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BOOK REVIEW

Carmel Borg and Peter Mayo (Eds.) (2025). *Stretching boundaries of critical education: Past, present and future possibilities.* Faculty of Education, University of Malta. ISBN: 978-9918-20-334-5.

What do I profess? I was once thus questioned at Heathrow Airport by an immigration officer, having jotted down 'professor' as my employment on an immigration form. It is not an easy question to answer, especially on the fly.

As one of so many educators, I often worry and think about how best to engage with my classroom, and its human subjects, shaping this amalgam into an exciting and energising experience, with productive consequences beyond the lecture itself. But: what if my students are just interested in securing a grade and getting on with their lives? What does 'education' really mean to these persons? And do I bother to publish for my own self-aggrandisement, especially when so many students don't read, even if they had time to do so?

These hard questions keep piling up. We never successfully address them; and they never go away. But we *can* try and get to better grips with them by venturing in either of two directions: upstream, to better understand the contexts and dynamics that have led to the contemporary classroom; and downstream, to scrutinise how to foster specific educational settings that build respectful, dialectical, peer-to-peer conversations; that liberate and empower those involved. (Calling those involved 'students' here is quite unsavoury.)

In *Stretching boundaries of critical education,* long-time collaborators Borg and Mayo curate a series of papers presented at an international conference on Critical Adult Learning and Education held in Valletta, Malta, in May 2023, under the aegis of the UNESCO Chair in Global Adult Education and the University of Malta's Department of Arts, Open Communities and Adult Education. Developed over five themed sections – internationalism, revolution, law and policy, engagement with key theory and economic considerations – the text grapples solidly with the origins of schooling and curricula as much as with the promises of education.

First, legacy and history: Jamaican icon Bob Marley once asked: "why do we get an education where we don't know who we is; but we know who Christopher Colombus and Marco Polo is?" The design of schooling and its programmes of instruction continue to be driven by the burdensome legacies of (Western) history, colonialism, pseudo-nationalist populism, militarist culture, hierarchisation via social class, race and gender, oppressive ideologies and market exigencies, including human capital theory. The very language of instruction and the organisation of classroom time and space are symptomatic of these power dynamics. We may be able to challenge – yet perhaps not change – this baggage; on the other hand, we should note, as should our 'students', that this condition is socially and economically constructed. It is easier to dream alternatives when one - rather, we - understand that the current predicament is not a foregone set-up.

Second, puddles and doses of liberatory education. Farsighted politicians and mobilised educators from all stripes and contexts have devised intriguing and imaginative techniques and pedagogies to privilege transformation and empowerment. For example, cooperative economics *is* possible; humans need not engage in perpetual atomised competition, and leading to the destruction of public goods: there are vital successes to be secured when banding together, as trade union and political mobilisation can attest. Training in practical skills can enrich theoretical educational experiences and outcomes, even in university settings: ask my students, all of whom get a taste of fieldwork. Women have been avid, culture-friendly educators, particularly when formal systems and institutions break down, as in times of war and social turbulence. Eliciting narratives, memories and other 'testimonials' helps to expose and unpack power dynamics and to understand why things 'just happen' the way they do. There are many learning spaces beyond schooling, from early childhood settings to adult and elder education fora and place-based community projects, where the exigencies of the 'neo-liberal world order' are weaker and less paradigmatic. Non-Western cultures can question 'traditional' (meaning imported) education methods and outcomes: these often narrowly serve a minority elite. It is helpful to ask 'who wins? who loses?' from educational provision. To start righting the world, how about we start re-writing it?

Chapters delve into the Africo-centric educational philosophy of Tanzanian leader Julius Nyerere; the history and influence of militarism in Brazilian education; the basis for curriculum development in medical education; the integration of feminist insights into critical pedagogy; the inspiration and essence of the popular education programme in the Caribbean island state of Grenada durin g the rule of the New Jewel Movement (1979-83); Greek village schools in the context of national resistance during Nazi occupation (1941-44); the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on adult education in the Arab world; the potential for adult educators to act as catalysts for change; the incorporation

of drama and theatre techniques into participant-led research and 'knowledge exchange' in the United Kingdom; challenging official narratives via life history accounts and memory recovery in Spain; a reminder of the centrality of social class (not so fashionable under neo-liberal thought); critiquing the shunning of practical skills and mainstreaming them again in higher education; the implications of establishing a proper legal framework to interrogate the relationship between education and law; the rise of human capital theory in Türkiye, leading to its systematic privatisation and commercialisation; an overview of critical education; a studied examination of populist movements in the context of industrial development in Northern Italy and Malta; how personal narratives become powerful tools amongst US-Mexican students in an Oregon college; the implications of literacy programmes for the elderly in Korea; and how professional development at the University of Malta helps early-career academics embrace and operationalise a more facilitative role.

This book has an ambitious, global scope; but all chapters converge around the significance of 'stretching boundaries' by integrating critical pedagogy into educational systems and settings. Their analysis suggests that education can play a subversive role in challenging neoliberal policies, promoting social justice and empowering marginalised groups or communities. As Carmel Borg suggests, it is by looking back with a trained and critical eye, that one can then move forward in hope (p. 313).

So: what do you profess?

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