

Resisting neoliberalism in education: Local, national and Transnational perspectives. Edited by Lynn Tett and Mary Hamilton (Bristol & Chicago/Policy Press, 2019 290pp. £64 (hbk) ISBN 9781-447350057; £21.99 (ebk) ISBN 978-1447350200.

Education, and in particular adult education, has a long and rich history of writing that celebrates opposition to dominant ideas and educational processes that exclude the poor and the marginalised. From Myles Horton's work with the civil rights movement (Horton 1970), to the work of Paolo Freire and Augusto Boal; from Mike Newman's powerful *Defining the enemy* of 1994 to his later *Teaching Defiance* (2006); from the London-Edinburgh Weekend Study Return Group's *In and against the state* (1980), to Stephen Brookfield and John D. Holst's *Radicalizing learning* (2012) there have been rich explorations of strategy and tactics to counter the orthodoxies of the time, and to assert the importance of values driven, co-operative and co-designed learning and education.

'*Resisting neoliberalism in education: Local, national and transnational perspectives*' is a welcome addition, locating its site of struggle as the institutional landscape shaped by neoliberalism. The editors, Lynn Tett and Mary Hamilton draw on David Harvey to describe neoliberalism as a system within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade that involves deregulation, privatisation and the withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision'. This leads, they argue, 'to a competitive market approach within which educational goods (such as qualifications, curricula, institutional reputation, expert labour) are branded and exchanged'.

The book sets out to answer how best practitioners, researchers and policy makers can resist the way that neoliberal ideas and institutional practices erode teaching and learning that is centred on dialogue. The editors introduce the book citing Freire's argument that neoliberalism is a deeply fatalistic discourse that 'speaks about the death of dreams and utopia and deproblematizes the future', at odds with holistic and inclusive approaches to education, as they focus on the possibility for resistance which, they argue, must involve both **action** and **be oppositional**. The essays are offered as an exploration of how teachers, librarians, researchers and organisers find resources and strategies to resist within the structures in which they work, in order to reassert the value of Raymond Williams' call for 'resources of hope'.

In his chapter on the limits of neoliberalism in the context of Irish higher education, Fergal Finnegan uses Williams again, drawing on the argument that it is important to distinguish dominant discourse from residual (effectively formed in the past but still active in the cultural process), and emergent discourse - which carries new meanings and values, new forms and practices, and new relationships.

It is significant that in a highly neoliberal country crippled by crisis and austerity, where HE is underfunded and increasingly envisaged in marketised terms, a great deal of teaching, learning, research, access work and career guidance, and workplace learning in HE has sought to confront or tactically circumvent the dominant logic.

He goes on to undertake a powerful analysis of the role of universities within and outside its walls, linking learning and action to rethink the role of the institution.

Nowhere is his use of Williams' distinction clearer than in the chapter, by Gwyneth Allatt and Lynn Tett, on literacy workers' capacity to protect dialogical, learner centred learning, whilst teaching 'employability skills' - a more narrowly utilitarian programme, more alive to labour market planning than learners' needs. They describe how tutors hold on to their understanding of how to best engage (Williams' residual discourse), whilst securing strategic compliance - 'making space for things like creative writing as well as meeting regulations'.

They cite the example of a tutor, working in a homeless project with a formally constrained employability curriculum, starting off by:

Asking them about their housing issues or how they have dealt with social work so that we can use their experience. We get to deliver our outputs on being 'employment ready' but we start from their knowledge rather than telling them what to do and it's so much more effective.

Similarly in a family learning workshop the emphasis is starting from learners' experience and their strengths, fostering a culture of sharing knowledge, and building the confidence of the group together, to develop knowledge as a vehicle for expressing critical opinions about the world - embedding the externally determined curriculum within an expansive and creative learning culture centred on dialogue, on talk leading to writing and hence to literacies relevant to lives and work alike.

Virginie Teriault offers a similar analysis in her account of work in two local Quebequois projects working with young people, 16 to 30, experiencing precarity, within a tightly prescribed state funded and accountable structure. She describes how the projects' youth workers develop what she calls 'conflictual co-operation', a complex of compliant and resistant practices that assist learners to express their creativity, and find their voices whilst operating programmes which are narrowly focused on employability and the needs of local labour markets. This is done through workers' exploration of the possibilities of using the forms of scrutiny and accountability as sites for learning, both to meet the expectations of funders and to offer sites of resistance. This is done through inserting learners' voices into formal audit structures. In the highly prescribed format of AGMs, obligatory under Canadian law for non-profit organisations, the programme participants claimed a

space for their own voices to be heard through a slam poem, in a strikingly different cadence from the official documentation, capturing with energy and irony the tension between what was expected, and how learners' experiences needed to be accommodated. Every word aligned with the external expectations, yet the form and energy of learner voices subverts, resists.

Whilst Finnegan analyses exploitable spaces within the neoliberal project, Anna Larson and Pamela Cort's history of Danish adult education policy over forty years offers a forensic account of the replacement of liberal and inclusive adult education policies by narrower economy focused and utilitarian policies. It makes sober reading - and is paralleled by the *cri de coeur* in Keiko Yasukawa and Pamela Osmond's account of Australian adult basic education, formally lodged now within solidly vocational skills agencies, where teachers draw sustenance and resources of hope from solidarity with practitioners in other countries.

That there are benign spaces to be found within the dominant discourse, however, is richly illustrated in Marcella Milana and Francesca Rapana's paper, which takes the example of the *Universita della Terza Eta e del Tempo Disponibile* - a public provider of popular education in the Autonomous Province of Trento in Italy. Much like the 1980s in the UK, when London's adult education services flowered during the years when Thatcherism was developing the neoliberal ideas and practices now so widespread because its municipal government pursued radically different socially inclusive policies to those of the national state - until it was closed down, Trento used its autonomy to support popular education strategies designed to empower people to understand and to act to change social conditions. The resultant richly expressive development of the popular education project was able to at once thrive with the support of the local state, and to develop provision whose very success offered a critique of increasingly homogenised, and narrowly utilitarian European policies for adult and lifelong learning.

Altogether, the sixteen essays are organised into five sections, covering adult, school and higher education, national and transnational perspectives. It is particularly strong on the experience of community learning and education, but weaker on colleges (apart from Vicky Duckworth and Rob Smith's essay), where it could be argued the greatest challenges lie in protecting liberal values in vocational education. Nevertheless, it has a rich vein of contributions from Canada, the USA, Australia, Denmark, Italy, Greece, Ireland, and the UK, ranging from curricular and institutional innovation in schools, including the use of art as a site of resistance, and another of parents creating an alternative more enlightened school, to an account of librarians countering the ubiquitous spread of paywalls and privatisation of knowledge; from an account of academics drawing on trade union opposition to ever tighter constraints on action, powerful illustrations of the power of learners' voices, articulating their own complex aspirational and learning trajectories, and a range of more detailed explorations of resistant practice.

There are, as well, explorations of transnational policy spaces for contesting the hegemony of neoliberal thinking

In the last chapter Carlos Vargas-Tamez explores the impact of the two dominant international discourses on adult education and lifelong learning. The first, the rights and values centred approach to education is enshrined in the work of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), with its commitment to inclusion, to respect for diversity, and to ensure equity for marginalised communities and peoples. As he shows it is regularly honoured in international agreements, but all too often ignored in policy and practice on the ground. By contrast, the ideas developed by the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, focused on human capital, and the role of skills development in strengthening it, have increasingly dominated the policy landscape. Nevertheless, as the collection of essays richly illustrates, it is the UNESCO perspective that inspires the writers of this volume and the practitioners and learners whose work they report.

In their afterword, Tett and Hamilton offer ten conclusions: that we should share values explicitly; value working collectively; that we should engage learners' perspectives; harness communication technologies, and foster creativity. We should collaborate with new groups; work both horizontally with peers, and have strategies (vertically) to seek change; that we develop a 'knowledge commons' - keeping access to information free; that we should foster shared responsibility between learners and professionals, and that we should value and use educational research as a resource for hope. It is not a bad checklist for activists.

If I have a criticism of the book, it is that it shows clearly how space for other ways of working can be asserted in literacy, the humanities and social sciences, it lacked examples of the same spaces being fought for, and achieved in craft and skills based training, in the hard sciences, or in business studies. But that would perhaps be a useful complementary volume to this very useful and stimulating collection.

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