

# BOOK REVIEW

*Learning in the Anthropocene: Reimagining Education in the Twenty-First Century.* By Carl A. Maida (2023), 370 pages. ISBN: 978-1-66692-468-8. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

*Learning in the Anthropocene: Reimagining Education in the 21st Century* is an important body of work that addresses how education should be envisioned in an age of acceleration punctuated with crisis, transition, and fluidity. In the face of the Anthropocene, Carl A. Maida's book explores two pertinent questions- how can education prepare young people for the uncertain future? And how can project-based learning deployed as a pedagogy serve to enlighten the minds of young people?

To answer these questions, Maida provides a historically rich and anthropologically engaging scholarship that masterfully connects the dots between two key important arenas required to reimagine education in the 21st century – school and society. Before delving into the contents of the book, it is first important to revisit the term Anthropocene which has received greater visibility in academic research in contemporary times. In essence, the Anthropocene was first proposed by Crutzen and Stoermer as the new geological epoch in the present time to characterize the negative consequences of human-induced actions on the natural environment. However, in March 2024, a panel of geologists from the International Union of Geological Science (IUGS), an authoritative body in the field of geology, declared that the Anthropocene is not an official geological epoch, but rather a pivotal chapter in human civilization. Regardless of viewing it as a new epoch or a major event in human history, the Anthropocene is still a powerful way to understand the world, which is now rampant with global diseases, environmental degradation, unethical technological advancements, and collapsing societies. Owing to this, education plays a critical role in preparing young people to face these unfolding futures underpinned by crisis and conflicts – and this is what the author addresses as the book explores experiential instructional approaches that enable students to gain the freedom to produce knowledge for the future. As a teacher and educational researcher in Malaysia, this book speaks to me in great volumes on how project-based learning, when planned well, connected to a broader context, and deployed efficiently, can deeply shift young minds to be critical thinkers.

The book is organized around three themes – Millennial Adolescence, Changing The Subject, and Rationality and Redemption which provide a closer inspection of how societal and cultural influences shape the youth. In the first theme, Millennial Adolescence, the author establishes that the adolescent has personal agency that unravels through a reciprocal relationship between their social environments. In highly regulated education systems that are bounded by accountability regimes, teachers and educators often overlook this 'emerging sense of self' of the youth, and as a teacher myself, this part is a reflection in today's context whereby students are often graded through a set of checklists – erasing their own personal identities. In Chapter 3, Maida (2023) likens education as a social movement as both "develop worldviews that restructure cognition, that re-cognize reality itself" (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991, p. 65, as cited in Maida, 2023). By associating education and social movements, Maida makes an important claim for all educators to take heed – just as how social movements occur within a specific historical point and are influenced by broader events, the same applies to education. This is a great segue for the next section – Changing The Subject whereby Maida illustrates successful and localised project-based learning activities taking shape in communities through Chapters 5, 6 and 7 prior to establishing project-based learning as a critical pedagogy in the age of Anthropocene in Chapter 4. In this section, Maida begins by challenging the current outdated realities of teaching and learning by drawing on Seymour Sarason's 'regularities of schooling' in Chapter 4. The argument is centred on how "persistent set of practices and structures

that dominate schooling ... are ineffective for motivating and encouraging the kind thinking required in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Maida, 2023, p. 73). The author further strengthens that project-based learning as an experiential approach fosters critical modes of inquiry that provide a deeper appreciation of the outcomes of learning for both the students and parents. I was also particularly intrigued by this chapter on Maida’s (2023) argument on how digital instruction, similar to Fordist innovations a century ago, merely “mass produce ideas, separating individuals from social and emotional processes necessary for deeper learning” (p. 83). Maida further elucidates that “digital learning more often depends upon designs that serve managerial and administrative ends, further alienating and segmenting student populations” (p. 83). While in recent years digital education has morphed into a global agenda and taken as a top priority among international organizations and nation-states, Maida’s arguments should serve as a reminder for us to pause and reflect on how digital education might negatively orchestrate teaching and learning.

Moving forward, in the third theme, Maida (2023) illustrates three key moments – the Machine Age, the Postwar, and the Millennium, that have resulted in prominent changes in learning and human development. Employing a historical analysis to gain a deeper insight into the three different historical eras, Maida tacitly weaves the need for critical pedagogies to support reflective inquiry and democratic schooling amid unprecedented global change. I personally enjoyed these three chapters as Maida depicts how the emergence of social movements during each period led to structural changes, which simultaneously promote learning through participation and inform public pedagogies. Maida’s work here reminds us to rethink education in the 21st century as the convergence around the idea that technology will save us from all our problems has subsequently led to the erosion of democracy in education.

In conclusion, this book is a deeply reflective work which brings together two important arenas in education – the society and school. The way Maida extends his work by drawing onto historical analysis not only enriches his analysis but also grounds his arguments in a well-established intellectual tradition, thereby deepening the theoretical rigor and historical context of the scholarship. Similarly, reflecting on my role as a teacher in advancing education for sustainable development, this scholarship shows the power of project-based learning as evidenced in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 to illuminate the minds of the youths. I envision *Learning in the Anthropocene* will be a foundational text in the field of comparative education and education policy in the coming years as it showcases that only through situating knowledge within local contexts, we can enlighten youths to navigate the uncertain terrains of the Anthropocene.

*Pravindharan Balakrishnan*  
*King’s College London*