

Capitalism and colonialism are clearly identified as causes of social inequity. The edited volume suggests that social movements should not merely be positioned as struggles to mitigate capitalist-driven market failures or reclaim the excluded and marginalized, but offer micro solutions for a macro problem—as narratives that both replace and displace dominant capitalist ideologies. However, the volume falls short of any actual bridging work of how such localized social movements can inspire broader national/global change.

The book helps draw some commonalities and connections between various social movements occurring in diverse national and community contexts. The expansive geographical span of the included chapters allows readers to gain familiarity with the shared humanity embedded within each story. The book doesn’t pretend to present any grand answers (such as how to dismantle capitalism), and it does not position each narrative/account of social change (or attempts at social change) within success/failure dichotomies. Rather, the focus is on individual and collective transformations and stories of solidarity and resistance against oppression. Social movement activists, academic researchers, and educators should read this volume. Academics are cautioned about assuming a narrow vision of where and how knowledge is created, but are also encouraged to work in solidarity with grassroots movements while not assuming leadership roles. Activists will find the cases contain a breadth of lessons on organizing and maintaining momentum. Educators will have in their hands a wide variety of cases to teach their students about exploitation and marginalization as well as the persistence of various forms of resistance and efforts to create a more just world.

### References

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## **FLEXIBLE PEDAGOGY, FLEXIBLE PRACTICE: NOTES FROM THE TRENCHES OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

**Elizabeth Burge, Chère Campbell Gibson, and Terry Gibson (Eds.). Athabasca University Press, Edmonton, 2011, 348 pages.**

Flexibility is a concept found in many aspects of life, but probably nowhere is it more actively discussed than in the education sector, where definitions and practices relating to flexible pedagogy are as varied as the people and institutions involved. While recent trends tend to equate flexible education with distance and e-learning, this well-organized

collection of essays examines the issues and practices relating to flexible pedagogy from a variety of perspectives.

The book examines what constitutes flexibility within the education sector, then discusses both the driving and restraining forces affecting flexible practices. The “swamp” of reality is examined thoroughly with some very practical and realistic looks at how flexibility has been implemented in a variety of settings; this is followed by a discussion of some of the resulting pitfalls and compromises. An examination of the downside of flexible pedagogy rounds out the book and concludes with a look at “what happens in the stretch for flexibility?” (pp. 313–326) and the “challenge of weaving principles with practice” (pp. 327–341).

As a senior administrator at the UK Open University, Denise Kirkpatrick has an authoritative voice in her examination of how educational flexibility relates to Web 2.0, which she identifies as playing “an increasingly important role in higher education” (p. 22). Kirkpatrick questions the ability of educational institutions to provide flexibility without complexity in a way that is cost-efficient and maintains a high standard of quality. Julie Willems continues the discussion of what constitutes flexibility by using a series of vignettes to look at how the end users, the students, perceive their learning environment. As Willems points out, “What constitutes ‘flexibility’ for one student can be ‘rigid’ for another” (p. 29). Rounding out this section, Der-Thang Chen, Rose Liang, and Yu-Mei Wang use a mixture of personal experience, gained in Eastern and Western institutes of higher education, and empirical evidence to question “the presumption that flexibility is ‘good’ and that it has specific aims, efficiencies, and outcomes” (p. 41). They conclude by proposing that “structured flexible learning (SFL) . . . would be a productive move beyond the current discourse on flexible learning” (p. 41).

By placing flexible pedagogy and practices within varying historical, cultural, social, and political frameworks globally, the authors provide some very clear, concrete examples of how educational practices can be influenced. Milly Deweti and Jean Mitchell clearly identify both the driving forces behind flexible education and some of the constraints impeding the hoped-for social transformation in South Africa. Political, pedagogical, and productivity-related barriers are identified clearly and succinctly by Cathy Gunn, who concludes her contribution with some suggestions for overcoming these barriers. Colin Latchem and Insung Jung use the Indian legend of the six blind men and an elephant to provide an effective introduction to the issues defining flexible education throughout Asia. They provide a concise yet comprehensive summary of the driving forces behind Asia’s push for flexible education and the main impediments students and administrators face. As they point out, “Every culture needs to define flexibility within its own philosophical, theoretical, and operational framework, but it also needs to be open and sensitive to cross-cultural issues” (p. 88). Mary Simpson and Bill Anderson take a different approach; they examine how government policies, teacher and learner expectations and needs, digital technologies, and institutional practices interact to both promote and constrain flexible education, and thus conclude what is a fairly thorough overview of the factors influencing flexible pedagogy and practices.

The "swamp" section consists of a series of essays by experienced educational practitioners who were asked "to write narratively and reflectively, to tell us as much of their unvarnished experience and lessons learned as they dared without getting into trouble in their home institutions!" (p. 109) These contributors were very generous and clearly identified the aspects that contributed to successful implementation, as well as failure, of flexible education programs. They were equally generous and lucid when identifying the factors that supported and/or interfered with successful implementation of programs. The essays include an overview by Darcy Hardy of the issues involved in developing a collaborative, multi-campus system; a discussion by Andrew Higgins and Mark Northover of how a technological solution imposed by senior management was implemented; a look at Andy Lane's experiences developing and nurturing OpenLearn in the United Kingdom; and an account of Kay Mackeogh and Seamus Fox's experiences nurturing a similar system in Ireland. Darien Rossiter and Yoni Ryan identify some of the issues involved with sustaining momentum; Ryan cautions against using "the technological component of flexibility as the 'silver bullet' to meet their challenges of restricted funding and competition between providers of higher education" (p. 177). For those readers with limited time, Arthur L. Wilson provides a good general overview of the common themes of flexible learning systems and power (p. 199) in his well-written and thoughtful reflections on the foregoing "swamp" chapters.

The final two sections of the book examine the compromises that have been made in flexible pedagogy and practice as a result of dealing with the social, political, and institutional constraints, and question whether flexible practices provide the best options for students. "The fogginess of the terminology" (p. 231) and its impact on flexible education are examined by Terry Evans and Peter Smith, while Greville Rumble provides a clear overview of how costs, both hidden and overt, impact flexible education practices. Melody Thompson and Lorna Kearns reflect on how ethical decision making determines the course of flexible education policies and practices. The paradoxes and myths relating to flexible pedagogy are examined by David Harris and Adrian Kirkwood, who point out some of the realities encountered by practitioners. Alan Woodley explains how flexible learning will continue to be a viable proposition as long as there are "plenty of saps." Finally, Katherine Nicoll reminds us that flexible pedagogy, policies, and practices are powerful vehicles for effecting change throughout society before questioning whether or not we want our societies to be reconfigured without careful consideration of the how, why, and where of those policies and practices.

Overall, *Flexible Pedagogy, Flexible Practice* is an interesting and insightful book that includes practical ideas and suggestions for educators involved in flexible learning. Many of the concepts and ideas discussed will resonate with the reader, while others will challenge current thinking and beliefs. I would recommend that any practitioner or decision maker involved in the design or implementation of the policies and practices shaping flexible pedagogy take time to read and consider the ideas put forth in this book.

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