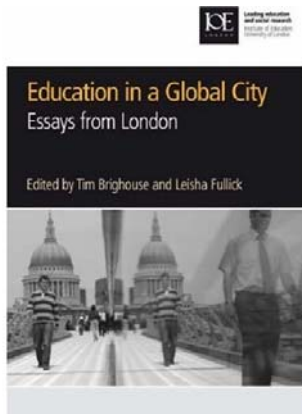


Book Review



Education in a Global City: Essays from London

by Leisha Fullick (Ed.) and Tim Brighouse (Ed.)

London: Institute of Education (2007).

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Review by Alice Bradbury

'Education in a Global City: Essays from London' is a wide-ranging and current survey of the important issues in London education. The twelve essays cover a broad range of topics, across age ranges and sectors, and provide an insight into the intricate complexity of London's education system. Reviews of recent initiatives, such as the London Challenge, sit alongside historical analyses of the ideal of comprehensive education in London, and the whole volume is littered with fascinating statistics on the capital's demography, school system and patterns of achievement. As a snapshot of the situation as it currently stands in London, it works well, but you cannot help but wonder how quickly the volume will need to be updated if it is to remain relevant.

As explained in the introduction, the essays are arranged thematically rather than sector by sector, and the book is not intended to be a complete survey (some sectors, including higher education and pre-primary provision, are ignored almost completely). This, and the thoroughness of the first scene-setting chapter by Ruth Lupton and Alice Sullivan, results in some repetition of statistics if you read the text as a whole. There is also tendency throughout to hark back to the days of the ILEA, and while the repeated discussions of a city-wide system of governance give the book a certain coherence, it does sometimes feel like a manifesto for the revival of the ILEA system. It is also not clear whether the authors would be so keen to put the Mayor in control of education in London after the election of the Eton-educated Boris Johnson since publication.

Nonetheless, the essays do provide useful insights into issues of contemporary relevance which are currently being debated in London. For example, in Chapter 3 Tim Brighouse writes on the lessons learnt from the London Challenge, with which he was heavily involved, at a time when it is being rolled out in two other areas of the UK. Janet Mokades writes in Chapter 5 about the impact of the Every Child Matters agenda on London's education, and effectively places the education issues into the context of the social and economic issues facing the city. The debate over 14-19 education is discussed in Chapter 10 (Paul Grainger, Ann Hodgson and Ken Spours), with reference to the many potential possibilities for collaborative 14-19 provision in London's secondary schools, further education colleges and sixth form colleges.

Two issues of particular significance in London – staffing and ethnic diversity – are given two chapters each, and these issues are linked well into the other chapters too. Hilary Emery and Kathryn Riley write on the lessons learnt about urban leadership in London, and Sara Bubb and Peter Earley comment on the problems of recruitment and retention in the city's schools. Jan McKenley discusses the ethnic diversity of London's schools, a very relevant issue since the majority of London's pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The essay includes a useful summary of the different views on differential attainment historically, and discusses responses to current problems. Dina Medmedbegovic writes on the connected

issue of multilingualism in Chapter 9, and the implications of the large proportions of pupils with English as an additional language in London classrooms, and the potential they bring.

The historical context of debates about secondary provision is provided by Sandra Leaton Gray and Geoff Whitty's chapter on comprehensive education, which also comments on the introduction of Academies. The potential of the Brown government to refocus on social disadvantage and the problem of balancing this aim with keeping middle class parents happy are also included. The social and economic benefits of education are also a focus in Leisha Fullick's chapter on adult education (Chapter 11).

Despite an overall sense of coherence, and excellent referencing between chapters, one essay sits less comfortably in this volume – Anne Sofer's chapter on Global city school systems. Because there is no education system unique to London, her comparison of London's education system with that in New York City, Chicago, Sydney and Toronto is mainly a comparison of the English system with the other cities, and the focus on London is lost. Indeed, throughout the essays, there are several instances of writers struggling to contain their comments only to London, and it is sometimes not clear whether the book is about London itself or about what the rest of the country, or the world, can learn from the city.

The concluding chapter returns to two themes from the essays – governance and social exclusion – and calls for a new London-wide debate about inequality in education. The editors also admit in this essay that descriptions of London's uniqueness can lead to the irritating suggestion that its problems are greater and more formidable than elsewhere, yet no real defence is offered to solve this flaw in the volume.

Nonetheless, for both those who are well-versed in London's schools and those unfamiliar with the city's complex and chaotic system, this collection provides a fascinating survey of the current situation in the capital. The diverse array of essays successfully negotiate and explain the intricate complexities of London education without losing sight of the overall arguments. The volume would be useful both as an introduction to education in the capital for those researching or working in the area, and as a collection to dip into for the view from London on issues of national and global relevance.