

# NEOLIBERALISM AND EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN CONFLICT

*Neoliberalism and Education Systems in Conflict: Exploring Challenges Across the Globe* explores how neoliberal values are imprinted onto educational spaces and practices, and by consequence, fundamentally reshape how we come to understand the educational experience at the school or system level. Countries across the globe struggle with the residual effects of increased accountability, choice/voucher systems, and privatization.

The first section of the book discusses the direct imprint of neoliberal policies on educational spaces. The next section examines the more indirect outcomes of neoliberalism, including the challenges of inequity, access, violence, racism, and social justice issues as a result of neoliberal ideologies. Each section of the book includes case studies about education systems across the globe, including Britain, Middle East, Turkey, United States, China, and Chile written by international contributors.

*Neoliberalism and Education Systems in Conflict* is essential reading for educators, scholars, and faculty of educational leadership and policy globally.

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# NEOLIBERALISM AND EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN CONFLICT

Exploring Challenges  
Across the Globe

*Edited by Khalid Arar,  
Deniz Örücü and Jane Wilkinson*

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# FOREWORD

It is a confronting pleasure to write this Foreword to Khalid Arar, Deniz Örüçü and Jane Wilkinson's edited collection *Neoliberalism and Education Systems in Conflict*. This is so because the book details in a granular fashion the direct and indirect depredations of neoliberalism on schools and school systems across the globe, including in China, Hong Kong, the UK, the USA, Australia, in nations of the Middle East, South America, and the Caribbean. It then raises issues for ethical and educative leadership practices in such systems and schools affected by these neoliberal economic policies that have been rearticulated as systemic education policies.

The global reach of this collection is impressive, just as the situations documented are deeply concerning for those committed to more socially just schooling and a more socially just world. Think for a moment of the reality of 29.5 million refugees in the world today; think of the growing inequality within and between nations (Piketty, 2013) and of the impact on the provision and experiences of schooling for many young people; think of racism and sexism, and of the impact of war and political upheavals. The evidence provided is deeply confronting and concerning. Yet, the goal is not shock and horror, but what can and should be done. In responding to criticisms of his sociology of education work that it was all about the reproduction of inequalities, Bourdieu (2008, p. 53) noted, "It is by knowing the laws of reproduction that we can have a chance, however small, of minimizing the reproductive effect of the educational institution." These chapters in this collection in their global mapping of the neoliberal impact on schooling similarly proffer knowledge and understanding as a step toward political action and progressive change. They also imply the necessity of the broadest knowledge for effective leadership in schools and school systems and the centrality of ethical and politically aware leadership to achieving those ends.

While neoliberal policy frames have been hegemonic in one way or another across the globe since the end of the Cold War, this frame always plays out in what comparative educators refer to as "path dependent ways." This is well illustrated in the chapters in this collection. For example, the neoliberal has played out vastly



differently in say China than in say Chile. As such, the history, postcolonial situation, politics, culture, geopolitical positioning, and place in the global economy mediate the expression of the neoliberal in the national systems dealt with.

The introduction to the collection uses the verb “imprinted” to describe the way this global phenomenon of neoliberalism touches down or is translated in these different nations. Whatever word is used, we must acknowledge that there are global, national, and local actors (individuals, groups, organisations) involved politically in this seeming hegemony of the neoliberal. The neoliberal has been a political project pursued by certain interests desiring to roll-back the egalitarian achievements of Keynesian welfare statism.

As the collection illustrates, the impact of the neoliberal in education has been through the restructuring of the state (new public management and network governance), through privatisation and marketisation and explicitly in schooling through the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM). Yet, just as with the broader neoliberal political framing, GERM manifests in different ways in different national systems of schooling, and there are as well resistances to it. While policy discourses in schooling now might flow globally, their national and systemic manifestations are divergent and play out in different ways. Furthermore, while global education policy discourses (e.g. GERM, a human capital construction of the purposes of schooling, test-based accountability) flow into national and local systems, they manifest in multiple and variegated ways and are always rearticulated as they move to affect leadership and pedagogical practices in schools. The nation-state has been affected by such global flows, the globalisation of the economy, and global hegemony of the neoliberal, but it remains important, but now works in different ways.

The collection was put together before the impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic, which has strengthened the rise of nationalisms and ethno-nationalisms in the face of neoliberal globalization. This emergence has been clearly manifest in President Trump’s *America First, Make America Great Again* slogans, in Brexit and in the rise of populist right wing governments across the globe (see Lingard, 2021). The pandemic has strengthened these new worrying nationalisms. Yet within nations, the US being a good case in point, the neoliberal remains dominant. This right-wing ethno-nationalism is a regressive, reactionary politics of resistance to the neoliberal and will achieve nothing for the poor and disadvantaged. It is clear, though, that effective responses to the pandemic demand effective local, global and national politics. This collection argues similarly in respect of the depredations of the neoliberal on schooling and resistances to them. There needs to be a multiscalar politics of opposition and resistance to the neoliberal generally and specifically in schooling. Education International, the global federation of teacher unions, is important in such politics, but so is the work of leaders in national school systems and in local schools, the focus of this collection.

The focus of the neoliberal has been on continuous economic growth and as such this focus neglects the effects of this ideology on our natural world in this period of climate emergency, the age of the Anthropocene. The endangered state of our planet and of all species must be an acknowledged context of moral, politically aware and progressive educational leadership today. A central critique here of the neoliberal is its erroneous and dangerous assumption of the infinite nature of resources. In stark contrast, there needs to be acknowledgment of the finite nature of our resources and consideration of how that anti-neoliberal observation needs to be put into effect in schooling, specifically in relation to environmental and sustainability education, but also more broadly, including in leadership practices (Rapplepey & Komatsu, 2020).

For me, the significance of this collection on school and system leadership in this time of the neoliberal is that it stresses the deep morality and acute political awareness necessary for effective, progressive and socially just leadership in schooling at this moment. It also documents the vastly different conditions under which such leaders work in different parts of the world. We also must acknowledge that the concept of social justice needs to be continually rethought, reconceptualised; as Nancy Fraser (2013) has so persuasively argued, globalization has significant implications for how we conceptualise and rethink, as well as enact, social justice today. Furthermore, the reconstitution of the concept in reductive ways in many schooling systems though a test constructed concept (social justice as the strength of the correlation between a student's social class background and test results) also needs to be retethered to a conceptual frame.

This collection does what many of the voluminous number of books on leadership, and indeed on educational leadership, fail to do: that is, acknowledge that effective leadership work is moral and political. This is why it has been a (confronting) pleasure to write this Foreword. The book proffers confronting accounts of the impact of the neoliberal, but these accounts also provide insights that make hope practical rather than despair convincing in respect of challenging the neoliberal in progressive ways and reconstituting more socially just schooling.

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# PREFACE

*Khalid Arar, Deniz Örücü and Jane Wilkinson*

This book examines the direct and indirect challenges posed by neoliberalism faced by schools and educational systems across the globe. It does by drawing on the voices of researchers and practitioners. As the defining political and economic paradigm of our age (Apple, 2006), neoliberalism has shaped the current educational landscape; spread its global education reforms or GERMs (Sahlberg, 2012); and re/formed the work of school leaders and teachers through the redefining of education as a commodity and private good within a market economy (Ball, 2013; Blackmore, 2016; Fuller, 2019).

Within this frame, this book offers a critical view of the contemporary educational leadership challenges that are faced by schools and systems across the globe when dealing with neoliberal discourses, policies, and ideologies. It aims to answer the following questions:

- 1 What are the challenging school circumstances that emerge as a result of neoliberal agendas around the world?
- 2 How do schools and education systems position themselves in such challenging contexts?
- 3 How does school leadership, policy, or praxis tackle direct or indirect neoliberal challenges in education in different countries?

In so doing, we aim to produce a global map which identifies the terrain of challenges that schools and systems face, shaped by a neoliberal imprint.

We have classified the papers based on the types of challenges they have tackled in terms of direct or indirect outcomes of neoliberalism. The chapters are located in two sections. The first section covers the direct drivers behind these challenges and is entitled *Challenges of Markets, Poverty and Privatization*. The second section covers the more indirect outcomes of neoliberalism and is entitled *Challenges of Immigration, Conflict and Social In/Justice*.

Following the first chapter of the book which raises the call to explore and map the educational challenges under neoliberalism across the globe by Khalid Arar, Deniz Örücü and Jane Wilkinson, the first section of the book exploring

the direct imprint of neoliberal policies on educational spaces begins in Chapter 2 with a comparison of school leaders and teachers' challenges in private schools in Turkey and Arab schools in Israel.

Through the voices of the participants of an ongoing study, *Deniz Örücü* and *Khalid Arar* portray and compare the policy and school based challenges of two contrasting contexts. It leads the authors to question the neoliberal policies determining the context and operation of privatisation in education. The corporate agenda, market forces, and the marketization of teacher and principal labour, which deviate from core educational ideals, are powerful levers in shaping the work of school leaders and teachers, and subsequently lead to these practitioners enduring major pressures and dilemmas.

In Chapter 3, a challenging case from the Hong Kong context represents the impact of performative culture of accountability. *Paula Kwan*, *Benjamin Yuet Man Li* and *Trevor Tsz-lok Lee* examine the unique challenging policy environment confronting Hong Kong schools from the perspective of neoliberal discourses. They reveal the reactive, as well as strategic responses of school leaders and teachers in coping with these challenges.

Without a case from Chile, the impact of neoliberalism on educational leadership would be incomplete. In Chapter 4, *Romina Madrid Miranda*, *Claudia Córdoba Calquín* and *Catherine Flores Gómez* offer an analytical view of two main reforms that affect school leadership directly in Chile: the national voucher system and the national system of quality assurance through testing. They vividly illustrate how recent reforms that prohibit selection of students challenge principals to move toward inclusive and collaborative approaches whilst conflicting with the historical way principals have responded to the Chilean neoliberal agenda.

China, the world's fastest growing economy, also poses the paradox of autonomy and accountability through a recent inspection reform which posed key challenges for practitioners. In Chapter 5, *Meng Tian* and *Xianjun Lan* reflect on the policy–practice decoupling in the Chinese education inspection system from the 1970s to contemporary times under the Communist regime. While doing so, they present a critical policy analysis of their findings and focus on how policies have/have not been translated into practices.

In Chapter 6, we return to Turkey to read about the challenges facing rural schools' teachers. As the country has vast socioeconomic differences across schools and regions, *Ecem Karlıdağ-Dennis* and *Zeynep Temiz* investigate the challenges that early childhood and primary education teachers and students experience from the teachers' personal perspectives. They draw on critical education theorists to analyse the related issues of privatization of education and class inequalities as neoliberal policies. They examine how the privatization of public education has resulted in regional differences in equity and economic security.

Taking the reader to another educational dimension and country, *Maysaa Barakat* and *Daniel Reyes-Guerra* narrate in Chapter 7 on the USA context. They

portray how, while maintaining elements of school leadership preparation program curriculum tied to standards and accountability measures, a redesign team rejected the inclusion of neoliberal vocabulary and conceptions as the lexicon and theoretical framework for learning. Examining a partnership between a school leadership program, a donor organization, and multiple districts engaged in the redesign of a Master's Degree program leading to assistant principal certification, they promote a language and lens of school leadership learning focused on student holistic outcomes of success. The goal was to take a comprehensive approach to school leadership that extended beyond the narrow focus/definition of achievement and accountability.

In Chapter 8, *Julia Mahfouz* brings her conceptual insights into the Lebanese experience as she examines the problems arising from the neoliberal practices and discourses reproduced and transformed into this educational system. She argues that the influence of neoliberalism has to a great extent undermined social justice and the quality of education despite explicit intentions of bringing communities together. Further, she contends that the competitive edge has strengthened the Lebanese private educational system at the expense of the public schools and the communities that these schools serve.

This section closes with Chapter 9, a comprehensive case study from Australia by *Katrina MacDonald, Jane Wilkinson* and *Corine Rivalland*. They outline how the leadership practices of three principals, working in some of the most disadvantaged areas in Victoria, Australia, are structured by and structuring of a public education system heavily influenced by neoliberal ideologies and a performative accountability culture. They focus on the highly gendered experiences of the school leaders, which amounted to invisible labour, labour that was not valued or measured in performative accountability regimes and yet was crucial in enhancing students' academic and social outcomes.

Part II, *Challenges of Immigration, Conflict and Social Injustice*, deals with the more indirect outcomes of neoliberalism. In this respect, the contributions here lend themselves to the challenges of inequity, access, violence, racism and social justice issues as a result of neoliberal ideologies.

In Chapter 10, *Eugenie A. Samier* takes us to the Middle East and focus on the challenges faced by school teachers and heads in the "failed" or "collapsed" states of Syria and Yemen where a complex set of factors combine to produce an extremely violent and insecure environment of war, terrorism, mortality, and severe deprivation. They examine internationalising the educational administration field to include the conditions under which schools operate in conflict zone countries. They propose a new type of intersectionality theory that would include the factors of "collapsed" or "disintegrating" states such as Syria and Yemen, which have experienced extreme violence and humanitarian crises.

*Alison Taysum* and *Carole Collins Ayanlaja* discuss in Chapter 11 the ways in which education systems swing from one political ideology to another when

there are changes in power in the government. They draw on evidence from 23 groundwork Case Studies from China, England, France, Israel (Arab perspective), Italy, Nigeria, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, Russia, United States (Higher Education perspective), Egypt, Finland, Greece, Israel (Jewish perspective), Japan, Kazakhstan, South Korea, Germany, Hungary, Guyana, India, Pakistan, and the US (K-12 perspective). The authors delve into the commonalities in schools and education systems around the world, shifting from welfarism to neo liberalism while questioning whether the “kids are ok.”

In Chapter 12, we are informed about undertaking social justice leadership in challenging circumstances in Trinidad and Tobago in schools with diverse populations. *Rinnelle Lee-Piggott*, *Dyanis Conrad-Popova* and *Dennis A. Conrad* present a tapestry of the nature of the socioeconomic challenges faced by three primary and three secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago, sharing their perspectives on their social justice leadership practices within an educational landscape of historical inequity. We read about how principals face a myriad of challenges where they must engage in practices to facilitate student success, essentially targeting “symptoms” of socioeconomic challenges.

Finally, in Chapter 13, *Fella Lahmar* presents us with the leadership challenges faced by an Islamic School in the UK, which has to interpret “British” educational values under neoliberal market dynamics, and the contradictions that ensue. She examines changes to policy, considering how neoliberal ideals of market competition are shaping and reshaping the education system in Britain and how leaders enable the alignment of their interpretation of “Islamic educational values” with an Ofsted “outstanding” rating alongside parental market demands for “Islamic schooling.” She expands on the challenges of change and diversity for Muslim school leaders working within both educational policies’ enablers and constraints, parental demands and the broader socio-political context. Twelve contributions from different parts of the world exploring different contexts provide us with deep insights into the various challenges faced by education professionals and schools operating within various manifestations of neoliberal ideologies. Challenges are manifest in a variety of forms in policy, leadership, and praxis and contextual elements trigger or alleviate the varied issues that ensue.

As we add the finishing touches to this book, in April 2020, the world struggles with the unprecedented health crises of COVID-19, which has/will have dramatic consequences for social, political and economic systems. The schools and systems presented in this book are already in lockdown, and we can anticipate that they will face newer challenges in finances, delivery of education, access, equity, social justice, and adverse forms of surveillance. These will definitely be the subject of investigation for researchers. We are witnessing how one tiny virus can damage the “holy” idea of neoliberalism and weaken humankind. We anticipate the challenging school circumstances portrayed in this book are now likely to be exacerbated by this global pandemic.

We hope you enjoy this book and that it contributes to a larger conversation on the imprint and challenges for schools and their systems posed by neoliberalism in local and global terms. In the end of the book, you will find our concluding thoughts providing a holistic look at the challenges, strategies, policy, and practice reflected in the chapters towards building a glocal perspective.

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# 1

## A CALL TO EXPLORE AND MAP THE EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES UNDER NEOLIBERALISM ACROSS THE GLOBE

*Khalid Arar, Deniz Örüü and Jane Wilkinson*

Neoliberalism has reinvented the notion of the individual citizen within the nation state into a particular form of competitive self-interest that moves beyond national boundaries (Blackmore, 2016, p. 6). Neoliberal economic theory has come to dominate bipartisan responses to economic globalization in most Anglophonic Western Democracies that were affected by the rapid processes of de-industrialization as fast mobile global capital sought cheaper labor in Asia and South America (Apple, 2012). Whereas some western economies adopted structural adjustment policies to maintain their global competitive advantage, structural adjustment was also imposed as an economic experiment by international monetary bodies such as the IMF (International Monetary Fund), the World Bank, and the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). Structural adjustment, an economic orthodoxy of the right wing in the United States, advocated deregulation of financial and labor markets, reduction of state welfare expenditure, privatization of education and health, and small government (Blackmore, 2016, p. 6). The hegemony of neoliberalism along with its inequitable effects has subsequently reshaped the project of compulsory education and compounded the challenges schooling systems face.

The implications of this movement raise key questions for us as educators, for example: What is the purpose of education in a neoliberal economy? What happens in regard to issues of equity, equality, and diversity?; What are the implications for the broader goals of education beyond the market?; How do schools and systems respond?; Who suffers the most from these reforms?; and finally, how do school leaders and teachers survive, if at all? The project that is this book emerged out of such questions and discussions with colleagues. In this respect, we aim to contribute meaningfully to a larger conversation around

how neoliberal values and ideals are variously imprinted into diverse educational spaces and practices and the challenges experienced at school or system-level across the globe. To achieve this goal, we have sought to uncover first the various and unique challenges facing schools and second to understand the strategies and practices employed by key actors within these schools or systems as they variously navigate through a dominant global neoliberal agenda to better cater for the needs of their students and societies.

## **Implications of Neoliberalism on Education**

In terms of public education, researchers have argued that neoliberal governmentality is “the key force affecting (and undermining) nation-states today” (Olssen, Codd, & O’Neil, 2004, p. 13). The intensified assault on public education is manifested in a number of ways including resource cutbacks and constraints and the increasing commodification of education (Apple, 2006; Ball, 2013). In addition to shaping educational systems across the globe, conservative ideologies and neoliberal policies have also impacted responses to the challenges faced by societies (Meshulam & Apple, 2014) such as economic instability, wars, refugee flows, environmental damage, racism, sexism, and poverty (Arar, Örüçü, & Waite, 2020; Miller, 2019). One of the key impacts of neoliberal policies and practices on education is the issue of exclusion for economic inequality, the politics of coloniality, and practices of exclusion within education have historically functioned to perpetuate the privilege and power of the wealthy and powerful within the neoliberal policy scape globally (Ball, 2017; Darder, 2009).

The global education reforms that arise from varied neoliberal agendas lead to varying and complex outcomes in different education systems and schools (Chitpin & Portelli, 2019). Neoliberalism represents a deep restructuring of the cultural, social, political, and economic relations of state, market, and society based on the politics of financial deregulation that sever the economy from social realities. As such, local expressions of neoliberalism are an outcome of how hierarchically ordered social groups are organized in relations of power concerning the “goods” and “ills” of social life in the context of wider structures of opportunity and constraint (Jaffe & Quark, 2006). Thus, neoliberal policies at global and local levels impact directly and indirectly on social systems in various nation states (Carnoy, 2016; Keddie, 2012).

While neoliberalism does not have a scientific basis (English & Papa, 2018), its emphasis on free markets, individualism, deregulation, privatization, and welfare reform has direct outcomes through creating new rhetorical strategies, identities, relationships, experts, and powers (Jaffe & Quark, 2006). For example, in relation to education systems (Ball, 2012; Barker, 2011), these include an emphasis on: marketization, commercialization and privatization of public schools, voucher systems, League Tables, accountability and performance

measures changed labor educators (Milner & Stevenson, 2019), and socioeconomic deprivation.

Regardless of the direct or indirect outcomes of a neoliberal agenda (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), the ideologies that underpin it have created major challenges within education systems and schools locally and globally (Gross, 2020). We do not blatantly claim that neoliberalism is *the only driver* behind the challenges encountered by schools, but its impact in shaping school systems globally is evidenced through a range of research (Apple, 2006; Ball, 2012), particularly in terms of the new challenges it poses for schools and systems (O'Donoghue & Clarke, 2019).

### Mapping Educational Challenges Posed by Neoliberalism

In this respect, challenge may be interpreted as a relative term. The concept “challenging school circumstances,” was initially associated with the UK context (MacBeath et al., 2007). Yet, the challenges of schools are a global phenomenon. In the UK context, they relate to failing schools, struggles with OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills) inspections, League tables, low student achievement (Harris & Chapman, 2004), and dealing with multicultural education (Banks & Banks, 1995). However, these are not the only challenges that schools face and they can be applied to any geographical region at different levels. As MacBeath et al. (2007) asserted, “this is a story that could be told in Sydney, Hong Kong, Paris, or New York,” thus reflecting the universality of challenging school circumstances. However, as Gronn and Ribbins exhorted in 1996, context needs to be taken seriously in any considerations about educational leadership. Capturing the daily realities of schools and local education systems is critical as their individual contexts and geographies mean that challenges take on different forms and occur at different levels, with responses to these challenges varying in developed and underdeveloped societies (Oplatka, 2019).

In terms of the relative nature of challenges in education, a disadvantaged or an advantaged school facing a regime of high accountability endures their own challenges in one part of the world, whereas a school without proper infrastructure in an underprivileged village in Africa, Latin America, or in a war zone in the Middle East experiences very different particular challenges. This is not to underestimate such challenges, but to make the obvious point that particular strategies and solutions in their own contexts will be required. In short, the challenges that schools and their systems face depend on their cultural, socio-political, and economic contexts, which we, as scholars, cannot underestimate. The chapters in this book illustrate this point very clearly challenging circumstances are not only about the deprivation of peripheric groups but also apply to advantaged schools. No matter what their geography and context, all schools experience diverse forms

of challenges. Hence, our previous research has examined the forms that challenging school circumstances may take, particularly in terms of their global and local neoliberal imprint (Arar, Kondakci, & Taysum, 2019).

The most direct challenges that schools face are poverty and its consequences such as inequity, deprivation, and issues in regard to accessing schooling. Research has highlighted that high levels of poverty distract from a school's ability to improve student achievement (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005; Ylimaki, Jacobson, & Drysdale, 2007). Students living in poverty often experience poor nutrition, inadequate health services, and higher rates of illiteracy and criminal behavior, which in turn can result in high rates of student transience, absence, and indiscipline (Ylimaki et al., 2007). These circumstances inevitably lead to lower achievement and other problems experienced by students in poverty. Given that schools are the main means of survival for underprivileged and/or initially low achieving students (Scheerens & Bosker, 1997), the effectiveness of schools is particularly critical for such students. Other challenges include major differences in the quality of schooling experienced in rural and isolated areas, as well as the issues experienced by migrant and indigenous populations (Arar, 2020; Ezzani & Brooks, 2019; Mulford et al., 2008). Globally, regardless of their contexts, schools are already challenged with League Tables (MacBeath et al., 2007), international examinations, performativity and uncertainty (Ball, 2000), and with neoliberal market policies in the form of exogenous or endogenous forms of privatization (Ball & Youdell, 2008; Blackmore, 2016).

Another group of challenges are indirect outcomes, which mostly accompany one or more of the direct challenges noted above. Wars, political upheavals, and socioeconomic crises, especially in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, have led to unprecedented numbers of displaced peoples (Arar, 2014; Arar et al., 2020; Arar, Brooks, & Bogotch, 2019; Banks, 2017; Dryden-Peterson, 2016; Hatton, 2017; Waite, 2016) around the world, which directly impact the education systems of host countries. While statistics vary, by 2019, an unprecedented **70.8 million** people around the world had been forced from home. Among them are nearly **25.9 million refugees**, over half of whom are **under the age of 18 and in need of education (UNHCR, 2019)**. In this respect, schools and their education systems face major challenges with the increasing numbers of refugee students (Arar, 2014; Arar, Örüçü, & Ak Küçükçayır, 2018; Wilkinson & Kauko, 2019).

In this respect, the needs of societies, schools, and children are endless and diverse (Arar et al., 2019; Brooks & Watson, 2018; Ezzani & Brooks, 2019). Thus, major challenges that educational policy-makers and practitioners face include developing sustainable improvement in schools facing challenging circumstances according to their specific contexts. Determining “the right sort of *ingredients*, mixed to suit the contexts and circumstances of individual schools” (West, Ainscow, & Stanford, 2005, p. 77) locally and globally is critical.

More specifically, economic and political crises are related to cultural/ethnic clashes and prejudice around the globe (Brooks & Watson, 2018; Ezzani & Brooks, 2019; Oplatka & Arar, 2016). These, in turn, have brought extreme challenges for schools with consequent racialized student populations (Banks, 2017). Host nations for immigrants, refugees, and displaced people are trying to pursue various policies to integrate refugee student populations (Arar, 2020; Arar et al., 2019; Mundy & Dryden-Peterson, 2011). Regardless of their experience, this has led to increasing levels of turbulence as schools grapple with diverse populations with very particular needs (Norberg & Gross, 2018). As such, there is a growing need to reconcile national and multicultural discourses (Banks, 2017; Wilkinson, 2018) in education policy and practice. Therefore, integration, inclusivity, social justice, and building social cohesion (Blackmore, 2016; Bogotch & Shields, 2014; Brooks, Normore, & Wilkinson, 2017; Theoharis, 2009; Waite & Arar, 2020) are some of the concepts that require immediate attention in leading schools with these challenges (Waite & Bogotch, 2017). On the one hand, concepts such as multicultural, intercultural education, and social cohesion are discussed together as a remedy for socially just schools (Brooks et al., 2017; Wilkinson et al., 2018) and as a more appropriate response to the new context of globalization and the increasing convergence of different languages, religions, cultural behavior, and ways of thinking (Arar et al., 2019; Portera, 2008). On the other hand, some scholars approach the use of such words with caution as they allege that these concepts already signify a form of othering, discrimination, and a move toward standardization as a reflection of neoliberal policies (Portelli & Konecny, 2013). Even the use and meaning making of the word “cultural diversity” is under debate, despite its attempt to promote social justice (Blackmore, 2016). Hereby, the discursive ideology of White supremacy is alleged to be produced (Brooks & Watson, 2018; Fylkesnes, 2018) and xenophobia, alienation, and marginalization are still to be faced in different schools sites (Arar, 2014; Arar et al., 2019).

We assume that neither a purely local nor global approach is possible in analyzing the challenges of schools and their systems around the globe which have been influenced by neoliberalism. Therefore, the book adopts a glocal perspective. In a world where policies travel globally (Lingard, Rawolle, & Taylor, 2005) as if local needs were ubiquitously the same, the book provides a glocal perspective to understand and analyze the experiences of schools and systems in different parts of the world as part of a “vast supermarket” of neoliberal educational policies (Apple, 2006).

Global capital, in its current neoliberal form in particular, leads to human degradation and inhumanity and has increased social class inequalities within states and globally. These effects are increasing (racialized and gendered) social class inequality within states, with markets exacerbating existing inequalities (Blackmore, 2016). Under these conditions, school leadership plays a significant

role (Jacobson, 2011) realizing the purpose of schooling and meeting the needs of students and society across diverse contexts. However, this is a form and spirit of leadership that recognizes a broader understanding of education, beyond narrow definitions of school improvement as defined by league tables and national and international testing regimes (English & Papa, 2018; Waite & Bogotch, 2017; Wilkinson, 2017).

Thus, a critical point for educators facing varied challenging circumstances is how to cultivate the necessary skills, dispositions, values, and actions for democratic citizenry among their students (Waite & Arar, 2020). As such, there is a growing scholarly interest on the leadership in schools facing extremely challenging circumstances (Ahumada, Galdames, & Clarke, 2015; Bush, Joubert, Kiggundu, & van Rooyen, 2010; MacBeath et al., 2007; Smith & Bell, 2014), particularly in terms of the critical and ethical practices necessary to transform the undesirable features of schools and societies into desired ones (Blackmore, 2016).

Critical and ethical practice, in this respect, requires a wider perspective of leadership in schools (Gross, 2020). In order to deal with such undesirable features such as racism, classism, and sexism in educational practice; prejudice against particular religious or regional groups or those with a range of disabilities, social and intellectual disadvantages, criticality, and ethics need to operate in a way that brings about a transformation of culture and social relations within the school. It also requires considerable social skills of advocacy, intergroup relations, team building, and inspiration without domination (Grace, 2000, p. 238). A critical-democratic engagement with education is essential to realize the authentic purpose of education (Portelli & McMahon, 2004). This is particularly the case in terms of the impact of neoliberal education policies, which include the instrumentalization of teachers, dehumanizing of students as classrooms are turned into spaces of performance and efficiency with no space for any genuine engagement with social problems, political issues, or cultural critique (Portelli & Konecny, 2013). It is the spirit of this critical-democratic engagement with education that underpins the formation of and contributions to this book.

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## Notes

- 1 Percentage that has not changed over time
- 2 Student selection is still allowed but only for 30% of student enrollment when the schools have high academic demands or a specific focus on arts or sports.
- 3 The New Public Management, developed in the 1990s, argues that administration and management of public services will improve as a result of adapting principles and models from private business (Sisto, 2018).
- 4 There are different procedures to hire principals depending on the type of school. Municipal schools are regulated by a national and public agency that is the same for all public services positions (Alta Dirección Pública). This means that the principals' performance is subjected to an assessment system. Principals in private subsidized and private schools use alternative procedures and requirements in the hiring process.
- 5 The Local Education Services are a new and decentralized institution that would be in charge of schools' administration and pedagogical and curriculum supervision.
- 1 Psuedonyms.
- 1 There is not space to discuss the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the reader is recommended to go to the website where all 17 SDGs are detailed with targets, and rationales that are exciting, innovative, and in their delivery will bring peace, and prosperity through new partnerships that are kind to people and planet.
- 1 Masha'-Allah: literally: whatever God Wills; equivalent to: Praise the Lord. It is often used to express exclamation at something good.