

and services to the crime rate, policing practices, or sentencing guidelines; rethink guardianship; think in terms of repurposing current police resources, developing the capacity of community members to be guardians and to foster guardianship, and sustaining investments.

For those interested in the school-to-prison pipeline, social justice, or the achievement gap, *Uneasy Peace* is a call to action and a plea to resist any path forward that ignores the visceral needs of poor children living in the nation's most disadvantaged neighborhoods.

KRISTA GOLDSTINE-COLE

WHEN GRIT ISN'T ENOUGH: A HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL EXAMINES HOW
POVERTY AND INEQUALITY THWART THE COLLEGE-FOR-ALL PROMISE

by Linda F. Nathan

Boston: Beacon Press, 2017. 184 pp. \$35.95 (cloth).

In the mid-2000s, researchers made the provocative case that *grit*—a form of self-discipline applied toward long-term pursuits—is as important to predicting future achievement as are general intelligence and talent. Since then, the concept of grit has garnered something of a cult following in popular culture, with devotees attracted to the familiar notion that anything can be accomplished through hard work and determination. However, in the context of high-poverty urban public schools, efforts to support the development of grit have been met with equal parts advocacy and derision. Proponents believe cultivating noncognitive traits like grit will have positive effects on student achievement, while critics argue that efforts to promote grit give rise to misdirected initiatives aimed at “fixing” students rather than addressing the inequitable ecosystems in which teaching and learning are embedded.

Against this backdrop, Linda F. Nathan's *When Grit Isn't Enough: A High School Principal Examines How Poverty and Inequality Thwart the College-for-All Promise* makes a timely and valuable contribution to the growing discourse on how educators can prepare students to succeed—as well as creating structures that bolster student efforts—in an increasingly uneven sociopolitical context. Whereas much of the discourse on student achievement in impoverished settings has been dominated by academic voices and theoretical insights, *When Grit Isn't Enough* draws from Nathan's formidable career as an educator and school leader. Throughout the text, Nathan weaves together student narratives, current research, and her own reflections to question the potential grit may hold for students who have been marginalized from social and economic power—particularly students of color, students from mixed-status households, and first-generation college students.

As the former principal of a high school in Boston, Nathan recalls promising her students college and career success in exchange for conscientious effort and making efforts to enact a school culture that celebrated grit and

then feeling bitter disappointment on witnessing how some of her “grittiest” students struggled in their postsecondary transitions. *When Grit Isn’t Enough* is motivated by this experience and is informed by eighty interviews Nathan conducted with former students in order to better understand the challenges historically marginalized students face after successfully completing high school. The text is organized into five chapters based on recurring themes that arose throughout these interviews—chapter 1, “Money Doesn’t Have to Be an Obstacle”; chapter 2, “Race Doesn’t Matter”; chapter 3, “Just Work Harder”; chapter 4, “Everyone Can Go to College”; chapter 5, “If You Believe, Your Dreams Will Come True.” Nathan argues that these tropes inform how we think about student achievement and stem from an uncritical, yet enduring investment in a meritocratic ideology that has adopted the guise of grit. Throughout these chapters, Nathan presents ethnographic vignettes that follow promising high school students throughout their experiences trying to pursue higher education or find stable careers in rewarding, bread-winning work. She finds that virtually all of these students faced significant financial barriers to pursuing postsecondary goals, failed to recognize how their personal struggles stem from systemic underinvestment in urban communities, and blamed themselves for their perceived inadequacies.

Nathan is perhaps at her best as she offers readers glimpses into students’ challenges and perceptions of failure while she grapples with her own assumptions about how educators can support nonprivileged students. In this respect, *When Grit Isn’t Enough* reads like a master class in reflective practice, as Nathan invites readers into her intellectual journey as she begins to recognize her students’ stories as evidence of collective, rather than individual, failure and to formulate a systemic critique of public education that challenges deeply held notions of individual achievement and meritocracy. In public education—a context trapped in a seemingly perpetual “wait for Superman”—Nathan illustrates the hard truth that there are no magic bullets.

Yet readers will likely find value in the fact that Nathan balances her incisive critiques with pragmatic recommendations and steps K–12 schools and higher education organizations can take to bolster their efforts to support vulnerable students. For instance, in chapter 1 Nathan enters into conversation with a growing number of scholars who have observed that first-generation college students receive neither adequate financial aid nor guidance in navigating a privileged social context with a new set of rules and curricula. While prior scholarship has documented the ways in which these challenges can render college completion all but impossible, Nathan marshals her unique insider perspective as a school-leader-turned-ethnographer of her students’ experiences to articulate steps that can be taken at both high school and higher education levels to ease first-generation students’ transitions to college. High school administrators may be interested to read about the extensive college preparation services Nathan implemented, which include summer intensives and retention specialists who maintain contact with students throughout their

first year of college, while college administrators may heed Nathan's call to provide sensitivity training to bolster staff efforts to support first-generation college students.

Readers may be left wishing that Nathan had presented even more practical guidance throughout the text, particularly after reading chapters 2 and 5, in which Nathan discusses the role of teacher professional development in understanding race and cultural responsive pedagogy and the role of action research and project-based learning in supporting a reciprocal relationship between individual and community enrichment. These short chapters necessarily leave much underexplored, and the critical topics raised, such as implementing antiracist curricula or nurturing student agency through creative learning opportunities, would benefit from an extended discussion allowing readers to more fully grasp the progressive alternatives Nathan gestures toward.

Nonetheless, in providing the reader with an intimate portrait of the on-the-ground experiences and narratives that have caused a seasoned educator to reformulate her educational philosophy and practice based on equity and collective action rather than individual merit and grit, *When Grit Isn't Enough* humanizes current debates on urban education, inequality, and opportunity. In addition to being a pleasure to read, the book will likely serve as an eye-opening text for teachers, school leaders, and policy makers willing to rethink their own assumptions about supporting student achievement.

RAQUEL L. JIMENEZ

THE EXPERIENCE OF NEOLIBERAL EDUCATION

edited by Bonnie Urciuoli

New York: Berghahn Books, 2018. 252 pp. \$120 (cloth).

In the 1930s, John Dewey argued in *Experience and Education* for the importance of guided experience to true learning centered around a student's growth and development as an individual. Indeed, Dewey is considered one of the American originators of the concept of experience in education, a "progressive" pedagogical philosophy often contrasted with "regressive" skill learning, rote memorization, and a culture of (standardized) testing. Bonnie Urciuoli's 2018 edited volume *The Experience of Neoliberal Education* interrogates this stereotyped contrast between so-called progressive experience and regressive skill acquisition, illustrating that in a neoliberal age, experiences, no less than skills, have been reformulated as commodities subject to demands from the higher education marketplace that include optimizing value to both buyer (the student and student's family) and seller (the corporate university).

Urciuoli's introduction and Wesley Shumar's conclusion frame the volume's chapters and are also richly theoretical contributions in their own right. In the introduction, Urciuoli invites the reader to think about "the college experi-