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Book Review. Alternative Approaches to Education: A Guide for Parents and Teachers. 2nd Edition. By Fiona Carnie, 2017. 256 pp. Price: $44.95 (Paperback) and $139.09 (eBook)

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

The book "Alternative approaches to Education: A guide for parents and teachers," which Fiona Carnie published in 2003, should be considered a masterpiece. It is one of the most fascinating books I have ever read. This book not only provided general concepts and principles regarding alternative approaches to education but also introduces some innovative ideas for new perspectives on education and developing education in Cambodia. The book attempts to prove that our current model of schooling is outdated, and there is a great need to radically rethink alternative approaches to education. It is crucial for education that various approaches to education are required to help young people find meaning and purpose in their lives and enable them to be active participants in society. In addition, this book emphasizes that teachers must teach their students based on their individual needs, and on the best ways to help students perceive the educational system.

There are plenty of rules and conventional regulations to determine teaching approaches. However, there is no one size fits all approach to meet the needs of children and students due to their differences. A customized and adaptive system is one of the 'out-of-the-box' ways to help children and students cultivate meaningful learning and practical knowledge and skills to achieve educational aims. To be more competitive and up to date on current trends, relearning, unlearning, and understanding are necessary for researchers, educators, and students to instill this as a societal norm. This book presents alternative approaches to education, which provide insightful information and perspectives for researchers and practitioners to carry out education to meet the needs of individuals rather than focus on the goals of institutions and governments. This book is an ideal and well-documented resource for those who seek innovative and alternative approaches to education, and the book serves as a guide for teachers and parents to collaboratively bring changes in the field of education.

This book is divided into three main parts: part I - Alternative Approaches to Education; part II - Doing It Yourself; and part III - Alternative Approaches in the State System. In part I - Alternative Approaches to Education, six sub-sections are introduced, including: small alternative schools, Steiner Waldorf education, Montessori Education, democratic schools, other philosophies, and the UK education

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system. The book provides some concepts and principles of alternative approaches to education through a discussion of various perspectives and best practices which support better meeting the needs and interests of learners and foster higher academic achievements for learners. Related to this, it addresses many new ways and methods to educate students to catch up with the fast pace of changes in society and to cope with pressing issues. Furthermore, in part I, the author addressed the case of the UK education system. The author seeks to demonstrate the UK curriculum is not concerned with the learners' needs but instead meeting the political agenda, which is centered on mandated standards.

In addition, the book discusses small alternative schools, which have innovative ways to educate the students. For example, the case of Hartland, which emphasizes educating the whole person (head, hand, and heart), putting into practice inventive approaches to educating the learners. In terms of human-scale education, the small size of an institution does not matter, as the key factor is how people work collaboratively to achieve common goals. A positive relationship is one of the main components for propelling schools toward sustainability. The 'term positive relationship' refers to the rapport among the students, parents, and teachers. Once they have a good connection and are able to share their ideas and opinions, the school system will be more active in enhancing and improving educational standards. One main purpose of this book is to show the varieties of alternative education in the UK as a means to answer the question "what is education?".

The book's critical thinking approach could help students to effectively learn through their own life and experience, encouraging them to critically ask questions and seek self-development (social, moral, emotional, creative, spiritual, physical, and intellectual). Indeed, students can express their ideas and raise their voices, and, as teachers know, learning takes place in a range of settings, not just in the classroom. Moreover, education is about developing the whole child (holistic) and should aim to foster creative, emotional, moral, and spiritual growth along with intellectual development. Students can develop a love of the environment by cultivating the mindset of environmental protection, which leads to environmental sustainability. In addition, there are some new theories, such as Steiner Waldorf education, Montessori education, and Democratic schools, among others. These emerging theories provided insightful understandings of education evolution for engaging with the current trends in teaching models. Many ideas and approaches addressed in part I, for instance, Steiner Waldorf education and Montessori education, are alternative approaches to education in the UK which have attempted to provide children with equitable access to quality education and meet their learning needs.

Part II of the book, titled "Doing it Yourself," consists of three sub-parts: setting up a small school or learning center, home-based education, and flexible schooling. The book articulates that these are alternative approaches to pedagogy when there is no education available, or when people want to get out of the state school system. There are various phases to establishing a school, which should be inclusive of community interests. They have to find suitable premises for the school, which align with the needs and interests of community people and learners. The author asserts, "Schools are not necessarily much to do with education...they are mainly institutions of control where certain essential habits must be instilled in the young. Education is quite different and has little place in school (Carnie, 2003)".

Based on this perspective, education does not have to prioritize school, and it can occur in various settings as long as it serves the interests of learners and community members. Bear in mind that we do not need to be teachers to educate our children at home, and we do not have to teach them based on the National Curriculum. There are plenty of approaches to home education, and it takes time and a good deal of trial and error for families to discover what works in their situation. There are no strict examinations for the students involved in home-based education, as they are optional based on the approach between the students and parents regarding conducting their learning. Besides, there is no one size that fits all.

Flexible schooling is one of the alternative ways which could meet the needs and interests of

students and parents. For example, for many children, going to school five days a week, six hours a day, is too much and causes tension and stress for students. It is time consuming for the students, and the teachers have to teach many students. To establish 'flextime' schooling, educators should cooperate with both the schools and parents because, without the agreement of the parents, the schools do not have any authority to modify regulations. Furthermore, flextime schooling is entirely legal. With a flexible schooling arrangement, in the UK, the child is a registered pupil at a school and deemed to be 'absent with leave' under sections 39 (2) and 39 (5) of the Education Act of 1944, during periods while s/he is educated away from the school. However, there are both advantages and drawbacks to flexible school. The child can have more significant input into decisions about their learning when not at school and can learn in different ways from different people, and in diverse settings, such as indoors and outdoors. The main disadvantage is the lack of continuity at school (schoolwork and also with friends) resulting in students missing opportunities.

The last part of the book is about alternative approaches to the state system. It contains three sub-parts, including: 'state schools: alternative ways of working; 'small is beautiful: lessons from America'; and, 'parents as change agents'. The author restates the case that there is inefficiency in educating by state schools, which is more about rule-based learning. As a result, there are some key aspects of education that the state system cannot perform well. Hence, the state school system has to modify and adjust the National Curriculum to align with the specific context to cultivate learners' full potential. The book emphasizes principles such as positive relationships, a holistic approach to learning, democratic participation, partnership with parents and the local community, and smaller structures. The universal principles set out in the book guide and teach students how to use their minds and demonstrate mastery through an 'exhibition' of their knowledge and skills, which requires stressing democracy and trust. These aims allow a student load of eighty pupils or less for each teacher and model democratic and equitable practices.

Even though this book provides parents and teachers with information and guidance on various education options in the UK and as well as further afield, it fails to render sufficient details about education, in the UK context and in the context of other countries The author should include more information on different approaches to education in other countries to enlarge data and broaden education options for the readers regarding how to deliver education to children. In part I of this book, the emerging theories and philosophies, like Steiner Waldorf education, Montessori education, Democratic schools, are limited because they ignore the significant impacts of schools in contributing to children's learning. This book should introduce more updated and supportive theories and approaches to ensure that children can assess meaningful learning and achieve holistic education. The author should provide a more realistic and practical approach which enables capturing all the important knowledge from this book which supports implementing teaching approaches to benefit their learners.

Part II of this book recommends how parents can understand alternatives for their children in cases where there is no school in their area by setting up a school or learning center, educating at home, or combining conventional school with home-based education in with a 'flextime' approach. However, there is insufficient information and evidence in the book to support the practice of 'Doing it yourself' because setting up a school or learning center using resources from the government budget is not enough and cannot sustain the learning space. Hence, this book should differentiate and elaborate on the primary funding sources: the government, community, and other relevant stakeholders. For instance, there are various methods of channeling funds to establish higher education in the UK according to different criteria for donations from community members and the government (McCann et al., 2019).

In addition, the concept of home-based education in this book is vague, when claiming that the home can be an alternative place for education. The author should provide essential information on organizing learning activities in the house because the reader cannot find practical ways to establish learning activities at home in this

book. In that regard, McLeod and Graber (2018), have provided some insights about how technology could assist learners to organize their learning spaces and enhance learning skills which allows them to conduct autonomous learning more easily. In their book, they describe strategies for organizing learning spaces by utilizing technology for improved learning.

Part III of this book raises concerns about state education, providing examples of alternative ways of working both in the UK and in the US, which is narrow and with applicability limited to developed states. The author should provide more examples of alternative ways of education for developing countries. It also helps the readers to understand the context of both developed and developing countries.

The book failed to elaborate on how to establish and construct recommended approaches to be more effective in helping children in their learning. The author needs to introduce more strategies and mechanisms to make those approaches more contextualized in each social setting, so that the readers are provided with critical information for putting into practice the teaching approaches. For instance, this book should provide more information about improving and fostering the quality of basic education in developing countries which concentrates on the role of education in improving the economic conditions of individuals (Kanu, 1996). In the last chapter of the book, the author suggests how parents can work together to bring about change. Still, the author does not provide insightful information about techniques or strategies for improving parent collaboration or parent-teacher cooperation.

The author does not clearly state how parents can make educational changes, leaving the readers confused about steps and methods for parents to do so. It would be great if the author could provide more information for the readers to see the benefits of parents working together to bring about change in education. Importantly, the author provides more detailed information and evidence on how to guide teachers with alternative methods to establish better educational systems for children to access meaningful learning.

To conclude, even though this book contains some loopholes and shortcuts which create the need for further research and discussion, there are various ideas that are useful to apply to the Cambodian context for the betterment of education. The main lesson learned from this book is the need to diversify learning approaches to assist children's learning, which is crucial for Cambodian policymakers and educators to consider. For instance, there are various options for educational approach, such as setting up small schools or learning centers, home-based education, and flexible schooling. Cambodian educators would benefit from being introduced to new approaches to education and should consider implementing them in the Cambodian context.

Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, there are new challenges for teaching and learning in the Cambodian education (Soeung & Chim, 2022). Online learning and blended learning have been implemented in Cambodian education to fight against the negative impact of social distancing required to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Traditional approaches to teaching and learning could not be practiced in this critical situation. Thus, those approaches to education outlined in this book could be useful for Cambodian scholars and educators to reflect on and develop new approaches to improving Cambodian education. Secondly, the concepts and principles of this book guide parents and teachers to work together to bring about changes in educational practice, which can be applied by Cambodian policymakers and educators for fostering parent-teacher relation-ships.

Furthermore, collaboration among parents and teachers helps holistic and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning. In Cambodia, parents and teachers could play an essential role in working collaboratively to monitor and evaluate their children's learning by attending monthly meetings to discuss their children's progress and challenges. Such meetings are an excellent opportunity for them to help their children to grapple with challenges to improving current learning. Of course, students should learn what they are interested in rather than required curriculum. Teachers, parents, and children should work with each other more closely to improve

education and make their learning more meaningful.

Thirdly, to realize Cambodia's aspiration to become an upper-middle-income country by 2030 and a high-income nation by 2050, alternative approaches to education must be materialized (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 2019). As this book emphasizes, to meet the demand of children it is not enough to focus only on the state school system. Based on the current schooling model in Cambodia, the education system cannot sufficiently provide quality education and produce competent human resources to meet job market demands. Therefore, alternative approaches to education are required in the Cambodian context to enable this country to unleash learners' potential and cultivate skills to stimulate Cambodia's economic growth. Alternative approaches to education could be catalysts for transforming Cambodia into a knowledge-based society as stated in the Cambodian education vision in 2030.

Additionally, a new edition of the book extended Part IV, which can help educate policymakers to support both private and public schools. It might be necessary to adapt key ideas to the Cambodian educational context to coordinate with the MoEYS and set up curriculum development. Key insights and ideas presented in the book can help to support the Cambodian government's triangulation strategy stage 5 which focuses on human resource development, and Sustainable Development Goal 4, which relates to the quality of education.

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