

Review of:

***Higher Education in a Globalising World: Community Engagement and Lifelong Learning* by Peter Mayo. Manchester University Press, 2019. 160 pp. £80.00 (hardcover).**

Rebecca Tarlau^{a*}

^a*The Pennsylvania State University, USA*

*Correspondence: rtarlau@psu.edu

This book is at its essence a plea to rethink the future of Higher Education (HE) in Europe and globally. Rather than propose a yet-to-be-seen utopian vision of HE, Peter Mayo offers us concrete examples of how HE institutions have been organized to support a democratic ethos and the “public good”—not simply prepare students for an uncertain and unequal job market. To this end, Mayo highlights lifelong learning programs within the HE sphere, which often have more flexibility for innovation than traditional college programs while also incorporating community engagement as a central focus. Through Mayo’s analysis of the European HE education context, this book offers us both a sense of urgency about the need to fight the neoliberal tendencies that are currently shaping our HE institutions and a preliminary roadmap about what alternatives to the neoliberal model can and do look like, thus imbuing us with the hope that another higher education is possible. The book could easily be incorporated into a diversity of graduate student courses, including courses on adult education, higher education (focused on the United States and internationally), and comparative and international education. While the book analyses higher education and lifelong learning, its practical application of Freire theory and the concept of praxis could also be helpful in more general courses on social theory and education and social justice.

The book is organized in eight chapters that each offer a theoretical contribution in addition to a diversity of empirical anecdotes to support these theoretical claims. The first chapter presents the overall framework of the book: higher education is shaped by both hegemonic globalization, which has as its base a neoliberal ideology of free market capitalism, as well as globalization from below which “is characterized by international networking involving the use of technology for progressive ends” (p. 4). As a thoughtful Gramscian theorist, Mayo is careful not to position these two types of globalizations as binaries but rather processes taking place on the same institutional, social, and economic terrain. This first chapter analyses how higher education has been influenced by hegemonic globalization, leading to a strong private sector bias, the reduction of HE to a consumption service, an obsession with human resources and human capital, the public financing of private needs, an emphasis on international quality comparisons, and, in the Lifelong Learning (LLL) sphere, the “vocalizing” of all adult learning opportunities. Overall, Mayo argues that we are witnessing a re-conceptualization of the university in which “the idea of the university as a public good is being eroded in the public discourse” (p. 11). Nonetheless, this gloomy scenario that Mayo lays out is not meant to paralyze us; rather, this first chapter is Mayo’s call to action. He contends that any of us

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who care about the future of the university and public lifelong education have the duty to be part of a “struggle for preserving and opening up democratic HE spaces motivated by the principles of and commitment to social justice” (p. 13).

The subsequent seven chapters provide us with both additional justifications for this call to action and examples of what alternative HE and HE LLL could potentially look like. Chapter 2 and 3 do the former, analyzing the influence of hegemonic globalization on HE and HE LLL. Chapter 2 examines how the expansive concept of lifelong education developed by UNESCO, which provided a “humanistic view of the entire process of human learning ‘from the cradle to the grave,’” was replaced by the late 1980s with the OECD’s vision of lifelong learning (LLL) focused on preparing workers in the 25-64 age bracket for the job market. The OECD emphasis transformed learning from a social to individual responsibility. In an appropriate analogy, Mayo writes that “invest in LLL” is the new “pull up your bootstraps,” blaming individuals for not obtaining the learning they need to succeed in the new “knowledge economy.” In Chapter 3, Mayo continues to critique the ways that hegemonic globalization has shaped HE institutions; however, he also offers us some glimmers of hope. Again, drawing on his Gramscian lens, Mayo notes that institutions such as the EU are not monolithic and within the increasingly neoliberal HE sphere there is still space for bottom-up forms of globalization. Mayo uses the example of the EU’s focus on “active citizenship,” which emphasizes the collective “in the sense of people working and acting together, complementing each other” (p. 24) in contrast to the individual citizen often reduced to the consumer/producer. Mayo argues that this idea of the “active citizens” could provide a framework for universities to re-conceive their mission as “a regeneration of democracy and the public sphere” (p. 39). The key to this reimagining, according to Mayo, is the idea of praxis, or the interconnection between theory and practice, reflection and action—and especially important for higher education institutions—teaching and research.

After laying this groundwork and explaining European HE institutions as they actually exist, Mayo turns in Chapters 4-7 to concrete examples of alternatives. In Chapter 4, Mayo examines the Euro-Mediterranean region, including HE institutions in Turkey, Morocco, as well other nearby locations. Mayo shows how HE institutions in this region have invested in LLL, offering dozens of interesting examples of the adult education and workers’ education programs that have been developed. These programs focus on diverse topics from domestic violence to cultural festivals to social solidarity economies—all of which show that the Southern Mediterranean and Southern Europe already have “their own traditions of university involvement in LLL, often community-oriented, which can be instructive, in this regard, for other universities in other parts of the world” (p. 52). Chapter 5 focuses specifically on HE and LLL and how, despite the overall focus on the job market in many of these adult education programs, there are important exceptions. For example, in this chapter, Mayo examines partnerships between HE institutions and social movements, which are part of what Mayo refers to (drawing on Raymond Williams) as the “long revolution.” Of course, it is often the marginalization of these programs within the HE sphere that allows social movements to co-create these programs and also allows these programs to flourish often out of sight of the scrutiny of university administrators.

Chapter 6 focuses on how HE LLL can prioritize community engagement. This chapter is much more of a roadmap or a “how to” guide to developing these types of Freirean programs that center the community. Some of the best practices that Mayo identifies are worth repeating here, including ensuring that this education is context-specific, being aware of stereotyping and pathologizing, avoiding a deficit approach,

inviting learners for meetings to discuss and learn about the community, incorporating outdoor activities and celebrations, being cautious about what divides the community, and making sure to prioritize gender, ethnicity, and climate change as central topics in LLL programs. Mayo also reminds us that this type of community engagement does not mean you should avoid sharing “academic” or what he refers to as “powerful” knowledge, which communities often want but are not able to access. The key is not to avoid academic theory and research, but rather, ensure a dialogue between different forms of knowledge. Another key is to always approach communities with the humility that allows for these communities to take collective ownership over the educational process. As Mayo himself admits, these suggestions are a “tall order” that might feel overwhelming to implement. This is why Mayo’s penultimate chapter is a reflection on his own practice, and more specifically, his attempt to develop a community engagement project at the University of Malta. In this chapter Mayo opens up his own practice to critique, as he reflects on his attempt with his colleagues to use “Holy Week” as a community education project. Mayo’s final chapter, Chapter 8, revisits the most important themes from the book and reminds us, once again, that “alternative prefigurative institutions already exist” (p. 117) and that it is our job to expand on and build these alternatives in our own institutions.

Mayo’s *Higher Education in a Globalising World* has many strengths. First, the book seamlessly weaves theory and practice together throughout all of its chapters, avoiding a common pitfall of separating the theoretical and empirical into different and distinct parts of a text. Second, the book illustrates, without any doubt, what is currently at stake both for HE in general and HE LLL programs in particular. Mayo shows how our higher education institutions are being transformed by a hegemonic form of globalization that is obsessed with the preparation of students—adult and otherwise—for the job market and providing them with the skills necessary for a so-called “knowledge society.” He shows us that our HE institutions are more likely to be shaped by the needs of corporate interests, rather than any dedication to a democratic ethos or collective, public good. Third and finally, a big strength of the book is that Mayo does not simply leave us with this critique. He offers concrete examples of what HE alternatives have already been developed and he articulates the major components of these alternatives that people can draw on to implement in other locations. Through his regional examples of the European-Mediterranean region, his focus on HE lifelong learning programs, and his roadmap for community engagement, Mayo illustrates that higher education does not have to adhere to a market agenda, even in this global moment when neoliberalism is still hegemonic.

As a junior scholar at a public higher education institution in the United States that follows many of the neoliberal tenants Mayo describes, I did find myself searching for more answers than this single book could provide. For example, although Mayo shows how the bureaucratic tendencies in our universities are winning out over academic interests, it is still unclear how assistant professors can take action to change this trend. I am part of one of the remaining few adult education programs in United States, yet there is still an intense pressure to publish in only the best academic journals (not other popular media outlets); there is little-to-nothing in the tenure process that prioritizes community engagement; and, there is a strong push for more tuition-paying undergraduates in our classes—not incentives for extension work with adults in the community. Furthermore, female professors like myself at the beginning of their careers often have young children and thus carry a huge amount of social reproductive work in our homes. How can we be part of creating the alternatives that Mayo outlines in this important book, while also obtaining tenure and supporting our families? I found in my experience that it is only possible to do this community and activist

work *in addition* to your other university responsibilities, which means more work not different work. A second topic I wanted more clarification on as I read this book is how to navigate the very real tensions that, as Mayo points out exist in every community, when organizing university-community engagement projects. In particular, I wanted to know more about how to navigate conflicts that emerge in diverse communities across racialized groups, or in the case of where I am located, in majority-white working-class communities that embody conservative and even reactionary (white supremacist) ideologies. Third and finally, although I was inspired by Mayo's call for faculty to join with students to build a broad-based social movement to fight against the neoliberal tendencies in our universities, I also selfishly wanted a "how to" explanation of how to build this type of movement. Social movements take a long time to develop, as do their educational initiatives. For example, Mayo brings up the example of the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement's National School Florestan Fernandes (ENFF), which was founded 21 years after the founding of the movement itself. Should faculty and students be prepared for that long of a struggle to build the types of institutions we want to see? Although not explicitly addressed, Mayo's answer to this question seems to be yes, as he continually refers to these types of fights in HE institutions as the "long revolution." In many ways, Mayo's book is simply a *starting point* to begin having these conversations about how to transform our universities.

Higher Education in a Globalising World makes several important and timely contributions to the field of comparative and international higher education. First, the book illustrates some of the general trends in higher education, and more specifically, the book articulates how the competitive and corporate nature of the U.S. HE sphere is shaping educational institutions across the world. Second, the book offers an in-depth examination of European HE, describing the lexicon of HE vocabulary that has come to dominate EU HE institutions and how this vocabulary is reflective of a hegemonic form of globalization that prioritizes the market over democratic citizenship and the public sphere. Third, this book shows that within this new lexicon of HE vocabulary there are still remnants of the "social Europe," which can provide the seeds for alternative forms of institutions and programs. Fourth, this book offers countless examples of where these alternatives exist, highlighting HE LLL as an important sphere where programs that prioritize Freirean praxis have flourished. Fifth and finally, perhaps the most important contribution of Mayo's book for the field of comparative and international higher education is the friendly reminder that *lifelong learning* is an important part of the higher education institutional milieu, and indeed one of the most critical spheres to study about, learn from, and build on for those of us who still believe in the "progressive social justice-oriented higher education of the future" (p. 118).

Rebecca Tarlau is an Assistant Professor of Education and of Labor and Employment Relations at the Pennsylvania State University, affiliated with the Lifelong Learning and Adult Education Program, the Comparative and International Education program, and the Center for Global Workers' Rights. Her book *Occupying Schools, Occupying Land: How the Landless Workers Movement Transformed Brazilian Education* (Oxford University Press 2019) examines the educational initiatives of the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST), a national social movement of rural workers struggling for agrarian reform. Her current research examines teacher union organizing in Brazil, Mexico, and the United States.
