

Book Review Symposium: Pau Bori (2027). *Interrogating Capitalism in Education: Critical Perspectives in the Digital Age*. New York and London: Routledge. ISBN 9781032524375

Michael A. Peters

University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, Illinois, USA

Manasi Thapliyal Navani

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University Delhi, Delhi, India

Xavier Diez

USTEC Teachers' Union (Unió Sindical de Treballadors d'Ensenyament de Catalunya), Catalunya, Spain

A Timely and Urgent Contribution to Critical Educational Scholarship

Michael A. Peters, *Emeritus Professor, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign*

Pau Bori's *Interrogating Capitalism in Education* arrives at a critical juncture when the intersections of neoliberalism, digital technology, and educational policy demand rigorous scholarly attention. As part of the Routledge Studies in Education, Neoliberalism, and Marxism series, this volume delivers exactly what its title promises: a sustained, theoretically informed interrogation of how capitalist logics shape educational structures, practices, and possibilities in the twenty-first century.

The book is elegantly organized into two dialectically related parts. The first (Chapters 2–3) provides a sweeping historical and political-economic analysis of the "new global educational order" that emerged from the 1980s onward. Bori traces the rise of neoliberal educational orthodoxy—its origins in Reagan-

era reforms, Thatcher's marketization of schooling, and Pinochet's Chilean experiment—while demonstrating how these policies have become globalized through the soft power of the OECD's PISA assessments and the coercive conditionalities of the World Bank. This section is particularly effective in showing how educational digitalization, far from being a neutral technological advance, has accelerated existing dynamics of privatization, teacher deprofessionalization, and the erosion of knowledge in favor of employability skills.

The second part (Chapters 4–5) shifts from structural analysis to lived experience, drawing on in-depth interviews with five Catalan educators and activists who resist the prevailing orthodoxy. Here, Bori amplifies voices that are too often marginalized in policy debates, revealing how teachers navigate, contest, and subvert the market-driven reforms imposed from above. The inclusion of these narratives transforms the book from a purely critical diagnosis into a work that also offers "resources of hope" (to borrow Raymond Williams's phrase) by documenting concrete practices of resistance and imagining alternative futures.

The concluding chapter extends the analysis to artificial intelligence, interrogating the myths, dangers, and political economies that shape AI's incursion into education. This forward-looking section makes the book especially relevant for scholars grappling with the rapid and often uncritical embrace of AI in educational settings.

Bori's command of Marxist theory is evident throughout, yet he deploys it with nuance rather than dogmatism. He draws productively on the Frankfurt School's critical theory, Gramsci's concept of hegemony, and contemporary Marxist educational scholarship (Rikowski, McLaren, Cole, Hill) while avoiding the over-determination that sometimes plagues structural analyses. The book walks a careful line between acknowledging the power of capitalist structures and recognizing schools as "arenas of struggle" where reproduction and resistance

coexist. This dialectical sensibility prevents the analysis from descending into either cynical determinism or naive voluntarism.

The concept of "global oligarchy"—the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the "Big Three" asset managers (BlackRock, Vanguard, State Street) and technology corporations—provides a compelling framework for understanding contemporary educational governance. By connecting the micro-politics of the classroom to the macro-structures of global finance, Bori demonstrates how seemingly local educational decisions are shaped by forces far beyond the school gate.

The Catalan case study is a particular strength. By grounding global trends in a specific context, Bori shows how international policy paradigms are mediated, contested, and transformed at the local level. The interview data are rich and revealing: teachers speak candidly about the bureaucratic burdens of performativity, the segregation produced by school choice policies, the precarity of their working conditions, and the ways they carve out spaces for critical pedagogy. The participants' reflections on digitalization are especially illuminating—they recognize the practical advantages of technology while warning of corporate domination, cognitive fragmentation, and the erosion of pedagogical sovereignty.

The detailed discussion of Google's penetration into Catalan schools (through free services that create dependency, extract data, and shape subjectivities) offers a concrete illustration of how EdTech corporations function as "new policy actors" in education. This case study will be valuable for scholars interested in the political economy of educational technology and for activists seeking to understand and resist corporate encroachment.

Despite its theoretical sophistication, the book is remarkably accessible. Bori writes with clarity and purpose, avoiding unnecessary jargon while maintaining analytical rigor. The structure is logical and signposted effectively, making it suitable for graduate students and researchers across education policy, sociology

of education, and critical pedagogy. The inclusion of interview excerpts in Catalan (with English translations) preserves the authenticity of participants' voices while making the text accessible to an international audience.

The book would serve as excellent supplementary reading in courses on educational policy, neoliberalism and education, critical pedagogy, and the sociology of education. Its focus on digital capitalism makes it particularly timely for courses examining technology and education.

While the book is a significant contribution, a few areas might warrant further development in future work. First, although Bori acknowledges the limitations of focusing on Catalonia, the analysis could benefit from more sustained engagement with educational transformations in the Global South. The BRICS countries, which he mentions briefly, are rapidly developing their own educational technologies and policy frameworks that may not follow Western neoliberal trajectories. A comparative dimension examining how capitalism operates differently across diverse political economies would strengthen the book's claims about the global educational order.

Second, while Bori's critical stance is clear and principled, there are moments when the analysis could engage more deeply with the internal complexities and contradictions within critical education movements themselves. The participants in his study are uniformly critical of the status quo, but critical educators sometimes disagree among themselves about strategy, pedagogy, and the role of the state. Attending to these internal tensions would enrich the analysis of resistance.

Third, the final chapter on AI, while provocative and forward-looking, feels somewhat compressed compared to the depth of analysis in earlier chapters. The rapid pace of AI development means that any assessment risks becoming dated quickly, but Bori's critical framing—emphasizing political economy, corporate power, and the need for digital sovereignty—provides a robust foundation for ongoing inquiry. Future work might explore more concretely how teachers and

students are navigating AI in classrooms, building on the interview methodology used in Chapters 4–5.

Finally, there is a slight tension in the book's use of AI translation tools (acknowledged in the epilogue) alongside its critical stance toward AI in education. Bori addresses this thoughtfully, recognizing the instrumental value of AI while refusing to delegate the "incommensurable value of manual work" in transcription and research. This reflexive moment adds depth to the book and models the kind of critical engagement with technology that it advocates.

Interrogating Capitalism in Education is a powerful and necessary book. It offers a comprehensive Marxist analysis of contemporary educational transformations while remaining grounded in the lived experiences of teachers and activists. Bori's ability to connect the global and the local, the structural and the agential, makes this a work of genuine intellectual and political significance. In an era of educational crisis—marked by teacher shortages, student mental health challenges, privatization pressures, and the rapid incursion of AI—Bori provides both diagnosis and hope. His insistence that education can and must be a space of emancipation, not just reproduction, is a vital counterpoint to the dominant discourse of inevitability. The book does not offer easy solutions, but it provides the conceptual tools to imagine and struggle for alternatives.

This is essential reading for anyone concerned about the future of education—not only researchers and postgraduate students but also teachers, activists, and policymakers willing to question the prevailing orthodoxy. Bori has written a book that is critical without being cynical, hopeful without being naive, and rigorous without being inaccessible. It deserves a wide readership and will undoubtedly shape debates in critical education studies for years to come.

Digital Capitalism and the Hollowing Out of Education: Reflections from the Indian Experience

Manasi Thapliyal Navani, *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University, Delhi*

The ideology of neoliberalism, or rather the scourge of neoliberalism, withdrawal of the state from its welfare role has become integral to the very fabric of governmentality across the globe. *Interrogating Capitalism in Education* authored by Pau Bori contributes critical insights into how the neoliberal ideology plays out in the domain of education as it interacts with EdTech and digital capitalism. The book's premise that capitalism is omnipresent in contemporary Western societies and the need to interrogate how its effects mirror in spheres like education is critically important. The present moment is marked by 'platformisation' of nearly everything including well-being. The celebration of Edtech Unicorns as the future of education in the post-pandemic world, and digital revolution in the form of Generative AI, indeed makes it appear that there is no alternative (TINA) other than the digital route in education.

The book does a service to society by holding a mirror to the euphoria around endless possibilities of edtech in universalising access and fulfilling the liberal dream and imagination around education. By invoking recent literature on politics of edtech, research on cognition amidst expanding digital economies of education, as well as voices from ground, the book is able to highlight the limitations of edtech and blurs the certainties around the economies of digital governance without a rejection of technology in itself or its varied possibilities. The rapid expansion and digitalisation of services in the Global South in the last decade has enabled exponential expansion of edtech. The shift of educational services to digital platforms during the pandemic demonstrated the potential and space for expansion of reach of tech giants and corporations as well as unleash a wave of new edtech entrepreneurialism in education 'markets'. India is a case in point, with Byjus emerging as an EdTech Unicorn in 2018 with a valuation of 1

Billion USD and reaching a valuation of 22 Billion USD in 2022 riding the pandemic wave. Yet, the unraveling of Byjus' is a case in point for what is wrong with the digital bubble. India boasts of five edtechs, global unicorns in edtech backed by top brands in global investing. While the edtech unicorns spent nearly INR 2250 crore on advertising and INR 5550 crore on employees in 2022, these excesses soon became unsustainable with shrinking funding in light of 'worsening slowdown' for the sector (Verma and Patwardhan 2023ⁱ). The book points to similar global experiences and that of Catalonia, Spain in particular to draw attention to precarity of the EdTech bubble. What the financial figures often hide is the human cost and aspirational unfreedoms that an exclusive focus on 'technicalities' and 'technology' in EdTech entails. The *Tech* consumes the *Educational* in its current imagination. As the route for expanding access to education, digitalisation as a strategy, gets incorporated into the existing social and economic asymmetries. As Nag and Navani (2024) point out, in countries, like India, where income and social inequality remains structural and hegemonic, the state aggressively promoting edtech as a solution and replacement of state institutions, amounts to preventing those who are in social margins from acquiring social capital. One could perhaps argue, how the push towards digitalisation, closely interconnected with privatization *of, in, and* education, as Bori highlights in the volume, could actually be a 'trojan horse' moment for education. Through Digital platforms or online learning through MOOCs, for instance, one gets the academic credentials, and yet the credential is an empty signifier, with poor conversion in terms of social or economic mobility. This is a point teased out in this succinct volume highlighting the process of decoupling of education from the public sphere and almost incipient dilution of expectations from the state, mitigating unrest and questioning. Bori quotes an OECD report (Morrison 1996: 30) on p. 33, "Families will react violently if children are refused admission, but not to a gradual reduction in the quality of the education given". The trojan horse of edtech and platformisation

of education has congealed perfectly with the neoliberal imaginary of “individualisation, competency orientation, focus on outcomes, and accountability” in education and it can be argued, as this book does, it has provided the perfect rationale and opportunity for both ‘simplifying’ curricular goals, content, and gradual reduction in quality.

Through digitalisation *in* and *of* education, as in the case of India, governments have found the perfect vehicle to execute significant public cuts in social welfare sectors like education, while projecting large numbers as investment in digital capital to augment educational services. The systemic denial of social capital to the most marginalised in society, by transforming education into the cloud-based digital educational experience, reduces learning to an asocial, individual, content mastery exercise for credential acquisition is a fundamental denial of the transformative aim of education as ‘human flourishing’ or expanding ‘freedoms’.

Pau Bori’s work thus points to this reductionist turn as not only an epistemic threat but also a hegemonic turn in ways of thought control and exhaustive constraints on professional autonomy and agency of educators. Criticality and reflexivity in this scheme get forced into a matrix of measurable learning outcomes and become part of ‘critical thinking’ modules, just as well being and flourishing get transformed to SEL and ‘Happiness Curriculum’ as in the Indian context. Reading the monograph from my location, one could notice unmistakable parallels between the Catalanian and Indian context. The book brings out starkly the hegemonic mask of neoliberal ideology parading as an *ethic of care*. The state, in service of digital capitalism, completely apathetic to concerns of ‘people’, takes on almost a militaristic pursuit to put in place guidelines and structures to ensure young people acquire tools to cope with a world full of precarity and ambiguity, instead of enabling them to critically engage with the nature of precarity and the multidimensional and systemic roots of despair. The book highlights how “individual” as the object of care, in the

digital economy, is not a future ‘citizen’, but an economic actor, reduced to a barcode and string of unique digital identifiers to be tracked, traced and managed within the New Public Management framework.

As the Catalanian experience points out in the book, the economic architecture of digital capitalism engenders new forms of rent seeking and dependencies on proprietary ecosystems. These make not just personal data and privacy of individuals, but public policy and public institutions ‘hostage’ to the profit driven decision making of tech giants. The book points to the dangers of the way big tech has monopolised institutional learning spaces, providing lucrative packaging and services to begin with, eliminating local alternatives, and becoming a monopolistic vehicle which could easily hold independent nation states and professional communities to ransom.

The book critically unpacks the presentation and promotion of global educational agendas as a value neutral ‘futuristic’ collectivist exercises. The politics of the global education reform agendas driven by large technology corporations, continues to be ‘whitewashed’ by governments world-wide, presenting visions of ‘future-ready’ and ‘work-ready’ students as the driving force of educational reforms. Sahlberg’s conception of GERM works as a metaphor capturing the insidious spread of what is ‘sickening’ the system far and wide, even if lacking in some ways, as Bori argues. Chapters 2 and 3 make for a brilliant exposition of the politics of educational reform and neoliberalisation of educational discourse and practice.

Chapters 4 and 5 present the voices of resistance. It was difficult and reassuring to read thoughts echoed by teachers across continents, as a wave of youth resistance washed over India in July 2026. What started as a social media outrage over an apathetic remark by the Chief Justice of India, calling unemployed, poorly educated lawyers as ‘cockroaches’, soon became an emblem and moment of ‘conscientization’, bringing school and college students on street in the capital city of Delhi, protesting for their right to quality

education and questioning lack of accountability for failure in governance. The moment also created a paradigmatic example for how ideas could spread spontaneously through digital spaces/ social media platforms, through shorts and reels— a protest movement emerged through *memes* bringing together voices of resistance for quality education and accountability. These survived mainstream media and state censorship and the satire induced irreverent lingua franca of Gen Z crashed through the carefully crafted ‘official discourse’ and control of narratives by the mainstream media platforms funded by the corporate giants. The state in response, outshined by Gen Z in controlling the ‘narrative’, resorted to violent repression through the police force. It also deployed facial recognition technologies (FRT) to identify the protesters and as soon as the state acceded to protestors’ primary demands, set the police and IT cells to track, identify and harass those who participated in the protests.

Resistance and questioning in such repressive and hegemonic contexts in itself becomes a radical act. As I wondered of the significance of the five voices in conversation with Pau, it echoed for me through each utterance of the educators, how hope itself is a radical act. The voices that can not be silenced through surveillance, the quiet perseverance of these educators in their holding on to a non-instrumentalist educational ideal, is a radical act. Persevering for equitable public education, and holding on to the vision of “critical democratic citizenship, ethical reasoning, and personal flourishing” as the heart of education, is a radical act. Continuing to imagine schooling and education as a relational and existential process, is a radical act. Not giving up on our collective futures is a radical act. Reclaiming the language and methods of transformative and critical pedagogies from its hollow instrumentalised reform garb, is a radical act.

Interrogating Capitalism in Education provides an immersive experience in a critical mapping of the nature of privatization, digital capitalism, corporatisation and its shaping of the educational discourse and practice, devaluation of

knowledge, individualization of learning and the depreciation of the teaching profession. It is simultaneously an immersion into the voices of hope and resistance in pursuit of egalitarian public education and social justice.

Notes

ⁱ <https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/business/startup/edtech-unicorns-brace-for-slower-fy24-bottom-lines-hit-by-aggressive-advertising-huge-esop-costs-in-fy22-10395891.html>

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Interrogating Education Beyond Capitalism

Xavier Diez, *USTEC Teachers' Union (Unió Sindical de Treballadors d'Ensenyament de Catalunya)*, Catalunya, Spain

Those who, like me, have had the opportunity to work within the education system for four decades, across different educational levels and in a variety of roles—from direct teaching to academia and public administration—will arrive at a frustrating conclusion. Beyond the good intentions of those who seek to build a solid and virtuous education system, one placed at the service of society and capable of improving the lives of new generations, they will inevitably encounter insurmountable barriers to these aims. These barriers take the form of old problems that, despite the passage of time, remain unresolved, alongside new ones that, when we began our professional careers, we could scarcely have anticipated. This has been my own experience: I began working as a teacher in the late 1980s and have only recently retired, at the end of 2025.

One of the principal motivations—perhaps the predominant one among young people entering the profession—is the desire to participate in public service. Teaching is a form of service to society: an intervention intended to advance goals and values such as reducing inequalities, overcoming functional rigidities and institutional constraints, and enabling all students to transcend personal and class limitations in order to become autonomous and free citizens. Yet over the past four decades, many long-standing problems have persisted, others have changed in nature, and new challenges have emerged that are not always readily intelligible to those adults who have spent their lives in schools, public administration, universities, or the broader field of educational reflection.

All these elements are openly addressed in *Interrogating Capitalism in Education*. Pau Bori, who has spent many years seeking to understand in depth what is happening in education, beyond the superficial perspectives that dominate

public debate, offers a concise and rigorous analysis of both its foundations and its transformations. He does so from a Marxist perspective. The present reviewer, whose own intellectual trajectory has remained distant from the method of dialectical materialism, finds in this book and in its author a markedly non-dogmatic outlook, together with an explicit ambition grounded in a political and psychological analysis of a depth rarely encountered in recent decades.

The author, who guides readers through the text and helps them navigate its complexity, divides the book into two clearly differentiated parts. The first, analytical and descriptive in character, focuses on the evolution of education systems following the neoliberal counter-revolution of the final two decades of the twentieth century. It seeks to disentangle the logic, assumptions, and effects of a digitalisation process that, although it began with the new century, accelerated after the great financial and debt crisis of 2008–2012, in parallel with the deterioration of public services and the welfare state. The second part centres on resistance to this process of educational degradation, which, while common across the West, is examined through the case of Catalonia—the author’s country of origin, which he knows well—before turning to the impact and consequences of educational digitalisation and the role of the major technology multinationals, concluding with a final chapter on Artificial Intelligence, the major debate currently shaking education systems.

With regard to the first part, and drawing on my own knowledge of the field, the opening chapter constitutes one of the strongest syntheses currently available of the global transformations that explain the present educational crisis. It reconstructs the process through which education systems—formerly the preserve of modern states seeking to shape, nationalise, and to some extent control their citizenry—have gradually changed hands. Globalisation has imposed a new set of rules in which entities such as the OECD, acting as a transmission belt for major global interests, together with large multinational corporations and the legacy of the Vienna School of economics and subsequent

developments in neoliberal thought, ultimately determine reforms to education systems. In other words, as the author recalls, many of us regard the OECD as a global “super-ministry” of education. Its capacity for control, through reports such as PISA and through the complex architecture of international trade treaties, has helped reshape education systems that may previously have functioned more effectively than they do today. The aim, as we have seen, is a certain homogenisation of education systems in order to promote, for example, the international circulation of workers—as with commodities—in the service of global capitalism. Another effect has been the concentration of power in an ever-smaller number of large corporations, among them the major technology companies. More troublingly, educational reforms have also sought to produce a form of citizenship docile toward the global interests of capital, capable of internalising capitalist values. As the author reminds us, citing Christian Laval, this entails turning individuals into entrepreneurs of themselves, making them responsible for their own failures, and individualising collective forms of distress. We also encounter the transformation of education systems in which knowledge is dismantled into “professional competences” designed to make students useful to companies, while companies become increasingly less useful to people. This has a profound impact on the everyday life of primary schools, secondary schools, and universities alike. A policy of “New Public Management” is imposed, involving processes of bureaucratisation, pressure on workers, and the pursuit of measurable results, all of which translate into a steady increase in psychological distress among teachers. The irony is that, thus far, these changes do not appear to achieve even the theoretical objectives formulated by the very elites who designed them. Indeed, the educational innovation of recent decades seems to have resulted in a generalised decline in outcomes, in which digitalisation appears to play a highly significant role.

The third chapter, devoted to digitalisation, offers a particularly interesting account of how the major technology companies have entered schools in order to

impose their own corporate agenda. This is an industry grounded in data mining, large-scale contracts with public administrations, and a kind of attention economy. As Bori notes, these changes, which had initially generated high expectations—it was believed, for instance, that technology could greatly assist students by personalising learning—have ultimately led to a widespread loss of basic skills among pupils and, in many cases, to psychological problems among children and adolescents. Beyond their effects on students, the author also sees this “digital revolution” as a means of gradually replacing teachers. Indeed, one of the major contemporary crises is the declining attractiveness of the teaching profession and the increasing abandonment of teaching itself. This development is viewed favourably by educational administrations at a time of reduced investment in the public welfare system.

The second part, as noted above, focuses on resistance to this set of changes, which are largely perceived negatively by the educational community as a whole. To this end, the author draws on five in-depth interviews with individuals from different generations: active and retired teachers, as well as a student. In all cases, these are people with a strong political commitment and involvement in either the trade union movement or pedagogical activism. The use of this methodology is highly suggestive, since it makes visible not only discontent but also the tension between the political will emanating from the economic system and the equally political will of those who regard education as a tool of emancipation. As a critical observation, while acknowledging that this is a common research methodology in educational studies, it might perhaps have been fruitful to complement these testimonies with additional sources, such as studies and analyses involving larger samples, in which statistical evidence could reveal dimensions less accessible through the voices of highly interesting but necessarily limited informants.

The final section addresses digital technologies and their impact not only on the present but also on a future marked by uncertainty. It offers a balanced analysis that considers both the advantages and the disadvantages of the rise of algorithms,

not only in the classroom but also in educational policy. Finally, it turns to the major debate that today concerns education professionals, families, the academic world, and—let us not forget—the educational administrations themselves, which are witnessing how ideas once thought to provide technical solutions to complex problems have instead generated unforeseen difficulties. These problems go beyond what takes place inside schools and institutes and concern the very nature of the human condition. Indeed, reflections on posthumanism and transhumanism—which connect with the concerns of thinkers such as Yuval Noah Harari regarding the impact of Artificial Intelligence—may point to an existential danger.

Interrogating Capitalism in Education is a timely work, situated within a body of contemporary academic literature and philosophical reflection that engages with concerns about the future at a moment when, in the West, we are living through what is widely perceived as a civilisational crisis. In my own educational experience, I have become aware that what happens inside a classroom often anticipates broader problems that tend to erupt shortly thereafter. Political leaders have frequently viewed education systems as instruments of social engineering, capable of shaping society according to a pre-established plan. Marxism has historically constituted a current of thought that has consistently denounced such temptations. Yet people, at least up to the present moment and as the author repeatedly reminds us, tend to think and act according to their own principles and interests. It is therefore valuable that someone should remind us of this, even in the form of an essay with academic aspirations.

Author Details

Michael A. Peters is a globally recognized scholar whose interdisciplinary work spans philosophy of education, political economy, and ecological civilization. He holds the distinction of Emeritus Professor at the University of

Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Distinguished Visiting Professor at Tsinghua University, and Research Associate in the Philosophy Program at Waikato University.

michael.adrian.peters@gmail.com

Manasi Thapliyal Navani, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor in the School of Education Studies at Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University Delhi, Delhi, India. Her research focuses on the sociology of higher education, educational reform, institutional change, equity, and inclusion in education.

manasi@aud.ac.in

Xavier Díez, Ph.D., is a retired teacher and professor. He served as editor of the journal *Docència* from 2009 to 2025 and has authored several books and articles on history and education. He is a member of USTEC, (Unió Sindical de Treballadors d'Ensenyament de Catalunya) the largest teachers' union in Catalonia, and also participates in the Ítaca Critical Education Seminar, a forum for reflection, debate, and the exchange of educational ideas.

diez.xavier@gmail.com