

Book Review: *Education, Equality and Justice in the New Normal: Global Responses to the Pandemic* edited by Inny Accioly and Donaldo Macedo

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BOOK REVIEW

EDUCATION, EQUALITY AND JUSTICE IN THE NEW NORMAL:

GLOBAL RESPONSES TO THE PANDEMIC

EDITED BY INNY ACCIOLY AND DONALDO MACEDO

BLOOMSBURY PUBLISHING, 2021. XXIV + 216 PAGES

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Inny Accioly and Donaldo Macedo, the coeditors of *Education, Equality and Justice in the New Normal: Global Responses to the Pandemic*, have powerfully voiced the uncertainties, struggles, and challenges the world has faced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and illuminate a ray of hope for the future. This volume helps us to understand how the pandemic exposed the fragility of our education institutions, especially those serving vulnerable populations. Accioly and Macedo emphasize the inadequacies of our global education institutions and how the pandemic revealed the glaring inequities in society, which they argue are largely caused by capitalism and neoliberalism.

This volume showcases prominent thinkers in the field of education, from academic scholars in the Global North, such as Noam Chomsky, to indigenous leaders like Chief Luiz Katu, who is head of the Potiguara, an indigenous people who live in Brazil's Northeast Region. It was refreshing to see that several of the authors wrote their chapters in their preferred or first language, which were then translated into English.

The coeditors and the contributors to this volume issue a radical call to action to confront fragmented and inequitable approaches to education, arguing that neoliberal and pro-capitalist ideas are obstacles to creating a holistic education system. In chapter 1, Accioly and Macedo state that neoliberalism will be the "new normal" as long as the world's ruling elites continue to be motivated by neoliberal ideas of unrestrained power and financial greed that put the welfare of the economy and the welfare of the public in direct opposition. In chapter 4, Leher comments that individualism, supported by technology giants such as Google, has also emerged as part of this new normal in Brazil, especially as education transitioned increasingly to a virtual rather than face-to-face environment during the pandemic. This environment is expanding in Brazil's higher education institutions.

Another central theme in this volume is the predominant preoccupation with education as a commodity and the continued argument that this benefits a knowledge economy. Leher contributes to this discussion, noting the importance placed on operational skills or a skills-based education. He writes that there are several disadvantages and limitations to this framework. For example, the current practices of many education systems are closely linked to modern capitalism and its tenets, as they were developed in the years after the Industrial Revolution. As argued in other chapters, neoliberal agendas have continually failed to acknowledge the indigenous education systems that have persisted for millennia, irrespective of colonization and capitalism. Many indigenous education systems are sustainable and community based, but they continue to be eliminated or replaced with systems that promote uniformity.

This volume aligns well with ongoing work and debates in the field of education in emergencies (EiE). Educators worldwide continue to deal with the pandemic's effects on education systems in areas of crisis and conflict, including higher dropout rates, gender-based violence, and the ongoing challenges of climate change that have affected access to food and water and made populations more susceptible to natural disasters. For example, several of the contributors, including Chomsky, Tsiakalos, and Lourerio, discuss how regions in Latin America and South Asia may become unlivable due to climate change combined with unstable political contexts.¹ In chapter 10, Lourerio outlines the need for critical environmental education that includes dialogue with traditional communities, such as those in Brazil. He writes that all people have a right to education and a safe environment as a "common good," and that understanding the impact of colonization, capitalism, and modernization sheds light on the need to preserve the environment and the associated indigenous knowledge.

The volume also showcases political and economic decisions made by leaders in Italy, the United States, India, and Brazil at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Italy, as Vittoria and Muraca discuss in chapter 7, the government's initial lockdown prioritized the health of the people over the economy. However, after a period of time, this proved to be challenging, due to persevering neoliberal agendas which prioritized the economy. In contrast, the volume showcases how the United States, India, and Brazil undermined access to health care, put essential workers at risk, and used the media to deflect criticisms of decisions about the pandemic. For example, Chomsky and Filippakou, in chapters 2 and 3, respectively, provide important insights into how the US government's response

¹ We see this clearly in recent news reports of heavier than normal monsoon rains and glacial melting in the Himalayas which has caused disastrous flooding in Pakistan.

to COVID-19 under President Trump was designed primarily to protect the economy, and how the neoliberal agenda remained at the forefront of policy decisions. Other contributors draw a parallel to the actions of leaders in other parts of the world, particularly in Brazil and India. Tsiakalos, Malichudis, and Papangeli (chap. 5) and Macrine (chap. 6) complement this discussion and outline how systemic racism allowed COVID-19 to disproportionately affect the most vulnerable and minoritized populations, particularly in Europe and the United States. Reading these chapters, I was reminded of Arundhati Roy, an Indian author and political activist, who asks how the current pandemic, which has exposed severe inequalities in our world, can help us “imagine another world” in which we can address xenophobia, racism, and other structural inequalities globally.

The book also resonates with the work of educators, scholars, and development practitioners in the EiE field, especially with limited resources and the inequitable distribution of resources. In chapter 8, Borg and Mayo illustrate how the pandemic impacted the Republic of Malta. Unlike other European countries, Malta’s economic and financial struggles made it challenging to deliver virtual education to all students. We saw this occur in many other regions, countries, and communities, where the pandemic increased barriers to accessing education.

According to Accioly and Macedo, the pandemic further revealed that generating profits remains a predominant goal of countries, and that maintaining economic productivity and protecting the health and wellbeing of our populations are conflicting goals. As we reflect on the global education response to COVID-19, we in the EiE field are compelled to acknowledge that racism and colonialism are still present in our work.

My own research focuses on indigenous knowledge in education, thus it was encouraging that Accioly and Macedo referred to indigenous philosophies as a counterbalance to capitalism. In the volume’s final chapter, “Resisting and Re-Existing on Earth: Politics for Hope and *Buen Vivir*,” Katu, Sánchez, and Camargo argue that, although we all were affected by the pandemic, the severity of its impact was “visibly racist and unequal” (p. 148). The consequences of this inequality during the pandemic confirm the pressing need to acknowledge and embrace the multiethnicity of societies in our own worlds and across the wider world. I appreciated that, in chapter 9, Fernandez, Salinas Barrios, and Lira discussed the importance of teachers as change agents in education and how teachers in Chile used the pandemic to amplify their voices, particularly on the use of social media in education.

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I agree with Accioly and Macedo's argument that the new normal must become collective, as there are many opportunities to learn from the plurality of knowledge in our world. Mainstream scholars might consider this problematic, but they must acknowledge that there is no one universal truth or universal reality and that the plurality of knowledge can enhance the global dialogue in many fields, including the sciences. This volume provides an important starting point for such conversations, but there is more to discuss and work on. For example, work that builds on this volume should highlight the opinions and experiences of communities in sub-Saharan Africa, where important discussions on inequality took place during the pandemic, including access to health care and virtual education, and where communities are still dealing with the impact of global decisions made during the pandemic.

I would recommend this book to graduate programs preparing students to work in the post-COVID-19 world, and to practitioners in the EiE field who are navigating emergency contexts and dealing with the challenges of ongoing neoliberal and capitalistic interests, as it will encourage them to reflect on and seek alternatives.

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