

FURTHER EDUCATION and the Twelve Dancing PRINCESSES



Edited by Maire Daley, Kevin Orr
and Joel Petrie

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Review by **David Powell**

This is a book I would describe as a series of “protest songs, history lessons and love letters to the sector”. In 2010 Frank Coffield stood in front of 250 trainee teachers at the University of Huddersfield and asked them what one book they might read over the summer holiday to improve their knowledge of teaching. New and experienced teachers, teacher educators, managers and principals who are committed to an active and democratised profession should put this book on at the top of their summer reading list.

Frank Coffield’s preface introduced me to the story of the Göttingen Siebhen. These seven professors from Göttingen University used a petition to resist the King of Hanover’s decision to annul the constitution in 1837. In the telling of the story we learn that two of the professors were Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, the authors

of the Twelve Dancing Princesses, and a significant connection is then made to the modern day Twelve Dancing Princesses who have contributed to this book. To conclude his preface Coffield identifies six important lessons from this act of defiance by the Göttingen Siebhen, perhaps the two most important of which are the need for ‘public protest’ (p.13) and ‘solidarity’. This preface was the first of many history lessons for me.

Joel Petrie’s introduction confidently argues that we need to replace the ‘Cinderella’ sector metaphor that further education has been labelled with since 1935 (history lesson No.2) with an alternative one of the Twelve Dancing Princesses from Grimm’s fairy tale, whilst acknowledging that even this metaphor is problematic. Joel’s chapter is a ‘love song’ to the sector; a heart breaking ‘love song’ about what has happened and is happening to the sector, a sector that my father worked in from 1964 and I joined in 1986 and have worked in and worked with ever since. Joel concludes his chapter by introducing the modern day Twelve Dancing Princesses and advising us that ‘Zipes suggests that power and oppression are the key concerns of folktales’ (p22).

These 12 Dancing Princesses have, it seems to me, authored a series of modern protest ‘songs’ about the state of the sector, how it has become like this and what we can do about it. It is a rallying cry for collective action and ‘public protest’ (Coffield, 2015, p.13) and, in an era when trainee teachers often seem no longer to be taught about the philosophical, sociological and political dimensions of education, it provides an excellent text for students and teachers interested in critical education, the politics of education and the power and potential of resistance and collectivism.

The book provides stories of courage and resistance from Maire Daley, someone I have worked with and admire for the way she models the values of democratic professionalism to her colleagues and trainees; Becca Maxted, another former colleague; Julie Hughes; Doug Rouxel, Rob Peutrell and Damien Page. The two most memorable points from these chapters were Maire’s claim that ‘resistance is fertile’ (p30) and Damien’s

hilarious account of the transgressive leadership of Keith, an FE manager, and his meeting with his carpentry team.

I found Bea Groves' autobiographical account of her 30 years' service to the sector both a moving love letter and history lesson. I particularly liked the way she draws on Milgram, Freire and Habermas to critically discuss her experience of working in the sector. For instance, she draws on Freire to argue for structural change if 'the structure does not permit dialogue' (p.38). Equally, I was inspired by Lou Mycroft's and Jane Wetherby's professional conversation about their own professional learning as teachers and teacher educators and their commitment to a teaching for a social purpose agenda. This has been translated into a quite unique community of praxis which harnesses technology to connect people and support them as they co-construct ideas about teaching and extend their professional knowledge. The book also exposes deeply problematic aspects of college practices in Matt O'Leary's chapter on lesson observations and Rob Smith's chapter on the impact of "new builds" on teaching and learning. These last two chapters provide an invaluable lens for Education Studies students and trainee teachers to investigate the impact of education policy on the sector.

Taubman's chapter on professionalism introduced me to democratic professionalism, an alternative view of professionalism that excited me and will be of interest to new teachers coming into the profession, as well as those who have been working in the sector for longer. Raina Hafez's history lesson on how the professionalism of teachers in the sector has been eroded since 1947 and the role those who have worked in the sector, and I'd include myself in this, have played in this is a salutary lesson in what happens if as teachers we are apolitical. Thankfully, all is not lost, according to Hafez, and she sets out how we, that is, teacher educators and teachers alike, might 'reconstruct' (Hafez, 2015, p.137) professionalism. It was whilst reading these two chapters that I began to reflect on the content of our initial teacher education programmes (ITE) and what we teach our trainees. What sort of teacher should graduate from our ITE programmes, I asked myself.

Yvonne Hiller's conclusion invites the reader to identify 'deliberative spaces' where those committed to a democratic professionalism can meet and 'confront... issues of status and power' (p.146), and Kevin Orr's coda makes two significant points: firstly, that writing is itself a 'form of resistance' and that 'the successful campaigns' against neo-liberalism and its policy hyperactivity have been a led by 'individuals who dared to defy and then to organize' (p.148).

I know a number of the authors and this has made it difficult to remain critically distanced at times, particularly when I have such a deep respect for what they have done in writing this book. There are some shortcomings, though. The most significant of which is the decision to omit any reference to the Education and Training Foundations' Professional Standards, which were launched in May 2014. A book being published twelve months later should have at least acknowledged this development, it seems me, when considering the professionalism debate.

On the other hand, its chapters are short and punchy, just like a great seven inch single used to be, and the editors have done an excellent job of compiling them into an 'album' of "protest songs, history lessons and love letters to the sector" by these modern day Twelve Dancing Princesses. Music magazines sometimes describe a new release (or re-release) as a 'must have'. This book deserves to be read by a wide audience in the hope that, as Kevin Orr suggests, it emboldens 'others to defy and then to organize and to dance' (p.148). The book will be published by Trentham Books on Friday, 1st May, International Workers' Day, and is priced at £24.99. IOE Press are offering a 10% discount to anyone buying a copy before midnight on 1st June 2015. To take advantage of this offer, go to www.ioepress.co.uk and search for 'Twelve Dancing Princesses'. Go to the checkout and use the code Dancing10. This is a "must have". [Buy it!](#)