

BOOK REVIEWS/RECENSIONS

THE PROFESSION AND PRACTICE OF ADULT EDUCATION: AN INTRODUCTION

Sharan B. Merriam and Ralph G. Brockett (1997). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

True to their subtitle, Merriam and Brockett provide an introductory overview of the major dimensions in the adult education field for all adult education practitioners. The authors' main intent is to raise awareness of critical issues and tensions inherent in the practice of adult education. The book provides an update on an earlier foundational book, *Adult Education: Foundations of Practice* (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982). As with any introductory book, this book provides a broad general sweep of the field of adult education as it presently exists; it does not purport to provide any depth of discussion on any particular topic. It builds on the earlier volume by integrating discussions about issues and concerns in the field that have surfaced during the last 15 years. In this respect the book is timely as it builds on the foundational elements of the now somewhat dated earlier volume. This updated foundational background sets the stage for understanding what is going on in the field today. The authors keep to their practitioner focus, which makes the book an ideal text for beginners in the adult education field and a welcome addition to the libraries of well established adult educators.

The book is divided into three main parts. The first (four chapters) focuses on foundations of adult education; the second (also four chapters), is devoted to the organization and delivery of adult education; and the final part (three chapters) centers on developing a professional field of practice. In addition to a reference list, a name index and a subject index make this volume useful as a handy quick reference. The 1982 book had endnotes rather than a reference list, so this change in reference style is a welcome improvement for busy practitioners who require quick access to information. Each part has a brief introductory section in which the rationale for and the content of each of the chapters in that part is explained. At the end of each chapter, a brief summary of the key points in the chapter is provided. The many questions posed throughout the text at key intervals remind the readers to pause and reflect, and try to make connections between what they have read in light of their personal experience. The questions also allow the reader to reflect on whether some of the connections are missing, and to ask the important question, why? What is the book missing? Whose voice is missing from the discussion?

Although much of the material in the book is not new, each of the parts, at least for me, has one interesting chapter that highlights an aspect of adult education which previously either had not surfaced, was bypassed, was given very little notice, or was perceived as being of very little interest or use to practitioners. For example, in the first part, the chapter "Perspectives on the Past" points out that the value of history for practitioners has often been ignored or considered unimportant. The

authors claim that a knowledge of history is one way to foster reflection on the practices of the past with an eye to improving practices today. This knowledge can also serve as a way of understanding what we as adult educators do, by providing important links with what has gone on before and with the wider adult education community. This chapter is organized around key questions, which are directed to establishing the value and benefits of studying various types of history. It forms a fitting companion piece to the previous chapter on philosophical perspectives.

In the second part, the chapter on "Examining Access and Opportunity" examines the issues of why adults participate in adult education programs, and why not. This chapter's important contribution to the issues is that it goes beyond a discussion of facts, figures, and possible solutions to one that provides a better understanding of the complex set of conditions and circumstances that are often intertwined. The chapter serves as a reality check, inasmuch as it makes clear that there are no panaceas and that the many solutions educators use to improve participation and related issues work for some learners and further complicate the lives of others.

The chapter on "The Unacknowledged Side of Practice" in the final part calls attention to the many practitioners in the field of adult education whose voices have not been heard, whose writing does not appear in mainstream adult education literature, and whose work and efforts are often dismissed as marginal—for example, community-based programs. Merriam and Brockett classify the invisible in two ways: invisible by who they are and invisible by what they do. The chapter ends on a positive note by claiming that the field of adult education is moving toward a more visible presence. Although most adult educators may agree that this increasing visibility is happening and that there is more effort being made to be inclusive, there are others, like myself, who feel that the movement toward full inclusion is more at a snail's pace and should be accelerated.

The book offers some interesting discussion about the issue of professionalization in adult education, and presents both sides of the debate in a balanced overview. Authors conclude that the professionalization process is irreversibly into motion today and that the bigger question which adult educators should debate now is what direction the process of professionalization should take the field in the future.

As an introductory book, this volume is excellent for all new to the field of adult education. For veterans in the field, it analyzes and synthesizes nicely the literature on current issues in the field; so I recommend it as a good way to update oneself. As an introduction to practice, it is complete, providing information on all the questions raised; concrete, using specific facts and vivid, image-building familiar works; and clear, achieving appropriate readability through the use of effective sentences and paragraphs. However, it falls short on conciseness. I found it personally irritating and disruptive to my flow of thought to have issues raised very briefly at various points in the book, only to be followed by a parenthetical statement, such as: "(This issue is discussed more fully in Chapters Ten and Eleven)". Instead of breaking the text, it seems to me that the editors could have done a better job of organizing the material by keeping certain sections together, rather than scattering

bits and pieces among the chapters. Conciseness requires that the text be organized effectively and that unnecessary repetition be avoided.

Marie A. Gillen

St. Francis Xavier University

ADULT EDUCATION IN MANITOBA: HISTORICAL ASPECTS

Deo Poonwassie and Anne Poonwassie (Eds.) (1997). Mississauga, ON: Canadian Educators' Press.

Every Canadian province needs a book like this one. Not just because education is a jealously guarded provincial responsibility, but because these provincial boundaries reflect more than arbitrary geography. They reflect culture, and the history of culture. Adult education arises from culture and, perhaps more than any other organized human phenomenon, reflects it. A history of adult education is a history of culture, and few books reflect that more than this one does. With the rapid growth of adult education in the past twenty years, and the appearance of legions of new practitioners emerging from the characteristic variety of supporting agencies, the need for regional reflections of our history, as well as for the Selman and Dampier's, *The Foundations of Adult Education in Canada*, (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc., 1991), has become imperative. In addition, the structure of the book itself, a series of case studies, reinforces the true image of the enterprise that is adult education. It is an enterprise emerging variously from the demands of a developing complex society, the timing, the conjunction and interaction of many various agencies, and the impulse for a better life for all.

One of the things that regional writing allows, indeed demands, is the presence of the individuals and groups actually involved in the activities described, and their impact on other people. Tweedie, Hayward, Lagasse, Roeder, Lorimer, and Ferguson are only some of the people revealed who had energy and imagination at the right time and in the right place. Many of them were national figures as well, which testifies to the fact that while being true to its own roots, Manitoba spoke to the whole country in terms of imaginative adult education.

All of the traditional areas of Canadian adult education are reflected in Manitoba's history: literacy, citizenship, health, vocational education, and a special emphasis on Aboriginal adult education which, in this context, does not mean education for Aboriginals sponsored by the majority culture. There are also valuable case studies of the major providing agencies: the university, the school board, the YW and YMCA, and the Women's Institutes. The history of the Winnipeg Adult Education Centre, a project of the Winnipeg School Board, demonstrates its courage and independence (like that of other provincial school boards) with respect to supporting education for the entire community, in this case adults. This was achieved with little support—support almost bordering on opposition—from the provincial government. One wonders if fewer and bigger boards (the present fixation of an increasing number of provincial governments) will manifest such courage and imagination. The dominance of Winnipeg in these histories, as in the