

Interrupting ‘Neoliberalism As Usual’ In The Education Sector: Constraints And Possibilities

Marie Brennan, University of South Australia, Mawson Lakes, South Australia
marie.brennan@unisa.edu.au

How do we understand the changing conditions of teachers’ work in Australia and the prospects for teacher participation in action research?

This paper traces three ‘waves’ of neoliberalism over the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s in governmental activity to control the work of teachers. I argue that neoliberal assumptions – marketisation, individualism, intensification of work, and subjugation of educational values to economic domains - have significantly altered the working conditions and spaces for activism in the Australian teaching profession, particularly in schools and colleges which serve marginalised populations. Participants will join in identifying examples of neoliberalism in action, and explore alternative explanations for intervention that involves more participatory, decolonising and democratic approaches to schooling and teachers’ work. Looking back over different efforts to support various forms of educational action research over the last 35 years, the paper goes on to suggest criteria for what might make educational action research more sustainable under narrowing conditions for teachers’ work. Group construction of new definitions for educational activism and political education of educational activists will conclude the session.