

Book Review

Peter Mayo (2019) *Higher Education in a Globalising World, Community Engagement and Lifelong Learning* Manchester University Press, Manchester, ISBN 978 1 5261 4092 0 (HB)

This is an incisive critique of adult education highlighting its direct bearing on the practice of democracy. It makes a rewarding and insightful read, arguing for Higher Education (HE) as a public good and not just a commodity for the promotion of a neoliberal global philosophy, corroding the very soul of HE. It awakens reflection on a whole range of themes related to globalization.

Neoliberalism idealizes market-oriented progressivism and, on a global scale, views adult education merely as a means of training for capitalist ends, supporting the narrow financial interests of the very rich of this world and their transnational corporations. A predominantly capitalist grasp of adult education with its direct relevance to a westernized hegemonic globalization is what this publication very soundly argues against.

This is a problem that is central to most educational systems today. In our globalized world, the emphasis is on the acquisition of skills essential to sustaining today's economies. In point of fact the concentration on the promotion and refinement of skills has led to the sidelining of education for promoting central human values. Rather than just enabling people to adjust and integrate within a system, adult education should serve to empower groups and individuals to challenge the system, in order to transform it and give it a social justice orientation. For example, education for responsible citizenship is but an undertow in adult education programmes, very often mediated through the mode of delivery of a subject area with varying degrees of commitment to considerations of values, that might not be regarded as central to the skills indicated in the official curriculum.

Countering this neoliberal global phenomenon, driving HE down the business route, is a noble and vital undertaking that is slowly gathering momentum. Of direct relevance to adult education and lifelong learning today are Peter Mayo's descriptions and analyses of the many projects for promoting university community-based engagement. Many seek to create space edgeways for nurturing a genuinely social and democratic public environment 'in the interstices' of European HE projects tied up with the marketplace. The humanities and social sciences need to be defended at all costs as the stoutest pillars of a university's academic autonomy.

Over a period of thirty years, Peter Mayo has, in great detail, made explicit, developed and refined what inspired the many discussions we used to have about lifelong learning at the post-secondary section of the Education Department way back in the late 80s. It was the time Mehmet Onat administered the Council of Europe Adult Education for Social Change Project. Budd L. Hall's preface justly lauds Mayo's outstanding contributions to adult education, highlighting his key idea of 'globalization from below'.

In fact, at the recent meeting of the Triennial Conference of the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA) held in Belgrade last September, Peter Mayo was inducted to the International Adult Education Hall of Fame for his contributions in the field of adult education. This is also recognition of Malta's collective contribution to the internationalisation of adult education which started with the work of Kenneth Wain on Lifelong Education followed by that of a host of University of Malta scholars.

Indeed it is this idea of globalization from below, through university community engagement, that is exemplified in Chapter 7, outlining an admirably seminal initiative. In fact It describes a community engagement project run by the University of Malta, showing how, in practice, a healthy and democratic globalization must start from an in-depth appreciation of local culture often infused with religious perspectives. It involved community-based participative research taking into account all aspects of indigenous Maltese culture. It makes it very clear that disregarding elements of local culture because they challenge Western secular scientific naturalism plays into the hands of hegemonic globalization.

Chapter 6 *University/ HE LLL and the Community* again highlights the importance of globalization from below stressing the point made by Paulo

Freire that experiments in Lifelong Learning are not to be transplanted. Every particular local culture embraces its own world view. Indeed, it is wise to acknowledge, especially in our liberal secular Western world, that cultural diversity has an important role to play in promoting values relevant to a truly democratic global consciousness, allowing space for indigenous ways of being and knowing within a wider range of perspectives. In this way, a more holistic approach opens up to questions of identity formation and transnational affiliation and belonging.

Moreover, a genuine promotion of dialogue fosters democratic relations, tolerance and respect for divergent cultures. Dialogue is a defining feature of our humanity and is an essential element in promoting globalization from below. Malcolm McKenzie, a South African, in an article in the *Journal of Research in International Education* quotes a Zulu saying which encapsulates this most elegantly: *umuntu ngamuntu ngabantu* (a person becomes human through others). The bugbear of neoliberal hegemonic globalization rolls roughshod over all this.

Some types of adult education take the form of “adult schooling” while others do not extend beyond the narrow needs of professional training. These are almost always run on a commercial basis with the market place foremost in mind. The author argues that capital forces in adult education militate not only against Lifelong Learning (LLL) but also against democracy and civil society as a whole.

As Rosemary Deem points out in her postscript, Peter Mayo’s book raises a host of questions. At a time when the country in which he operates, Malta is facing accelerated social, cultural, environmental and political challenges in a world globalizing in a neoliberal mode, this book is a timely call for initiating a serious public dialogue for promoting community-based participatory research for tackling such themes as:

How to save the environment, i.e. our Earth?

How do we go about solving the Migration crisis?

Now that 16-year-olds in Malta have voting rights in the General Elections, is it not time to teach them and their teachers about the Rule of Law? Ugo Mifsud Bonnici’s book *The Law of Education* shows how one can promote a democratic culture.

How does one get to grips with the problem of illiteracy which still runs at around 20%, depending on how one reckons this grave social ill.

How can one control the increasingly selfish and rapacious tendencies in today's Shareholder Activism in the business world?

The above are all problems exacerbated by hegemonic globalization and its neoliberal agenda. Universities worldwide are deeply affected so that, in Mayo's words, "rather than being made more responsive to the democratic needs of society and engage with the preoccupations and concerns of specific communities, the discourse is being reduced to one regarding another form of business governed by the principles of the market".

Paul E. Heywood

Former Chancellor, University of Malta