

BOOK REVIEW

Carmel Borg and Peter Mayo (Eds.)

*Stretching Boundaries of Critical Education:
Past, Present, and Future Possibilities,*
Faculty of Education, University of Malta, Malta,
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When you are teaching, sometimes you need to stop and truly reflect on what you are doing. When I was invited to review this book, it prompted me to pause and re-examine my role as an educator, and to reflect more deeply on the current state of education in Malta. I became a teacher in 1989 because I firmly believed that education could be a tool for social change - one that encourages people to think critically, to empower themselves, and to support marginalised communities. Reading this volume reaffirmed my conviction about the transformative power of education and reminded me of the importance of resisting the reproduction of social exclusion and injustice within educational systems.

The structure of the book itself invites reflection. It uses the past to interrogate the present, opening up possibilities for a more emancipatory future in education. Critical education challenges traditional norms and practices, pushing beyond established boundaries to address issues of power, inequality, and social justice. The book powerfully demonstrates how learning can be transformative, helping individuals and communities to question dominant narratives and engage in practices of emancipation. It provides much-needed spaces for marginalised voices to be heard, recognised, and empowered—to envision and fight for alternatives to injustice.

I particularly appreciated how the book draws from a rich diversity of experiences and knowledge from different parts of the world - especially from countries often labelled as “less developed” in both the Global North and Global South. Contributions from scholars in the Global South show that researchers from these regions are not merely describing phenomena but are also generating critical theories with global relevance. Authors such as Njoki Wane, who explores Mwalimu Julius Nyerere’s educational philosophy of Ubuntu and self-reliance, illustrate how indigenous philosophies can offer powerful alternatives to colonial and Eurocentric models of education.

Importantly, the book seamlessly weaves together theoretical discussions and practical analyses, addressing various fields such as public education, STEM, compulsory education, adult and popular education, theatre, oral history, and literacy. The chapters reveal, for example, how colonial education undermined indigenous pedagogies (Wane), how the militarisation of education threatens democracy (Bordin), and how technocratic approaches dehumanise medical education (Grant).

Several chapters resonated with me on a personal level. I was particularly drawn to contributions that focused on grassroots initiatives and emancipatory knowledge production, such as Aidan Jolly’s work on somatic knowledge and embodied learning; Angela Daly’s “spaces of hope”; Gianna Katsiampoura’s recounting of women educators in the Greek Resistance; and Jesus Jaime-Diaz’s exploration of Critical Race Theory in Oregon’s community colleges. Eva D. Babovec’s feminist critique of critical education also stood out, reminding me how feminist and critical pedagogical frameworks share a commitment to challenging systemic inequalities and amplifying marginalised voices.

Both critical pedagogy and feminist education challenge power dynamics, reject the idea of “neutral” knowledge, and prioritise lived experiences, intersectionality, and transformative learning. Aidan Jolly’s emphasis on co-produced knowledge echoes these principles, suggesting that learners and educators must work collaboratively rather than hierarchically. Knowledge, as the book repeatedly underscores, is situated, contextual, and shaped by histories of struggle and survival.

This insistence on diverse, contextualised knowledge is urgent. As Peter Mayo and Paolo Vittoria argue, education cannot remain tethered solely to Eurocentric or North American models; it must be globally relevant

and locally responsive. In Malta, as elsewhere, we see how a single pedagogical model often marginalises vulnerable groups. Different individuals and communities require different forms of education at different stages of life - whether for healing from trauma, empowering minority groups, or fostering economic self-sufficiency.

Moreover, several chapters offer timely critiques of the commodification of education. Maria Chalari, Eleftheria Atta, and Hasan H. Aksoy warn against how market-driven priorities deepen educational inequalities - a phenomenon increasingly evident in Malta. Aksoy's critique of the growing gap between private and public education mirrors the troubling PISA results in Malta, where children from independent schools outperform their peers in state schools by nearly two years. Education risks becoming a privilege rather than a right, reinforcing existing social divides.

The book also highlights the role of non-formal education in promoting democratic and emancipatory ideals. Aidan Jolly's work with theatre, for example, illustrates how embodied practices can be used to foster public health awareness, address trauma, and build resilience through collective knowledge production - an approach deeply aligned with feminist critical pedagogy.

Another powerful contribution comes from Sung Sang Yoo, Gabyung Kim, and Yu-Na Kim, who explore literacy among the elderly. In a rapidly changing world, illiteracy - whether traditional or digital - isolates individuals and erodes their agency. Literacy remains fundamental for social participation, dignity, and self-esteem.

In conclusion, *Stretching Boundaries of Critical Education* is a rich and timely volume. It reminds us that the periphery and semi-periphery possess the capacity to generate theory, knowledge, and praxis that challenge dominant paradigms. I am deeply grateful to Professors Carmel Borg and Peter Mayo for facilitating this edition, and to all the authors who have shared their critical and hopeful visions for education. This book is not only an academic contribution; it is an invitation to rethink, to resist, and to reimagine education as a truly emancipatory force in our lives and societies.