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Book review

Marginalised Communities in Higher Education: Disadvantage, Mobility and Indigeneity

by Neil Harrison and Graeme Atherton (Eds)

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In this edited book, Harrison, Atherton, and the contributing authors highlight the importance of developing understandings of the lived experiences of groups experiencing/at risk of marginalisation in higher education. While acknowledging that the term 'marginalisation' is 'slippery' (p.3), in the opening chapter the editors point to the importance of conceptualising this term, particularly in the context of higher education. The focus in this edited book is not on issues of gender, class, and disability, but rather on other groups at risk of marginalisation that have received less attention to date. To that end many of the chapters report on findings of small-scale, exploratory research studies, or desk-based analyses drawing on demographic information, policy documents etc. The result is a highly engaging text that provides the reader with a glimpse into the experiences of groups/populations at risk of/experiencing marginalisation in higher education who have not traditionally been at the forefront of discourse in relation to this issue.

The book comprises 14 chapters altogether and is split into three sections, broadly representing different types of marginalised communities. These sections are framed under the headings disadvantage, mobility, and indigeneity.

The first section, on disadvantage, reports on the marginalisation in higher education of care-experienced young people in England and Scotland, former prisoners in the US, carers in the UK, transgender students in Hong Kong, and religious students in the UK. Interestingly, some of these groups may be considered 'majority' groups (e.g. religious students in the UK) (p. 79), while others would be considered minority groups. Their experiences of marginalisation, however, bear many similarities – not least the impact of their circumstances on their ability to engage in higher education and the critical role that support (both in terms of policy and practice) can play, and in some instances has played, in improving the experiences of these students.

The second section of the book focuses on mobility and reports on the marginalisation of refugee students in Germany, Irish Travellers, Sami peoples in Finland, and rural students in South Africa – all in the context of higher education. Contributors in these chapters (as with the previous chapters) provide the reader with very helpful relevant background and historical

information on these groups. This provides important context for appreciating the, often deep-seated and long-standing, challenges these groups can face in relation to accessing and progressing through higher education.

The final section of this book focuses on indigeneity and reports on the experiences of Australian Indigenous peoples, the Orang Asli in Malaysia, and disadvantaged groups in India. These chapters provide insights into challenges relating to accessing higher education among these groups as well as highlighting promising practices that have gone some way to improving progression. These chapters also remind the reader of the importance of the wider economic and social context when considering issues such as marginalisation in higher education. The need for an institutional culture in higher education that respects diversity is highlighted in Chapter 13 (examining higher education and disadvantaged groups in India); arguably a core principle to guide efforts at reducing marginalisation in any context.

The editors include a final chapter in which they explore the relevance of Sen (1993, 2001, 2009) and Nussbaum's (2000, 2011) capabilities approach to social justice. Drawing on the content of the previous chapters and this approach, they highlight a useful framework for considering the dimensions of marginalisation - by society, by systems, by time/space, and by relevance. The authors note that any efforts to support marginalised groups are likely to also enhance the experience of the wider student body.

The chapters in this book make for incredibly engaging and informative reading and are noteworthy for their use - and integration - of multiple data sources to examine issues that have, to date, been relatively under-examined. Each chapter highlights key points in relation to policy and practice while also emphasising progress that had been made where relevant - a helpful reminder that progress can be made on this issue.

About the author

Dr Eavan Brady is an Assistant Professor in Social Work in the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin. Eavan is a registered social worker and vice-Chair of the Irish Aftercare Network. Her research interests are

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