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Title	Book review [Review of the book Knowledge, control and critical thinking in Singapore: State ideology and the politics of pedagogic recontextualization by Leonel Lim]
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Source	<i>Critical Studies in Education</i> , 58(1), 122-123
Published by	Taylor & Francis (Routledge)

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This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Educational Research on 20 Sep 2016, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/17508487.2016.1234275>

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Citation: Tan, J. (2017). Book review [Review of the book Knowledge, control and critical thinking in Singapore: State ideology and the politics of pedagogic recontextualization, by Leonel Lim]. *Critical Studies in Education*, 58(1), 122-123. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2016.1234275>

Leonel Lim. 2016. *Knowledge, control and critical thinking in Singapore: State ideology and the politics of pedagogic recontextualization*. London: Routledge. ISBN 978-1-138-88748-0.

This book, which represents the author's doctoral dissertation findings at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, promises a great deal to readers. It examines how the teaching of critical thinking in Singapore is regulated by the Ministry of Education through what prominent educational sociologist Basil Bernstein termed the process of "pedagogic recontextualization." Lim problematizes the underlying philosophies and assumptions regarding critical thinking within the Singaporean socio-political context. His book explores the enactment of critical thinking in two secondary schools – one elite and the other non-elite – in order better to inform the state of knowledge with regard to issues of power, knowledge and control.

In chapter one, Lim highlights the paradox of an apparently illiberal state attempting to promote critical thinking in its schools. He then makes a case for using Bernstein's notion of pedagogic recontextualization to understand how critical thinking, which is premised on Western liberal ideals, might be translated and implemented within a rather different socio-political context. He also critiques the state of research in critical thinking as being overly focused on abstract formulations, and urges instead a more sustained interrogation of the social relations and political dimensions implicated in the teaching of critical thinking. Lim tells readers how his teaching experience in a school serving students from socio-economically disadvantaged homes has informed his personal interest in understanding the political nature of curriculum knowledge differentiation.

The second chapter is devoted to explaining key concepts propounded by Bernstein. These include codes, control, the

pedagogic device, classifications, frames, power, control, and sacred and profane identities. Lim states these conceptual tools will help answer a few critical questions that inform the rest of the book: “What are the limits on what may be critically thought about? How might such limits be constituted through the very discourse on critical thinking? Who should be given the autonomy to think in these ways? What is their role in the social and political order? How is it possible to separate out those who will not develop these competencies – and what will they instead learn?” (p. 45) The chapter then introduces Lim’s case study methodology in the two schools. The first is an elite school with considerable curricular autonomy and with an academically high-achieving student body. The second school has students from humbler socio-economic backgrounds and its academic standing pales in comparison with that of the first. Between June and September 2011, Lim employed a combination of three research methods: semi-structured interviews with a total of seven teachers, classroom observations of critical thinking lessons and an examination of curriculum documents. Of particular interest was the framing of the pedagogic discourse of critical thinking in teacher-student interactions during critical thinking lessons.

Chapter three points out the failure of the critical thinking movement to address the power dynamics underlying the political division of labour in education. Although there is general consensus over the fundamentally emancipatory nature of critical thinking, less attention has been paid to how schools, as state apparatuses, grapple with the contradictory tasks of teaching for individual autonomy versus the dictates of neoliberal visions of economic competitiveness. The next chapter introduces the key features of the Singaporean socio-political context. Lim illustrates how a well-entrenched elitist conception of meritocracy combines with political illiberalism and economic neoliberalism to shape the education system. Of

particular interest is the need for schools to produce individuals with certain preferred forms of knowledge, skills and attitudes deemed necessary to meet the demands of the global economy. At the same time, these forms are differentiated across the student population through the practices of academic streaming, especially at the secondary level of schooling. Attempts to inculcate critical thinking thus involve a delicate manoeuvring in order to maintain the dictates of an illiberal political system. Lim also raises the question of class biases in the maintenance and reproduction of cultural capital, as well as the possibility that individual schools and teachers wrestle with tensions and contradictions as they implement the teaching of critical thinking.

Chapters five and six analyse the teaching of critical thinking in the mainstream school, Valley Point Secondary School, and the elite school, Queen's High, respectively. In the mainstream school, all the lessons that Lim observed exhibited strong framing values on the part of teachers. In addition to teachers maintaining firm control over the selection of material, more importantly, critical thinking was explicitly linked to students' success in answering test and examination questions. The school adopted an 'infusion' approach where critical thinking was taught in each curriculum subject. What resulted was a highly instrumental conception of critical thinking, one that was divorced from students' personal lives and that seemed irrelevant to them. Teachers were pedagogic specialists in one or two academic subjects rather than experts in the teaching of thinking skills. Lim draws on Bernstein's concepts of profane knowledge and identities to highlight the externally driven nature of the critical thinking curriculum.

In contrast, Queen's High, with the benefit of curricular autonomy, has chosen a philosophy programme as a means of developing critical thinking dispositions. The crux here is

the emphasis on the philosophical processes of inquiry, clarification, understanding and justification, rather than the narrow examination-focused interpretation found in Valley Point. Furthermore, there is weak internal and external framing of pedagogic interactions, with students being allowed much more autonomy over their learning of critical thinking. Once again, Lim brings in Bernstein's concept of sacred knowledge and identities to highlight "the differential social locations of knowledge and knowers" (p. 157).

The book concludes in chapter seven with Lim summing up his major contributions to knowledge. The two distinct pedagogic codes in the two schools demonstrate how power relations and ideologies are intertwined with the workings of the pedagogic device. The Singapore state's attempts to prescribe its preferred pedagogic identities have weakened the essentially emancipatory thesis underlying critical thinking. However, Lim acknowledges the potential for teachers to function as harbingers of change rather than as mere curriculum implementers. Lim is to be commended for his brave attempt to extend Bernstein's theory of codes to the study of the relationships between power relations, official and implemented curricula, and pedagogic interactions and identities within an illiberal state such as Singapore. His book will be crucial reading for scholars in curriculum theory and education reform.

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