



Education for Societal Transformation: Alternatives for a Just Future

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Steven J. Klees, Giuseppe Lipari, Carol Anne Spreen, and Deepa Srikantaiah,
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BOOK REVIEW

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Nelson Mandela once said ‘Education is the most powerful weapon to change the world’. This NORRAG (Global Education Centre of the Geneva Graduate Institute) Special issue (NSI), an open-source periodical, translates this multidimensional vision of social transformation through education in order to build a more just, equitable and sustainable planet. This book draws on experiences from across the Global South – from Argentina and Peru to South Africa, Malawi, Iran and India – to outline a robust roadmap not just for educational reform, but holistic transformation at all levels.

In these times, confronted with a planet in the midst of civilizational polycrisis this special issue conceived by The Alternative Project (TAP), a collective of progressive civil society, offers a glimmer of hope. TAP believes that the current social, political, economic and educational inequalities across the world are intertwined and reproduce inter-generational injustices. Therefore, there is an urgent need to conceptualise, showcase and expand alternative educational systems. They hold the potential to rebalance power asymmetries across the spectrum by expanding societal cooperation and solidarity with an emphasis on moral ethics and ecological sustainability.

This book is divided into nine parts with 39 short chapters. While the first part lays out the vision of educational alternatives from economic, social and political dimensions, the second to the fifth sections focus systematically on structures of school, postsecondary, non-formal education and decolonial and indigenous knowledge systems respectively. The next two segments draw attention to the climate crisis and conflict and emergencies. In conclusion, the final two sections posit the pathways of education for liberation and the way forward.

One of the primary arguments that the authors make is that while education has been positioned as one of the key contributors to societal transformation, the reimagining of the epistemic core of pedagogical redevelopment to balance quality, equity and justice considerations offers not a singular framework but multidimensional and multiscalar alternatives and innovations. However this book is not a theoretical tome, but instead it explores the landscape of experiments across the pluriverse from soul-based learning inspired by Māori traditions that aims to interrupt the ‘colonization of the unconscious’ to the use of timebanks in universities to foster fraternal, non-monetary exchanges and build a solidarity economy.

The compilation also highlights the role of a number of pioneering social movements, as cultural ‘laboratories of experience’. The research spans the expanse from the HDK (Peoples’ Democratic Congress) that unites diverse social movements in Turkey to the role of the Brazilian Union of Secondary Students’ (UBES) 2021 campaign ‘Vida, Pão, Vacina e Educação’ (Life, Bread, Vaccine and Education) and Greta Thunberg’s (Fridays for Future). In Latin America, the most transformative case is that of the Landless Workers Movement’s (MST) success in enacting the 2010 Educação do Campo (Education of the Countryside) law in Brazil with a focus on agroecology to bolster its fight for agrarian reform and alternative livelihoods. The collection also includes numerous examples from India and the diaspora including the

achievements of South Asian activist collectives to recognise 'caste' as a protected category in universities and state policies in the United States.

The strength of this compilation is the wonderful panoply of unique country case studies. One large-scale innovation is that of the *Bachilleratos Populares* (Peoples' High Schools) created within worker-managed cooperatives in abandoned factories to combat high unemployment in Argentina. Equally noteworthy is the Freirian 'revolutionary praxis' of the feminist 'Jineology' framework adopted in Rojava (the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria) from the 'Jin, Jiyan, Azadi', (Woman, Life, Freedom – WLF) movement in Iran. Each of these chapters evocatively portray the stellar achievements of these path-defining, revolutionary, organic social movements to employ education as a tool for egalitarian restructuring of societies.

However, despite the richness of scope, the book insufficiently delves into the scale, nuances and critiques of each case study as the micro-chapters are restrictive in length and structure. Further, the other noticeable lacuna is that while the compilation covers most continents and even includes a few cases from Europe and the Global North, there isn't a single case study from China and only a brief mention of the former Soviet bloc.

Nevertheless, the wealth of experiences contained in this compilation offer a ray of much-needed hope in a post-truth world confronted by the unprecedented brutality of livestreamed genocide and nuclear threats alongside the snowballing of climate-induced natural disasters. This timely comparative perspective presents a feast of the multitude of experiments to build alternative, non-hierarchical, just and participatory educational systems, and also a glimpse of the potential to reconstruct progressive societies with a vision for equality, justice and planetary sustainability.

As this sanguine book aptly concludes, contrary to Margaret Thatcher's TINA dictum that 'There is No Alternative to (neoliberal) capitalism', the 21st century reality is instead more akin to David Bollier's TAPAS – 'There are Plenty of Alternatives!' to transform our world.

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