

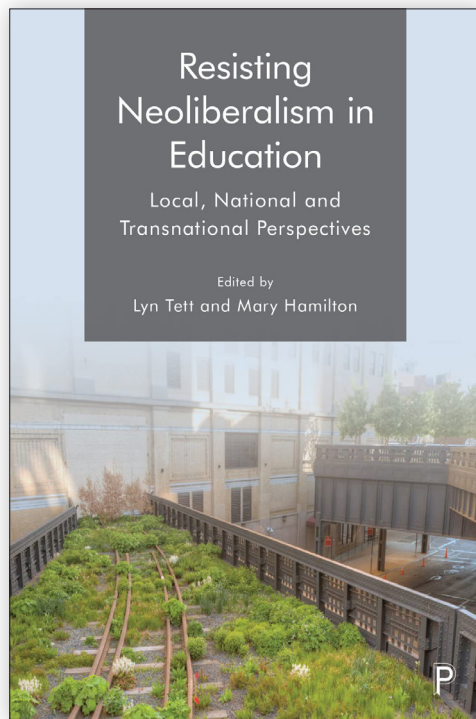
# Review of *Resisting Neoliberalism in Education: Local, National and Transnational Perspectives*

Erik Jacobson, Montclair State University

As described by the editors of *Resisting Neoliberalism in Education*, the key goals of the collection are to share “resources of hope” and to identify “interstices for resistance - points where it is possible to intervene to disrupt the dominant neoliberal regime and to help emergent, more emancipatory, cultures to take root” (p. 253). As such, the volume is intended to not just diagnose the societal, economic, and educational ills created by neoliberalism, but to also highlight practices that point towards a more humane future. Rather than privileging a single strategy, the editors suggest, “Resistance to neoliberalism is a mindset: a set of dispositions, be these individual or collective, that challenges the social and educational injustices that neoliberalism promulgates and institutionalizes” (p. xix). Each of the chapters addresses different aspects of this mindset, across different educational contexts.

Unlike with many edited volumes, here discussion of adult education in its various forms is not an afterthought. Indeed, the first section is devoted to studies of adult education. The editors explain that, “We begin with adult education because

this is the area that often has enough flexibility to offer a variety of ‘resources of hope’ for democratic renewal” (p. 5). As an example, Chapter One focuses on how the leaders of a community-based program in Quebec learned to navigate accountability regimes using a strategy referred to as ‘dynamic resistance’ – adapting neoliberal practices to their own ends. Chapter Three presents a program in the UK using similar tactics. From a different perspective, Chapters Two and Twelve describe ways that learners and teachers try to reshape educational spaces by redefining what it means to be an adult learner. Here the resistance takes place at the personal level, with a refusal to be identified in deficit terms.



Tett, L., & Hamilton, M. (Eds.). (2019). *Resisting Neoliberalism in Education: Local, National and Transnational Perspectives*. Bristol University Press. 248 pages. \$45.95, paperback and ePub; \$149.95, hardcover. ISBN: 9781447350071 (paperback); 9781447350057 (hardcover); 9781447350200 (ePub). <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvnjbdm2>

Some of this occurs via critical dialogues that teachers and learners have about the nature of literacy practice, and learners explicitly reclaim agency and open new opportunities for themselves. The suggestion is that adult education may have more of these spaces of possibility than K-12 institutions, and multiple authors draw on the history of critical pedagogy in adult education as a lodestar.


Although there are reports in the volume that may indeed act as *resources of hope*, much of the analysis is focused on what has been lost in the last few decades of neoliberal policy ascendancy. In country after country, we get accounts of how there has been a shift away from holistic, transformative, or liberatory education efforts towards the accountability logics associated with human resource development. Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen move the analysis to the regional level, with detailed descriptions of policy making procedures within the EU. As a eulogy for a more humanist model of adult education, the volume is a very detailed one, with specific analysis of how neoliberalism can be directly tied to curricular changes, shifts in teacher training and the narrowing of outcomes that can be reported to funders. This means that rather than being an abstract denunciation of the neoliberal turn, the authors are able to point to a multitude of specific and concrete ways that education has been reshaped.

A consistent theme across the chapters is that another world is possible (contrary to the assertions of those promoting neoliberalism as the only rational way to organize society and economic activity) and that those committed to a different set of principles need to stand strong. However, despite general and repeated calls for hope in the face of the neoliberal onslaught, less time is spent on the specifics of how resistance as a mindset

has been instantiated. There certainly is value in rallying the troops, and a few of the chapters provide helpful theory and suggestions for concrete practice, but there is often a sense that the resistance the authors are calling for remains more of a possibility than an insurgency.

True to its title, the chapters cover programs and policies from a number of countries, including England, Canada, Denmark, Australia, the United States, Italy, and Ireland. Although this provides a chance to compare the situation in North America and Europe, it would have been helpful to have accounts from other parts of the globe. For example, there are a number of notable efforts in Mexico, and in Central and South America, where adult learners and teachers are explicitly engaging in work that is combatting neoliberalism and colonialism. This includes experiments with horizontalism in Argentina (Sitrin, 2012) and community-based education projects initiated by indigenous communities in Oaxaca (Meyer & Alvarado, 2010). Their experiences and insights would certainly add depth to the analysis. Of course, a text cannot cover everything, but getting perspectives beyond Europe and North America would increase the possibilities for transnational learning and solidarity.

On the whole, the text is more helpful in terms of the diagnosis it provides than any remedies it suggests. However, that diagnosis is no small thing. The nature of neoliberalism is covered in great detail, and in thoughtful ways that highlight history and the present moment. Additionally, because 7 of the 16 chapters directly engage with various types of adult education (adult basic education, higher education, and popular education programs), those working in the field may find useful conceptual tools and language for their own acts of resistance. *Resisting Neoliberalism in Education* may not present



a clear path forward, but the various studies it presents highlight how many terrains the battle against neoliberalism in education is being fought on – not only in government offices and large institutions, but also in classrooms and interpersonal relations. The studies also suggest

how learners, teachers, program directors and policy leaders can find their own means of resisting and encouraging the development of more emancipatory cultures. In the end, individual readers will have to decide how much hope the text provides them.



## References

Meyer, L., & Alvarado, M. (Eds.) (2010). *New world of indigenous resistance*. City Lights Books.

Sitrin, M. (2012). *Everyday revolutions: Horizontalism and autonomy in Argentina*. Zed Books.