

## Review

**Lyn Tett and Mary Hamilton (eds) (2019) *Resisting Neoliberalism in Education: Local, National and Transnational Perspectives*, Bristol: Policy Press. 290pp.**

In this edited collection from Tett and Hamilton, the authors explore the pervasive nature of neoliberalism within a range of educational contexts, including compulsory, adult and higher education. The need to resist dominant ideology, which puts profit over people, is a key theme throughout. Part One provides food for thought on ways to subvert dominant ideology within adult education. Chapter 1 (Thériault) examines the demands on community-based organisations in Quebec to undertake ‘accountability literacies’ (p.13) to prove their worth but highlights the resourcefulness of youth workers, who practise everyday resistance. I was left with a desire to read even more about the findings from this study, having personal experience of ‘conflictual cooperation’ as a youth worker funded by the state whilst challenging state demands on young people. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on adult education in England, examining adult literacy practice and policy. Duckworth and Smith (Chapter 2) propose that a discourse of transformation and hope constitutes natural resistance to the dominant expectations of ‘performative curricula’ (p.38). Allatt and Tett (Chapter 3) describe the approaches that adult literacy workers use to navigate ‘creative solutions’ (p.53) to meeting the demands set out by the discourse of employability skills that permeates policy and practice.

Part Two considers forms of resistance within compulsory education. McKee et al (Chapter 4) outline results from their study in a school in Ontario, Canada, in which a community of practice (Wenger,1998) was developed that transformed the literacy practice with first-grade pupils. The chapter emphasises that by focusing on a pupil-led approach using digital literacy, a hopeful and creative pedagogy is possible. Chapter 5 (Thomson and Hall, p.75) regales the possibilities of art-informed learning as an approach that contrasts with ‘the norm of micro-targets, the dull daily diet of so much neoliberal schooling’ (p.86). Hursh et al (Chapter 6) provide insights into a successful social movement in New York that saw parents as activists, working to challenge policy

decisions that embodied the neoliberal spirit of ‘high-stakes testing’ (p.91). This chapter is a great example of practice that counters any claims of apathy within such communities. Desai et al (Chapter 7) make a compelling case for educators as healers within communities that have been blighted by neoliberal policies. They posit education as a process through which ‘body-soul rooted pedagogy’ (p.103) can heal the traumas experienced by young people within the US school system. The authors propose that education must ‘tap into the deep mind/body/spirit knowing of people of colour’ as the basis for education as an act of hope and resistance.

Part Three of the book considers the impact of neoliberalism within higher education, beginning with Quinn and Bates (Chapter 8), who explore the university library as a site of resistance to neoliberalism. The university library is not immune to the demands of managerialism and capitalism. The authors suggest a process that is reminiscent of Freire’s pedagogy: ‘engaging in critical and honest conversations with students and colleagues represents a small-scale but profound practice through which to work towards remaking our worlds on a daily basis’ (p.131). Hamilton (Chapter 9) examines the life histories, contexts and practice of academic staff and refers to the increasing pressures they face, including the diminishing space and time available for scholarship. The chapter concludes by outlining one of the ultimate acts of resistance by academic staff, i.e. industrial action. It remains unclear if this action will bring change particularly as the global pandemic has impacted academics’ workloads as they pirouetted to meet the demands of online teaching. Finnegan, in the final chapter of Part Three, considers the possibilities of working against the neoliberal demands of higher education in Ireland. He refers to the embodiment of passion for learning in academic staff and concludes with a call to ‘build alliances and dialogue’ (p.162) to create a new vision of higher education based on a shared belief in ‘the non-commodifiable nature of education’.

Part Four includes insights on adult and popular education from Italy (Milana and Rapana, Chapter 11), Denmark (Larson and Cort, Chapter 12), and Australia (Yasukawa and Osmond, Chapter 13). Across all contexts, adult education faces the demands of competition and the need to produce adults equipped to contribute to economic development. Milana and Rapana emphasise the importance of

understanding the frames of reference that shape adult education and suggest adult educators must nourish ‘concepts of inclusion, participation and culture’ (p.171). Larson and Cort outline their efforts to ensure ‘dialogue and empowerment through participation’ (p.191), rejecting the primacy of adult education as the vehicle to produce a well-qualified workforce in Denmark. In Australia, there is a call to ‘critically interpret aspects of the dominant discourse’ (Yasukawa and Osmond, p.205).

Chapter 14 by Stevenson et al. considers the impact of policy and the European Semester. The European Semester is a structure that enables the management of economic policies across the European Union and should be used as a democratic space to influence to development of education policy that promotes a ‘progressive commitment to social justice issues and public service provision’ (p.221). Zarifis (Chapter 15) calls for adult education as a form of ‘active participatory citizenship’ (p.236) and adult educators to be agents of resistance to ensure learning spaces that pursue ‘basic human ethics’. An awareness of learners’ culture and how an adult educator’s culture may influence the learning experience is vital. Finally, Vargas-Tamez (Chapter 16) calls for education to reject the language of meritocracy that is synonymous with neoliberal ideology. The last chapter and the Afterword by Hamilton and Tett emphasise the demand for an authentic enactment of social justice and equity within education. All forms of education *should* encourage hope for a better future and offer opportunities to reject hegemonic forces. This collection provides very useful examples of how to do just that. I was left wanting to read more about the range of studies and reflections. A future edition should undoubtedly include a consideration of the impact of the global pandemic on education.

**Louise Sheridan,  
School of Education,  
University of Glasgow**