

worlds, have a realistic chance of being achievable.” The co-editors have made a strong, inspirational, and provocative contribution in showing readers *how* these authors write for such purposes and what is involved in bringing their voices into successfully framing some of the most compelling educational discussions of our times.

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## **MORE THAN IT SEEMS: HOUSEHOLD WORK AND LIFELONG LEARNING**

**Margrit Eichler, Patrizia Albanese, Susan Ferguson, Nicky Hyndman, Lichun Willa Liu, and Ann Matthews. Women’s Press, Toronto, 2010, 280 pages.**

This expansive work seeks to fill a large gap in the scholarship on lifelong learning in Canada. By illustrating the many types of “unstructured” and “incidental” learning that occur during the informal process of engaging in household work, Eichler, Albanese, Ferguson, Hyndman, Liu, and Matthews (2010) describe for their readers of the rich and diverse learning that can occur within the home (p. 6). Eichler et al. invest household work with the recognition that it deserves, in an effort to effect changes to social discourses, policy, and systems that position household workers, both paid and unpaid, as inferior non-learners. Naming and affirming the menial and repetitive tasks of *housework*, as well as the creative and sustaining nurturance of *carework*, their combination of research, analysis, and narrative cautions their readers not to engage in blatant reductionism that characterizes household work as necessary, yet virtually insignificant.

In cooperation with the Work and Lifelong Learning research network (WALL), headed up by David Livingstone of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), Eichler, an OISE professor, teamed up with Albanese, an associate professor at Ryerson, and four OISE graduate students to compile this book. The authors’ research concludes that not only is much of the work undertaken and accomplished within the home unpaid or underpaid, it is often downplayed by the mostly women who perform it. This book incorporates firsthand accounts of household workers struggling to identify and claim their learning rather than dismiss it as isolating, repetitive, and lacking in affirmation (p. 185). At the same time it gives voice to the insight of the most vulnerable among household workers by contextualizing the things they “should not have to learn:” denial, discrimination, harassment, neglect, and poverty (pp. 107, 142, 177, 205).

This publication seeks to reveal the assumptions that underlie both the lack of recognition and marginalization of household work. First, the authors challenge the notion that household workers do not serve the needs of society as a whole; their research disproves that paid household workers perform tasks that are only necessary to less significant members of society, such as mothers and their children, the disabled, the infirm, and the aged, while unpaid household workers’ efforts benefit only themselves and their dependents.

When discussing the value of carework, the authors assert that relationships mediated by paid or unpaid caring can bridge boundaries between genders, ethnicities, ages, and abilities, in any socio-cultural contexts or time periods. By affirming that this aspect of household work as an “embodied, dynamic, and intersubjective” learning process, Eichler et al. clarify the complex and changeable nature of household work and the impact that it can have on oneself and others (p. 165).

Subsequently, the authors explain how the dynamic and complex nature of household work prompts workers to participate in both explicit (conscious) and tacit (unconscious) independent and social, informal, and experiential lifelong learning. Once encouraged to articulate their learning, workers credit their *housework* and *carework* with developing their resourcefulness, flexibility, initiative, creativity, money and time management, short and long range planning, as well as conflict resolution: all of which are highly transferable and marketable knowledge and skills.

One of the most notable contributions of this publication is how the authors illuminate the interrelationship and interdependence of all persons through sharing in household work and learning. Their depiction of the cyclical spiral of gathering information and techniques, followed by testing, evaluation, adaptation, and practice, reveals the lifelong learning process in which all household workers engage.

This learning builds on the vital contribution that myriad household workers make to society. For instance, the authors identify the crucial role that both paid and unpaid household workers play in enabling their, most often male, employers and spouses to perform paid work for longer periods of time, more thoroughly and effectively, and for increased acknowledgement and remuneration. The authors insist these factors ought to increase society’s economic valuation and expand the definition of household work (pp. 23-25)

While this book is somewhat unrealistic in its ambitions to overturn the systemic policies that oppress household workers and limit their ability to achieve their goals, it accomplishes its aim of empowering household workers by voicing their learning (pp. 215-224). By describing the lifelong learning, unlearning, and relearning in which household workers must participate before, during, and after migration, acquiring a new job, welcoming or losing a family member, becoming sick and/or disabled, this book imbues its empirical data and analysis with a notable significance and breadth. April, a live-in caregiver cited by the authors, boldly asserts that household work is nothing short of “doing everything”, more than we are asked to do, to sustain our own lives, and the lives of those for whom we care (p. 192).

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