

during the Great Depression. Again Selman's research is important and innovative because little work has been carried out in the field to write provincial histories of Canadian adult education. Selman's work provides valuable insights to those who would proceed with such research and face the challenge of finding ways to get these valuable accounts published.

Selman's collection of historical essays is a useful introduction to the field for new students. It is a worthwhile resource that serves as a reminder to the rest of us about what it means to be a Canadian adult educator within the vast learning mosaic comprising our field. It stands as an informative work for all who value the importance of the historical context in building a knowledge and understanding of Canadian adult education. Selman's book takes us through the metamorphosis of adult education from its glory days as a field where amateurs enlivened a social movement to new days when professionals reacted to the demands of an increasingly technicized and commodified practice. While it remains for others to complete this account, Selman's work here and elsewhere is an important contribution toward the accomplishment of an extensive social history of adult education in this country.

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### **COMMUNICATION THEORY TODAY.**

David Crowley and David Mitchell (Eds.) (1994). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Adult learning is now widely understood to occur in natural societal settings in addition to formal instructional ones. The terms *learning society*, *learning culture*, *lifelong learning*, and *learning organizations*, although murky in specifics, have all become commonplace. These popularized terms behoove us to devote more scholarly resources to nonformal adult learning and its intersection with other areas of scholarship which address conditions impinging on learning outside classrooms and in the natural world. In this regard, the field of communication is of paramount significance. For adult educators open to interdisciplinary inquiry, an excellent resource for a critical exploration of the common terrain between adult education and communication is available in *Communication Theory Today*.

The essential connection between scholarship in both communication and adult education is the significance that each accords to understanding the creation of knowledge. Communication too is exploring the critical role of social relations, political structures, economic imperatives and cultural practices in shaping perceptions, beliefs, and values. Of particular relevance to adult education for social change is the manner and extent that the technologies and economics of communication are fuelling and shaping social change and contemporary society. Any adult educator who ignores the analyses available through current communication scholarship for the project of transformational learning would be like the proverbial ostrich.

This particular publication is worthy of attention from adult education scholars for five reasons. First, edited by two Canadian scholars (Crowley of McGill University/McLuhan Program, University of Toronto; Mitchell of the University of Calgary), the book is a collection of original essays summarizing scholarship in thirteen key areas of contemporary communication. Second, nine of these essays could just as easily appear as major topics in a text or conference on critical and progressive adult learning. The titles "Mass Media and the Public Interest" and "In the Realm of Uncertainty: The Global Village and Capitalist Postmodernity" are two such examples. Third, the book is informed by critical social theory and cultural studies and as such speaks to the critical turn in adult pedagogy. Fourth, the book's frame of reference is interdisciplinary, and like critical adult education, emphasizes a meaning-construction approach to communication rather than an instrumental one. The book adopts a cultural model of communication congruent with Freire's view of education as cultural work—and avoids the transportation model of communication which so deeply shaped early conceptions of distance education in Canada. Fifth, the view of communication in this text shares a large number of common referent points with adult education including Dewey, Innis, McLuhan, Habermas, Goffman, Foucault, and Giddens.

The book has four major sections, each with relevance for critical adult education. *Part I—Communication and the Mediation of Social Worlds*—documents the relationship among information technologies, societal conditions, the resultant environment, and human agency. Three scholars offer compelling arguments about the limitation of any contemporary social theory which purports to examine issues of power and control without also encompassing an analysis of modern media. Since this is a failing of critical adult education theory, their arguments deserve our close scrutiny and careful assessment.

*Part II—Media, Meaning, and Discourse*—is more narrowly focused on concerns particular to communication scholarship, although each essay has at least one point of relevance for progressive adult education. For instance, those with a focus on population mobility, issues of immigration, and multicultural societies (such as Canada) will be informed by the exploration of mass media influence on group identities. The theme of the second essay—risk communication—might appear obscure until reconfigured as a "purposeful exchange of information about health or environmental risks," in which case its pertinence for adult education's agenda becomes self-evident. The section's engaging essay on conversation analysis should be required reading for adult education courses on qualitative methods, illustrating as it does the constraints, collusion, and imperatives of one-to-one dialogue, of which interviews are an obvious form.

*Part III—Contingency, Reflexivity, and Postmodernity*—is aligned with postmodern perspectives in adult education. The first essay challenges the classic dualities in previous communication literature—dualities such as producers and consumers, senders and receivers, encoders and decoders—or, in adult education—learners and teachers, developed and developing. The authors of this section share the current adult education concern for how social relations impact the production of meaning but go beyond that to include an analysis of how social relations impact the circulation and comprehension of meaning. They posit that the new electronic technologies by which

meanings are circulated with their attendant deviation from former conventions of time and space have created change of sufficient magnitude to warrant attention at the level of social theory. The book cautions against assuming that diversity in the global village can be equated to independence or freedom from power and domination; and instead fixes diversity as arising from a surfeit of power relations mediated by particular personal and historical positions. The suggestion that the development and practice of border pedagogy is a constructive approach to partiality in cultural analysis should strike a chord with progressive adult educators.

The final section of the book addresses a traditional theme in adult education, *Part IV—Civil Society and the Public Interest*. The first essay argues that the long-time intersection between communication and the public interest as expressed in concern for freedom, diversity, information quality, social order and solidarity, and cultural order is more critical than ever. This author cautions that a normative theory to contain these complexities is still elusive and made more so as a result of electronic media; the proliferation of media's technical and institutional forms; the loss of distinction between print, broadcast, and telecommunication media; and the transnational nature of ownership, financing, and distribution of media. The second essay invites us to withstand the Luciferian "authority" of new technologies, at least long enough to recall that far from solving societal problems, technologies also cause them. In the case of communication and information technologies (CITS), the gap between those who have control and access to technologies and those who do not is widening, a point of view which unites communication with adult education in a concern for social justice. The section closes with an essay on communication and development—another illustration of the convergence between our two fields. Written from the perspective of development for peace and justice, the essay, although dense, provides an useful overview of four development theories—modernization, dependency, totalitarianism, and communitarian—and five metaphors for social change—supernatural, mechanical, organic, cybernetic, and linguistic. The author favours the communitarian model of development and with it the corresponding engagement of media for endogenous and not exogenous development.

The book is not an easy read; a publication about theory in an entire field and written by scholars for other scholars does not make airplane reading. Tackle it anyway, as it offers a rich snap-shot of contemporary communication scholarship from a helpful post mass media stance, and is mercifully free of media-centricism. As the information autobahn cuts a swath through the social cartography from which we formerly took our bearings, the book is an excellent resource to advance an interdisciplinary understanding of the complexity of nonformal learning and social change in the last years of the 20th century and in the approaching 21st.

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