

*Changing schools: Alternative ways to make a world of difference.* Terry Wrigley, Pat Thomson, Robert Lingard (Eds.) (2012). London: Routledge. 220 pages. ISBN: 9780415558600.

The promotion of democratic citizenship and social justice in the global education community due to standardization, deficit model thinking, and high stakes testing taking over global education policy is the central purpose of *Changing Schools: Alternative Ways to Make a World of Difference*. The editors, Wrigley, Thomson, and Lingard, bring together 14 case studies from Australia, Germany, Norway, Brazil, the United States, and England to show how individual teachers, principals, schools, and sometimes school districts have altered school practice in order to create a better relationship between students and schooling. By bringing together these particular resources, the editors aspired to illustrate the possibilities that exist within the confines of standardized education, a realm that so often does not allow alternatives or reform programs to exist. To that end, the editors were unable to meet these aspirations, since many of the schools focused on in the case studies were not typical, run of the mill schools; therefore, the expectation that any teacher at any school could accomplish the ideas presented in this collection is unrealistic given the strictures and constraints placed upon teachers by most school districts.

Overall, I find the various examples moving, and each case study depicts a way that schooling could change for the better in many instances. However, the book lacks an overall cohesiveness as well as connections between chapters, elements that I would have found advantageous as a reader. The studies range in location across six vastly different countries, from preschool through to grade 12, and from low socioeconomic (SES) locales serving highly marginalized groups to high SES suburban communities. The editors, however, do not illustrate the ways in which student learning in these diverse communities may be connected either to a larger societal issue or due to problems with global educational policies. Given that the editors did not put this collection together as a prescriptive guide to how schooling could be changed, highlighting particular themes along with commonalities or differences would allow readers some insight into how focusing on pedagogy for example could be done in a multitude of ways. It is also clear from Chapter 16 that the editors, Wrigley, Thomson, and Lingard, see many threads and connections among and between the studies: Chapters 2, 6, 7, and 15, for example, all focus on the “recovery of dignity and well-being in marginalized cultures and communities” (p. 203), and Chapters 4, 8, 9, 10, and 14 all deal with alternative forms of assessment beyond the basic exchange of grades. The use of subsections such as “the dignity of marginalized groups” or “alternative assessment practices” would have been beneficial in order to highlight these threads and connections as the book progressed in order to present a clearer vision of the key possibilities presented throughout the 14 case studies. The challenge would be in finding areas of commonality between such diverse topics as 1) how the Brazilian Landless Workers’ Movement has maintained control over their own school system in Chapter 7; 2) the creation of the Coalition of Knowledge-Building Schools in Australia in Chapter 13 which highlights how teachers in New South Wales have come together to create research and share knowledge, 3) supporting student-led learning in a nursery school in England (Chapter 11); and 4) in Chapter 9, the way in which Norwegian secondary schools use technology to break down the barrier of school walls to explore the Antarctic and other locales.

In some ways, the book does bring together the open-minded alternatives that the editors wanted. For instance, Chapter 5 illustrates how three alternative schools in Australia meet the needs of marginalized students who have either dropped out or were kicked out of their previous schools. Through high teacher expectations and having teachers assist students as they work around the familial issues that often cause lateness or acting out in mainstream schools that subsequently led to students being kicked out of their previous schools, the three alternative schools exemplify ways in which schools can better meet the needs of marginalized students. Further to this, the authors of Chapter 5 also recognized that these alternative schools are not a long term option to meet the needs of marginalized students since the existence of alternative schools negate mainstream schools from having to find solutions, thereby letting them “off the hook in terms of meeting the needs of their often most marginalized students” (p. 57).

While Wrigley, Thomson, and Lingard seemed to have an overall vision of presenting alternative ways for viewing mainstream schooling within the confines of standardization and current global education policy, many of the schools highlighted in *Changing Schools* worked outside of mainstream schooling. Some examples of this phenomenon include 1) Chapter 5 and the alternative schools for students who have been expelled or who have dropped out; 2) the charter school focused on in Chapter 15 that describes an elective course not required for graduation; and 3) the laboratory school in Chapter 3 that has been “freed of many official requirements and provided with some additional staffing” (p. 27), is closely linked with a university and draws students who are a representative sample of the German population based on social class and ethnicity. None of these schools seem to be working within the typical confines of a run of the mill school, subject to typical standardization policies and high stakes testing, and, therefore, presenting the ideas from some of the case studies as feasible is disingenuous, given the constraints that teachers have to deal with in mainstream schools.

*Changing Schools* could be an excellent resource for any teacher, administrator or policymaker in education hoping to gain insight into how schooling could be reimagined as long as the studies are read and analyzed critically and not seen through rose colored glasses. The 14 case studies included in this collection offer some innovative ideas and suggestions that are capable of guiding dedicated teachers and administrators in their efforts to support democratic citizenship and social justice in modern schooling. However, given the less than cohesive manner that the book has been put together, it might be advantageous to start with Chapter 16 to gain some insight into how the chapters are connected to each other before delving into the rest of the collection.

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