

THE CRAFT OF TEACHING ADULTS (3RD EDITION)

Thelma Barer-Stein and Michael Kompf (Eds.). (2001). Toronto: Irwin Publishing Ltd. 360 pages.

When a book on adult education is published in a “third edition,” it must be making a valuable contribution to the field. From a uniquely Canadian perspective this edition provides a thought-provoking examination of some of the diverse principles, values and methods that make up the practice or “artisan craft” of teaching adults. Weaving together frameworks and practices ranging from postmodernism to program evaluation, transformative learning to group facilitation, anti-racist pedagogy to mentorship, this volume expresses the diversity, challenge and complexity of a constantly renewing field of teaching and learning. The strength of the text is in the scope of its discourse on the ‘how to’—the method and process of teaching and learning. With a few exceptions, the book is limited in its focus on many of the critical contemporary issues and contexts of adult education work across Canada.

There are 20 chapters, each introduced by a “practitioner summary” by 20 university adult educators from various parts of Canada. The last word of the publication is given to the late J. Roby Kidd, founder of the department of Adult Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and the International Council for Adult Education, and the humorous yet poignant “Ten Commandments of Educationists.” The text is divided into four main sections or “cornerstones” of adult education: knowledge of self, knowledge of teaching and facilitation, knowledge of student, and knowledge of context.

In section one, “Knowledge of Self,” the four chapters examine various self-reflective practices of both full and part-time adult educators. A common thread is the need to take time to reflect on who we are, what we do, how and why we do it, and what we need and want to learn as practitioners. The ten chapters of section two, “Teaching and Facilitating,” explore methods ranging from learner- and process-oriented approaches to evaluation to distance education practice and holism in learning to valuing workplace experience. The four chapters of section three, “Knowledge of Students,” delve into issues such as racism through a framework of cultural diversity, and valuing the individual journeys of learners and the needs and experiences of women and seniors. Section four, “Knowledge of Context/Environment,” is an eclectic look at organizational learning, issues in literacy, the process of mentoring, the importance and value of history, the maze of definitions for/in the field, and the art of comparison.

What the authors have in common, although they come from diverse angles, is a deep respect for the adult learner and the difficult role of the

practitioner in contemporary society and a determination to examine and re-examine learning theories and practices in order to meet the constant change and challenge of the delivery, context, and meaning of adult education. From different angles, Neufeld, Scott and Draper enter the somewhat nebulous frameworks of transformative learning, postmodernity and philosophy that challenge the aims of adult education, the underlying values and assumptions inherent in its philosophies, and the meaning of learning. While postmodern theories question the validity and usefulness of "universalizing," transformative learning and radical and humanist philosophies challenge adult education to engage in critical inquiry and debate towards a unifying goal of social change. Laiken, Bouchard, Quigley and Fenwick argue that we need to re-think the ways in which we include the values, knowledge, skills and aspirations of the learner in our research and evaluation processes. Acknowledging inequity and the issue of power, Barer-Stein and MacKeracher examine ways to increase participation in adult education through the frameworks of feminist pedagogy and cultural diversity. They confront the issues of sexism and racism which persist today and the impact they have on the lives and learning of women and people of colour in Canada. Randall adds to this debate by acknowledging how the perspective of elderly or old is a social construction and how this perspective creates potential barriers to learning for this growing demographic group.

This publication is extremely accessible in its language and design. The addition of the extensive "Practitioner's Summary" provides an excellent orientation to each chapter. However, one problem with the structure is the absence of an index. An index is valuable in guiding readers to some of the major issues that may not be visible through the table of contents. For example, if a reader was interested in feminist perspectives in adult education, s/he would need to read all the summaries as none of the titles indicate that either feminism or women is a focus even though MacKeracher takes them up under the guise of "Process of Adult Learning."

While the first three sections meet their goals, the final section on context is relatively weak. This is not a reflection on the existing chapters but rather on what is absent, and of course no single text can cover all the issues. Throughout the text there was little or no focus on complex contemporary contexts of globalization and corporatization, cultural homogenization, environmental degradation and development, poverty and violence to name but a few areas that form the matrix of many adult lives across this vast country. A chapter on contemporary contexts and issues in adult education would have made this text more complete and valuable in any number of

courses. Nevertheless, as it stands, this publication is extremely useful and provides an excellent orientation to the field—past and present—of adult education. It would be most valuable to practitioners and learners working in program planning, teaching and facilitation methods, learning perspectives and literacy, evaluation, and definitions and frameworks of adult education.

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