

this book. It provides us with a solid discussion and eye-opening description of an important and much-needed praxis.

Overall, there is much self-congratulatory rhetoric throughout the texts, especially when the authors mix up epistemology with cultural or religious nostalgia. One noted exception is the discussion of the status of women and the absence of critical thinking in Korea’s Confucian education. Another is the earnest struggle against oppression by Christian church people in South America.

The book is a welcome addition to the critical literature on learning and epistemology. Much work still needs to be done to acknowledge feminist, anti-racist, non-hegemonic, and inclusive education, and this book contributes to the enterprise. The conceptual basis for collecting the texts under the guise of non-Western knowledge is, of course, flawed from conception. Literature on religious schooling is not difficult to come by, and neither is literature on traditional cultures’ world views or on liberation ideology. What this collection does, however, is offer a contribution to each of these areas using the theme of knowing and learning as a common thread.

If I had been asked instead to collect some works under the themes of religion, tradition, and liberation, I would probably have accepted, thus avoiding a trap that I then would have been forced to justify with shaky reasoning, most likely hovering somewhere around stammering—as is sadly the case here.

One last thing: the cover design of this book should be nominated as most distasteful for both its concept and colour scheme. Spirals and rays, sheesh. When will academic publishers start to hire real graphic artists? In a pinch, I can certainly recommend a few.

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RE-THEORISING THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

Per Anderson and Judy Harris (Eds.). National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, Leicester, UK, 2006, 330 pages.

This is a collection of 15 chapters from authors working in a variety of countries and academic locations plus an *Endword* from Michael Young. All authors are Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) advocates, although they approach the topic from different theoretical perspectives and research frameworks; a few are grounded in the practical struggles over RPL, with, perhaps, those based in South Africa being the most rooted. Anyone who approaches RPL as a simple issue will do well to read through these arguments and gain some understanding of the problematic theoretical perspectives and nature of RPL.

Judy Harris provides a useful introduction to the field and overview of the contents in Chapter 1. What follows are chapters on assessment theory, knowledge and curriculum, a discussion of what happens to RPL after a student is in a course and program, and RPL as a pedagogical process. The first six chapters close with a discussion of the gap between the support for RPL and the reality, and a call for more process-based developmental models. The next couple of chapters look at postmodern understanding of RPL; these are followed by a chapter examining the recognition of immigrant credentials in Canada and Sweden. South African experience around assessors' handling of RPL and the difference between workers' oral knowledge and written university knowledge are explored in the next two chapters. In Chapter 12, Australian experiences with RPL and its link with outcomes are explored further; this is followed by a U.K. perspective on the issues and Tara Fenwick's discussion of complexity theory as a way of considering RPL. The final chapter argues for the transformative potential of RPL.

Many of these chapters deserve a review in themselves. Inevitably they vary; some are more convincing than others but overall they provide divergent ways of thinking about and arguing for RPL. A number of good questions are posed (for example, by Judy Harris in Chapter 3); there is some good discussion of the problematic use of portfolios as assessment vehicles and the role of RPL courses in preparing students (although these could be seen as preparatory or "return to learn"-type courses), and the question of whether RPL is about entry into programs for non-traditional students or advanced standing for adults taking traditional courses is discussed in a number of chapters. Extensive use is made of Bernstein's writings to explore knowledge and curriculum issues.

There are, however, some interesting omissions. For example, a number of chapters talk about "learning outcomes" and others "competencies," but neither concept is problematized. There is no real discussion of the applicability of RPL to different subject areas or educational domains—applied subjects as opposed to arts or training as opposed to higher education, for example. Are there parameters for RPL? Would it make sense to distinguish between the use value and exchange value of experiential learning and knowledge? Digs are made at the traditional elitist values of many academics and academic canons; although many of these may be justified by authors' experiences, there is no extensive discussion of the nature and origins of much academic knowledge, beginning as it does outside the academy. Such a discussion would underscore the relevance of authors' claims for recognizing experiential learning—perhaps, at the same time, making claims for the transformational potential of RPL more realistic. On a different tack the neo-liberal thrust behind many RPL claims is not adequately critiqued. Reference to adult education literature and ideas (transformative learning, for example) is scant, yet the book finishes with a dig by Michael Young at "the closed intellectual world that many adult educators tend to take for granted" (p. 321)—a comment he makes in spite of his acknowledgement that he has "not worked in the field of adult education" (p. 321).

Some authors are aware that RPL has not achieved its equity objectives, while others are still hoping for the best—with, perhaps, the use of RPL in South Africa being the best bet for a positive outcome. Overall this book is an optimistic advocacy for RPL; a theoretical argument for its adoption. It is not meant to be a practical guide on how to do RPL, but it does have some important observations and implications for practitioners.

There is still scope for a book that takes some criticisms of RPL seriously and deals with the practical application (and theoretical justification) of RPL in higher education—perhaps a book more rooted in adult education knowledge and practitioners' experience than this text. In the meantime, this collection will satisfy those who believe RPL has been under-theorized within the education literature.

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TEACHING DEFIANCE: STORIES AND STRATEGIES FOR ACTIVIST EDUCATORS

Michael Newman. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2006, 305 pages.

As I was reading this book, I was approached by a man who wanted to know what I was reading. After I told him, the man called "John," a self-described poet, commented that he had "learned defiance" not through explicit instruction but through books. Michael Newman's book can also be understood as a great teacher, developing our understanding of defiance and facilitating our ability to teach it; it "allows learning to happen," as John, the Vancouver poet, put it.

What, then, do we learn from this book? Throughout the 19 chapters, we learn about the roles and power of defiance through the exploration of rebelliousness, rebellion, revolution, choice, insight, action, emotions, and morality. In talking about "teaching choice," Newman admits that no one explicitly taught him how to make decisions, but rather the "school of hard knocks" (p. 76) led to accidental learning. As Newman later argues, and as everyone in adult education can attest, critical learning can "occur suddenly, by chance, and as a part of another activity altogether" (p. 240). Like John (the poet), Newman has clearly learned defiance, though it was not always obvious. Likewise, some of our learning from this book may not be obvious nor what we had intended to learn, but learn we will.

To respond to the question of how the book teaches, we first need to look at the person who wrote *Teaching Defiance*. Michael Newman is very much an Australian. His writing is rooted in his own cultural context, and many of the experiences he draws on are from his work with the Australian Trade Union Training Authority and as an educator in Australia, the United Kingdom, and South Africa. As is commonly said of Australians, Newman tells it like it is, with humour and without pretension, and this makes for a highly readable book where messages are conveyed through inspirational stories of adult educators and of seemingly everyday events. Newman demonstrates that stories are, indeed, powerful, and comments, "We can tell stories. These stories do not need to be long. Their job is to illustrate a point upon which we can help people reflect and then move on to more learning" (p. 40). While Chapter 17 focuses explicitly on story-telling, it appears that the entire book is a story-telling endeavour.