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BOOK REVIEW: *LIFELONG LEARNING, GLOBAL  
SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND SUSTAINABILITY*

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## BOOK REVIEW: *LIFELONG LEARNING, GLOBAL SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND SUSTAINABILITY*

Leona M. English & Peter Mayo. Springer Nature. 2021. 137 pages.

For the first time in human history, with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations in 2015, the global community acknowledged the criticality of lifelong learning and education to the achievement of sustainable development and economic prosperity (Benavot, 2018). Indeed, SDG 4 advances the conversation from one of ensuring access to basic primary education, as in the Millennium Development Goals, to one of also ensuring universal access to the knowledge, skills, and learning necessary to function and participate actively as national and global citizens.

English and Mayo's *Lifelong Learning, Global Social Justice, and Sustainability* is particularly applicable in this context. The authors construct the history and tell a story of the UNESCO concept of lifelong education (LLE) on its transformative journey toward lifelong learning (LLL). In Chapter 1 and employing a Shakespearean analogy to set the stage for the book, English and Mayo take issue with how LLL has been increasingly serving as a shroud to camouflage a neoliberal agenda hidden beneath. By doing so, they shed light on the transition of responsibility for, and funding of, education from the state toward individual citizens. Across all eight chapters, the authors invite readers to join them on a journey as they make a case to dismantle the current conception of LLL as a conduit for employment and reimagine LLE in a way that repositions lifelong learning as a critical tool to achieve global social justice and sustainability. In its recent *5th Global Report on Adult Learning and Education: Citizenship Education: Empowering Adults for Change*, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning underscores the pivotal role of learning in citizen development resulting in benefits that "go beyond those made explicit in the SDGs" (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2022, p. 17).

In Chapter 2, the authors introduce the European Commission's *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*, presenting it as a turning point in the evolution of LLE to LLL. The authors argue that learning underwent a transformation from once being valued as a public good (i.e., a collective and social responsibility) to being viewed as a personal endeavour with a decided focus on employability. Concomitant with this transformation, English and Mayo further contend that the evolution to LLL brought with it a commodification of education and, with it, rampant increases in tuition and other costs associated with education, resulting in learners "mortgaging" their futures and limiting their "possibilities at work and in life in general" (English & Mayo, 2021, p. 22). The authors argue that the resulting rift in the accessibility of education, a condition they refer to as "educational

apartheid” (p. 23), affects marginalized and other historically excluded populations disproportionately.

English and Mayo begin to make the case that, in order for SDG 4 to be realized, LLL must divest itself of the effects of neoliberalism that eroded education’s standing as a public good and return to a more holistic and socially responsible focus on learning. In Chapter 3, they devote valuable space and energy to a review of some of the work of Ettore Gelpi, Italian pedagogist and educator, who focused on the relationships between adult education, workers’ education, and social movements. Gelpi’s work reminds us that employability is not synonymous with employment and that there is ample opportunity for a return to an LLE that “engages critically with work and the economy rather than simply being an education for the economy” (English & Mayo, 2021, p. 35).

Chapter 4 reinforces these arguments by presenting a case study from Malta. The Maltese example illustrates that a national education system can successfully navigate networks of EU policy without fully succumbing to neoliberalism. By discovering how to work “in and around” (English & Mayo, 2021, p. 42), or “in and against” (p. 87) the system, Malta’s discourse on LLL is considered through a sustainable futures lens that weaves together factors such as the environment, gender, dis/ability, and age with employability.

The authors continue to develop the themes of gender, intersectionality, and oppression in Chapter 5, arguing that acknowledging the situations of those in inequitable power relationships forms the basis for many social issues. Drawing from the successes achieved in Malta, English and Mayo stress the criticality of policy that emerge through lenses of both intersectionality and sustainability. They maintain that, in order to address the current inequitable access to LLL, such as that experienced by women, marginalized, and other historically excluded groups, we must proceed with “our eyes wide open” (English & Mayo, 2021, p. 71) to ensure that we do not continue to “privilege the already privileged” (p. 71).

For a second time in the book, English and Mayo dedicate an entire chapter to a significant learning advocate – Paulo Freire in this case – and his concept of “learners as collective social actors” (English & Mayo, 2021, p. 81). Chapter 6 explores Freire’s humanistic pedagogical approach as a means to overcome the adverse effects of educational commodification.

In Chapter 7, English and Mayo remind us about the realities faced by the massive numbers of peoples who have been displaced due to environmental degradation and climate change, conflict and instability, and repressive and oppressive governments. Intersectionalities with gender, race, religion, and ethnicity exacerbate the problem of inequitable access to education. The authors summarize their case for a reimagined version of LLL that supports a life for all global citizens “characterized by dignity” (English & Mayo, 2021, p. 93) and that reverses the concept of human “disposability” (p. 107).

In Chapter 8, the final chapter of the book, English and Mayo speak to the unparalleled effects of COVID-19 on the globe. The authors stress that the pandemic highlighted the adverse effects of neoliberalism, clearly demonstrating the concepts of privilege for some and disposability of others simply by how vaccines and boosters were distributed globally. In addition, they worry about the potential for an expansion of inequitable access to education and learning, thereby making the achievement of SDGs all the more problematic and challenging.

Readers of English and Mayo's *Lifelong Learning, Global Social Justice, and Sustainability* will find themselves on a journey that covers eight decades of LLL history, including the many lessons we may collectively draw from to improve life for all in our finite world. Citing the "terrible and unequal world out there" (English & Mayo, 2021, p. 126), the authors make a case for social transformation as their call to action.

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