upon the types of research that are sanctioned within a department or a discipline. Decisions about authorship for collaborative work may not always fully represent the students’ contributions to the work. Students’ ideas and written work may be used without acknowledgement or financial compensation. These incidents of oppression erode students’ sense of self, undermine their confidence, and exacerbate their fears.

Oppression may be intentional. Some faculty members are fully aware of the oppression of graduate students because they themselves experienced this oppression when they were graduate students. For these individuals, there is a sense that “I lived with it, now it’s your turn.” For others, the oppression is unintentional. Hinchey and Kimmel make the important point that oppression need not be an intentional act. The institutional culture within universities rewards certain behaviours that lead to increased power and recognition for those who follow the status quo. This leads to many unintentional forms of oppression. Students are often caught in the middle as representatives of the institution strive toward their own goals. Institutional reputations are built upon the kinds of features that are portrayed in media (e.g., *Maclean’s* annual ranking of universities). In order to attract students and government funding, the university administration needs to emphasize features that can be positively documented. Similarly, reward structures for faculty members emphasize research productivity over teaching, thereby influencing the amount of time and

attention that faculty members can devote to responsibilities that do not lead to research publications.

Hinchey and Kimmel raise awareness about the oppressive nature of institutional and individual practices through excerpts from interviews and published documents about graduate experiences. They focus particular attention on the complexities of lived experience for students in relation to their positions within multiple cultures or groups. Students' experiences are shaped by their gender, sexual orientation, age, race, class background, abilities, research interests, regional positioning, and other individual differences. Hinchey and Kimmel provide detailed discussion about the experiences of women students, students of colour, older students, lesbian and gay students, and working class students. Their descriptions of the particular difficulties faced by students from one or more of these categories are thoughtful and informative. However, we were surprised that the authors made no mention of students with disabilities. In an institutional culture focused on ability and excellence, disability may be treated as an aberration that could be viewed as a drain on limited resources. Students with disabilities are particularly susceptible to oppression because of their disabilities, as well as the stigma attached to having disabilities. Hinchey and Kimmel's critical theory perspective would provide a useful lens to consider the oppression faced by students with disabilities. We would have liked to see some attention to the experiences of students with disabilities in the book.

Throughout the book, Hinchey and Kimmel incorporate quotations from students who have experienced oppression within graduate institutions. The anecdotes provide concrete and realistic examples that illustrate "the hidden workings of power" (p. 20). These stories are most powerfully drawn in the chapter entitled, *Voices of the Oppressed*. The students and former students described their experiences in extended narratives using their own voices and without the interference of explicit editorial comments. The chapter provides space for voices from students who felt particularly oppressed. The students in this section use powerful metaphors that echo the list that we used to begin this review. For example, these students described feeling like flies caught in spider webs, mere cogs in the whole scheme of things, token minorities, slaves of the department, or circus acrobats jumping through hoops. To some extent, we found this chapter the most challenging to read because of the extremely negative experiences documented and the limited options or outcomes available. However, we recognize that the most oppressed are the ones whose voices most deserve to be heard, and we applaud Hinchey and Kimmel for providing space for these students' voices.

Hinchey and Kimmel's focus on raising awareness about oppressive behaviours is intended to lead to change or transformation. This change can come about in one of two ways. First, oppressed individuals who become aware of their oppression may be in better positions to react with the limited power that they hold within a situation. For graduate students, this might include decisions to walk away and refuse to engage in an oppressive situation. However, quitting is not the only solution. Other forms of resistance are available through self-advocacy or collaborative efforts. For example, graduate students could sign petitions or make representation to a departmental review committee. Hinchey and Kimmel also relate an example where a graduate student faced a very draining dissertation defense and needed to make revisions within a short time frame. A small group of other graduate students worked together to edit the dissertation on behalf of the emotionally distraught candidate. Second, oppressors who become aware of the oppressive nature of their behaviours, may strive to change those behaviours. For faculty members, this means making a commitment to use their power for the betterment of graduate students not their detriment. Such initiatives might include arguing on behalf of graduate students in departmental policy changes. On a more individual basis, this could also involve, for example, organizing classes to be more inclusive of all students and providing appropriate compensation and acknowledgement for students' contributions to collaborative work. However, as Hinchey and Kimmel argue, it will take more than individual efforts to effect real change.

Universities are medieval institutions that are highly resistant to change. Hinchey and Kimmel point readers to existing scholarship that questions whether change is likely given that these changes require powerful individuals to accede some of their power to others. However, they argue that this resistance to change does not mean that change is impossible. Raising awareness is an important first step toward effecting change and *The Graduate Grind* does an exceptional job at raising awareness of oppression within graduate education. Beyond raising awareness, the book also provides some suggestions for how things might be otherwise. As Hinchey and Kimmel argue, "If we are to make any progress at all, we must begin with trying to imagine how things might be different If we can't imagine an alternative reality, we certainly can't pursue one" (p. 136). In the final chapter, they ask what changes are needed and present possible starting points for reform. They discuss such practical concerns as funding, accountability, advising and mentoring, and expectations for programs and people. These practical concerns can provide immediate improvements in graduate experiences, but, as critical educators, Hinchey and Kimmel have concerns about wider philosophical issues of

developing critical consciousness, realizing community, and nourishing the human spirit. These concerns can only be addressed through a reconceptualization of graduate education based upon “attending to the lived experience of everyone engaged in graduate education, and...valuing graduate education as a *human* enterprise rather than an institutional enterprise linked to income and prestige” (p. 151). While this lofty goal may seem unachievable in the near future, it is certainly one that is well worth pursuing and Hinchey and Kimmel provide some excellent starting points for transformation, most importantly they provide a vision for how things might be otherwise.

The Graduate Grind is a readable, yet not readable book. The writing is clear and powerful and the subject is engaging, yet it is discouraging and difficult to read the extremely negative cases. Reading the book involves some hard slogging through negative experiences before finally getting to the positive potential provided in the concluding chapter. This is not a light read, but it is an important read for all those who are involved in graduate education.

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Technology in its Place: Successful Technology Infusion in Schools
J. F. Lebaron, and C. Collier, Eds. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001

Reviewed by **Dirk Windhorst**, Redeemer University College

A reader might interpret the title of this short book in one of two ways: A teacher skeptical of the benefits of technology may believe that this book will argue that computers and the Internet must be given a limited educational role and will show educators how this may be done successfully. After all, when you “put something in its place,” you are reducing its influence in changing or disturbing the context in which it is embedded. Alternately, a technology enthusiast may not read such a connotation in the first part of the title; indeed, he or she may skip over it immediately to the second part of the title and look forward to reading a book that describes effective techniques for integrating

technology with student learning. The latter interpretation of the title proves to be correct.

Twelve authors, including the editors, John F. LeBaron and Catherine Collier, have contributed ten chapters — eight of which provide snapshots of how technology is being successfully implemented in some North American schools, and two of which explore the European context. The European connection was cultivated by LeBaron (Professor of Education at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell) when he studied educational technology on a Fulbright scholarship at the University of Oulu in Finland. Collier is a technology specialist with the Shirley School District in Massachusetts and an adjunct professor of technology in education for Lesley University (Cambridge, Massachusetts).

Even though the 12 authors tackle a variety of issues from classroom implementation of computer-assisted inquiry (chapter one) to building corporate partnerships and public support for technology infusion (chapters eight and nine), they are united by the theoretical framework of constructivism: students construct knowledge as they interact with technology and each other. The teacher's role is to provide the scaffolding for student inquiry in a technology-rich environment. In chapter four ("Technology and Learning: Getting the Story Out"), Jarvela argues that technology is our best tool in motivating and helping students learn in a constructivist framework. In his chapter, "Curriculum Planning for Technology-Rich Instruction," LeBaron tries to distance himself from the behaviorist, ends-means view of learning exemplified by Ralph W. Tyler (1949) and embraces constructivism. Yet, his six stages of curriculum planning bear a marked resemblance to Tyler's Rationale.

In chapter six, Pulkkinen and Ruotsalainen are similarly optimistic about how the constructivist model of learning can be advanced through on-line learning where "collaborative methods of study develop students' critical thinking and direct them toward the construction of their own knowledge through discussion..." (p. 74). However, when the authors evaluated an on-line course that included university students based in four European countries, a major problem surfaced: most of the students had difficulty with independent goal-setting and self-directed learning. It seems that not enough scaffolding had been provided by the course tutors to help these students make the transition from a traditional model of learning to a constructivist one.

School principals who aspire to provide instructional leadership in technology integration will find chapter seven helpful ("The Computers Are Here!"). Perry and Areglado clearly lay out an eight-step change process that principals can follow if they wish to have their teachers and students exploit the full educational value of computers.

Teachers who are looking for practical tips in using computers and the

Internet with their own students at the elementary or secondary level will be disappointed in most of this book which is written for other stakeholders. However, chapters one and five are the exceptions. In chapter one, Abilock shares her experiences providing leadership in curriculum at a school in California. She provides a model for using technology for higher-order research, thinking and communication and lists a number of web sites that teachers can browse. Unfortunately, this reviewer found many of these sites to be unavailable. This was not the case with Collier's chapter: "Staff Development for Technology Integration in the Classroom." One web site in particular, WebQuests, is very intriguing: it gives hundreds of examples of teacher-designed web activities that span all grades and subject areas.

Collier underscores the importance of the teacher's role in assisting students in using computers wisely. Rather than making teachers redundant, information technology requires that teachers provide students with formal instruction in keyboarding, in structured note taking, in purposeful and productive searching, in evaluating information critically, in synthesizing divergent points of view, and in presenting key ideas (pp. 68-69). Computers are not necessary for these skills to be taught, but these skills are *very* necessary for anyone who seeks to use the Internet with intelligence. Notwithstanding Zimmerman's hope that technology will help us solve teacher shortages (p.108), the physical presence of teachers among small groups of students is vital if we want to make sure that students will be able to withstand the temptation of digital plagiarism.

Technology is never defined in this book. It is assumed that we know that "technology" refers to computers and the related software and hardware of networks. For those who study the impact of technology on all aspects of modern life — including education — this definition is too narrow. Computers and fiber optic cables are the artifacts of a technological spirit that has its origins in the seventeenth century with Francis Bacon's "interrogation of nature." Grant (1986) defined technology as the co-penetration of knowing and making in which both activities are changed. The authors of *Technology in Its Place* intuitively understand that constructivism fits within the spirit of technology as Grant defined it. Our knowing has become a kind of making, and as we immerse ourselves with digitalized data in the confines of cyberspace, we find it harder to imagine that knowing could be understood in any other way.

References

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