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Book Review



Pamela Burnard, Elizabeth Mackinlay, David Roussell and Tatiana Dragovic (Editors), *Doing Rebellious Research In and Beyond the Academy*, 469 pp. Brill Publishers.

There is no question this book is **BOLD**, as bold as the cut-out letters used in the title: *Doing Rebellious Research*, a title that strikes me as an oxymoron. As the word ‘Rebellion’ evokes images of freedom, for many people in academia today, research has become increasingly associated with systems of measurement and assessment, used to evaluate ‘quality’, and allocate (increasingly selected amounts of) research funding. Decisions on the worth and value of research are made against set criteria and clearly specified boundaries of discipline, methodology, impact, national or international excellence.

But it is precisely against such boundaries that this edited collection is voicing to rebel against. Led by four co-editors from Australia and the United Kingdom, the book comprises 24 chapters from a range of international authors, some of whom are established academics, while others are early career researchers and educational practitioners working across disciplines in the sciences and the arts.

When I first received the book and about to turn the first page, I was excited if a little nervous, my mind figuring the image of closed fist or a solid brick smashing through the window of the academic world. And instead, I was pleasantly surprised. The book opens with a personal message to the reader, in the form of a letter directly addressed ‘to me’; it was the voice of another writer, an academic and fellow researcher like me, asking me to pause and listen to the rhythm of academic writing. Not as the frantic ticking of the keyboard firing off the last e-mail of the day, but as a set of refrains, 5 in fact, that give voice to the authors of the book, spelling out their rebellion. I write here a few, selected lines, randomly assembled:

During COVID, A rebellious collaboration

Together bringing and creating together

Choose to throw the beads of accountability away, away

See ourselves as performers and practitioners

Who see ourselves as philosophers thinking and wondering perhaps?

We think and wonder with

Coming-with, writing-with, making-with, listening-with, talking-with...

I trust the authors would not mind me taking such liberty of cutting out and re-making the refrain, as I am drawn into the rebellion. There is no fight here or violent connotation. The rebellion is set out clearly and in affirmative ways, replacing isolation with solidarity; metrics with eclecticism; sameness with hybridity; dullness with creativity. The rebellion is a form of authoring and of future-making, a way to respond to the obvious crisis we are all seeing and experiencing, in the environment and social relations.

And so, the book opens with its 4 parts. Part 1 sets out the epistemological foundations of Rebellious Research that Pam Burnard locates within trans-disciplinary practice. Drawing on a quote of Marenko (2021, p.166), she sets the tone of the quest: “What does it take to imagine, design, and design spaces of experimentation, collaboration and reflection together? How do we – designers, educators, practitioners, change-makers – come in close proximity with each other to create togetherness?”

This sentence speaks clear and loud to many of us, as educators within and outside academia, inviting us to resist the pressure to conform to given structures and normative languages, and to engage the imagination about what futures we may be able to bring about, pursuing different paths, but most importantly, together. Many examples of such re-imagining are given by the authors in Part 1. I can only offer here a few examples that resonate with my work in teacher education. Alisan Frank speaks about researching with circus as a source for rethinking the language of research itself. Circus practice goes beyond the formal training of either the physical sciences or the performing arts by drawing its essence in the relationship between ‘performers and listeners’; it transcends the scientific dualism of researcher and participants, actors and audiences, to recover instead the power of circus performance to bring bodies and lives in close contact with one another: “by re-orienting material and bodies away from their usual functions – and through the diversion of audience/participant senses and perceptions...” (p. 61). And here comes the rebellion, not as a means to shock and stun, or to poke fun at professional standards, but as an opportunity to intersect different perspectives, allowing

different ways of seeing and perceiving, between conventions and imaginations. Many teachers I speak to everyday often talk about ‘the balancing act’ and the ‘spinning plates’ of being a teacher in the contemporary school... There is a certain, negative connotation in using circus metaphors to express an inability or sense of inadequacy. And yet, circus is a shared, human experience that brings bodies, environments and human constructions together in practices of hope. Seeing pedagogy within circus research points much more clearly to the act of teaching itself, as we are being taught by our surroundings and through the relationships we form with other people.

Part 2 headed up by Elizabeth MacKinlay introduces *DRAW*, as a group of essays authored by early career researchers engaged in re-searching ways of writing their theses differently. MacKinlay takes writing seriously not as a practice aimed at the delivery of a product but as a practice of creation, the practice that makes all things manifest, and thus rebellious for its power to shape the visible and the perceptible. In Chapter 9, Naomi Lee McCarthy and Eleanor Ryan give an example of *DRAW*, by troubling the bounded linearity and smoothness of the Zoom presentation. The authors harness poetry and theatrical performance as a site of interrelation, co-experimentation and play. From the style of writing to the content of the zoom sessions, much is learnt about the human condition in reading this chapter, a metaphor of our lives lived in bounded spaces. “Words that paint a picture” says Jonathan Wyatt in Chapter 11. And yet, in such making our condition visible and manifested, there remains an element of privacy and intimacy, giving the reader space and time to ponder and to stay on this troubled line.

In Part 3, David Roussell offers a take on methodology for rebellious research, by referring to ways of being that “refuse to comply with what counts as productive and useful within the institutional grid of the university” (p. 242). The collection of chapters in this section contribute a range of creative and imaginative approaches to doing research and re-searching different ways of being and doing in one’s own community. From drumming to graffiti, rituals and day-dreaming, authors articulate research practices that are fundamentally educational practices, pushing against linear time and legitimising a pluriverse of multiple space-temporalities, in which past and futures are inextricably linked. This section is fluid and free by design, and teaches you to take a different position on commonly given categories of good and bad, male and female, right and wrong: one learns to stay with the trouble, and in the creative potential that may be found.

Finally, in Part 4, Tatiana Dragovic addresses leadership, because rebellion is not anarchy but it is the invitation to embrace and make difference hospitable in everyday spaces. It is inevitable as Dragovic gently says, to associate

leadership with balance and order, in right opposition to a rebellion that is dangerous and disproportionate. And yet, leadership brings people together and leadership can only be sensed through the processes and experiences it creates. Hence leadership is profoundly rebellious in the ways it allows for confluence and hybridity to occur. All chapters in this section exemplify rebellious leadership in formal and informal education spaces, from classrooms to museums, but it is the last chapter that catches my attention. *The Hip-Hopification of Education* authored by Breis (Brother Reaching Each Inner Soul) brings the disruptive and eruptive power of hip-hop to bear on a new imaginary for education: one in which experiences are shared, told and re-told and at the same time, made and re-made through music and words. Hip Hop is by definition rhythm and pace; the beat of the music is the beat of one's body: like the authors that spoke in the earlier Parts 1, 2 and 3, writing is rebellious because it lets the body speak and naturally affiliate to other bodies that beat. That way the body knows that what is being experienced is shared, real and true to oneself and others.

Taken altogether, all chapters in this book offer many examples of how life in academia and more widely, in our educational establishments, can be re-written and literally re-drawn in different ways that allow for different relationships to emerge and take form. This is a rebellious but most appropriately, a courageous book that was written at a time when hope appeared to be lost. Perhaps a sceptical reader would say that writing is in itself a privileged occupation, for a privileged section of the population. And that a return to normal, with the spectre of Covid-19 on our back, it is going to be business as usual. Yet, the examples given here show that writing is indeed action and movement: the movement of the line on the paper is a powerful gesture that signs for the reader, by painting a picture. The picture I am left with is one of hope and one of possibility: that there are fellow researchers, students and colleagues out there to connect with, and to make-with, to re-DRAW boundaries and make the futures we wish to enact. Let's go out and find them.

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