

BOOK REVIEWS

International Handbook of Progressive Education
by **Mustafa Yunus Eryaman & Bertram C. Bruce (Eds.)**
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Comprising a collection of journal articles and papers, this long book considers the role that progressive education can and should have in the twenty-first century at a point in which national systems of schooling are beset with neo-liberal notions of management and efficiency. Drawing on a range of perspectives and examples—from within the past as well as from a range of different countries in the present—the various authors make a case for the importance of individual transformation and for the development of active and questioning global citizens. Schools are of course central to this but so too are other settings, many of which are included in the wide-ranging discussions found here.

This is undoubtedly amongst the longest and certainly weightiest books on the much-covered ground of progressive education and serves to compliment recent similar synoptic works in the field including Matt Hern's *A New Deschooling Reader* (2008), Helen Lees and Nel Noddings' *The Palgrave International Handbook of Alternative Education* (2016) as well as my own *Progressive Education: A Critical Introduction* (2013). However, whilst the first two of these texts were concerned with looking solely at notions of democratic self-governance and the latter intentionally historical without straying too far outside of an established European locus, this volume is much broader both intellectually and geographically. Boasting 47 chapters and including contributors from twenty countries including those as far afield as New Zealand, Georgia and Spain, the scope of this book is impressive, daunting and, as is the nature of such works, wholly diffuse with some of the essays being reproductions of earlier quite specialist journal articles published within the *International Journal of Progressive Education*. Although effectively therefore a series of disparate publications which take the reader across the globe some sense of order is attempted by a division of five sections, each with an introduction, comprising the Past, the Present (including

both schools and other educational settings), the Future and concluding with Overarching Issues in which critical pedagogy is considered (rightly) as the dominant manifestation of contemporary progressivism. An essay by the ever-engaging Henry Giroux serves to reinforce this point and indeed marks the overall tone which is (perhaps expectedly) anti-authority and challenging of the status quo.

One fundamental issue when addressing the topic of progressive education lies in developing an acceptable working definition, a task made nigh-on impossible by the competing use of discourses and practices across a range of settings and time-frames. This was a point long-ago recognized by the distinguished historians Herbert Kliebard and Lawrence Cremin (and similarly made here) who attributed any lack of terminological specificity to the pluralistic nature of its origins and its competing interpretations across time. Pervading throughout this book however is an understanding of progressivism as stemming from American-style pragmatism, beginning in the 1870s with its philosophical development (a key figure being William James) and subsequently put into practice by Francis Parker and, inevitably, the unavoidable colossus that is John Dewey. Indeed, Dewey dominates these pages (one chapter title refers to him as a “guiding foundation”), not least perhaps because his concerns over democratic participation and the need to enrich individuals with a range of relevant societal skills stands as a necessary corrective for a contemporary education system which, the editors argue, is dominated by capitalism, efficiency and quantification. Whilst this diagnosis is not in itself new, and brilliantly articulated within the works of such sociologists as Stephen Ball (2012) and Michael Apple (2012), one of the joys of dipping into these pages (and it is very much that sort of book) is to see how, in very practical and global ways, older historical ideas still carry relevance and weight today.

Of course to premise the volume on this dominant “American progressive tradition” thereby implicitly sidesteps more Romantic and, therefore, esoteric understandings of child-centeredness including those ideas of Froebel, Steiner (three mentions each) and Montessori. Ultimately though this is no bad thing and the heart of the book is one which beats with the themes of reconstruction and social-renewal—key concerns for the Deweyans amid the need to be forward-looking yet tempered by reference to the past. There is a glut of important chapters relating for instance to aspects of citizenship education and which might, since the book’s original publication, be of still greater relevance following recent political upheavals and governmental responses to, for instance, threats of terrorism and economic crisis. Issuing such clarion calls for teachers and pupils to act as change agents and become active citizens gives a further hint at the idea of progressivism as being now a political construction and one emboldened through pulling hard on its past threads of social reform. Change in this context—and following the claims of the old firebrand George Counts—is however understood here more broadly and incorporates not merely social changes within wider society but also personal

transformations of the self. Leo Casey's chapter on the telos of learning was particularly insightful on this, charting as it does new technologies and ways of learning which are now more widely available and enable access to previously unimagined networks.

This book is unashamedly leftist in its stance and this will no doubt appeal to much of its (and this journal's) readership. If we are—the editors contend—to counter the prevailing noxious neo-liberal trends within education then it is only through the development of critical thinking and moral responsibility. This paradigm-shift is referred to early on as the progressive impulse and which is equated with developing a “conception of the good life” (p. xiv)—utopian dreams furthered by asking questions of challenge and refusing to entrench systems of efficiency. Nor is such a prescription limited solely to schools; museums, arts centres, Special Educational Needs providers and teacher training colleges are all seen and discussed here as contested spaces in which the development of politically conscious individuals can, and should, take place. Hardly surprising that in much of this the explicitly creative subjects are central to such claims and the global downgrading of their curricula status in recent times at the expense of other “core” disciplines is hardly coincidental. In therefore providing concrete examples of practice, the book offers practical and universally applicable solutions which move beyond simple theorizing. Examples from (perhaps surprisingly) China and Indonesia show the importance in particular of a broader global outlook.

Ultimately, this is a sprawling tome with many things of interest and, as an historian, I particularly enjoyed the earlier chapters which sought to identify solutions to the present from those found within the past. Other readers will no doubt find their own interests satisfied elsewhere. What can be said however is that, whilst an academic read, it is an optimistic one and there is much here for the scholar, student and practitioner to suggest that the spirit of Dewey and the progressive tradition can be kept alive. In the current educational climate, this surely remains an essential priority.

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