

## Book Reviews Recensions

### CHALLENGING TRANSITIONS IN LEARNING AND WORK: REFLECTIONS ON POLICY AND PRACTICE

**P. Sawchuk and A. Taylor (Eds.). Sense Publishers, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 2010, 333 pages.**

In *Challenging Transitions in Learning and Work: Reflections on Policy and Practice*, its many authors collectively challenge notions of linearity within learning and work transitions. These authors provide evidence, by way of scholarly research and documented case studies, of the complexity of learning and work transitions and demonstrate that these transitions rarely follow a straight path. Each chapter places these transitions in context as the obstacles faced by youth, women, immigrants, veteran workers, and retirees are discussed. All authors suggest changes that must take place within policy and practice to ensure that all Canadians have equal access to post-secondary and workplace learning and that informal learning is recognized as authentic.

The introduction, written by editors Peter Sawchuk and Alison Taylor, provides a synopsis of the book as well as some relevant transition literature. The editors emphasize that this book takes a critical vocationalism approach in an effort to shed light on the fact that educational and training needs of marginalized groups are not being met (p. 20). Critical vocationalism, as the editors state, is characterized by the argument that, in a contemporary, fast-paced, global market economy, emphasis is being placed on abilities such as independence, evaluation, conflict resolution, and teamwork. As a result, narrowly prescribed, occupationally specific knowledge and skillsets are becoming less important (p. 8). In chapter 2, D. W. Livingstone provides demographical information of current learning environments by presenting empirical data from the Work and Lifelong Learning (WALL) research network, which is a compilation of surveys and case studies completed by Canadian researchers from 2002 to 2007. Livingstone states that the incidence of learning has increased among all people in both formal and informal learning activities (p. 36). The workplace is still investing in training for high-level workers, but there has been an increase in informal learning that is not constrained by class (p. 36).

Section 1 of this book focuses on education and training for which Sawchuk provides another introduction, including an overview of the next seven chapters. Chapters 3 to 5 each discuss the factors that contribute to the educational and career choices of low-socio-economic-status and First Nations youth in Canada, and the challenges they face in navigating new learning environments. The authors point out that youth whose parents attended post-secondary education were less likely to drop out of school, and that youth often feel pressure to stay within the community to remain close to family. The focus of chapter 6 is on the configuration of disability in the transition from education to work; it points to the high levels of unemployment and underemployment of disabled Canadians to emphasize the need for new adaptation techniques and a new conception of disability.

Chapter 7 explores the use of pre-apprenticeship trades programs to attract women into skilled trades and retain them in these fields. The authors highlight the issue that when these programs are designed, the barriers women face in attempting to transition to the workplace, such as child care, workplace discrimination, and transportation to work sites, are often overlooked. Chapter 8 highlights a successful community program aimed at at-risk youth that could serve as a template for other communities attempting to reach out to these youth. Chapter 9 points out the language and cultural barriers faced by internationally educated teachers that see them constantly relegated to the role of occasional teacher as they attempt to transition into a permanent teaching job in Canada.

Taylor’s introduction for section 2 gives an overview of the remaining contributions, which are focused on transitions within work, career, and life. Chapter 10 provides insight into transitions within the workplace brought about by technological change, which in this case leads workers to develop their own informal learning cultures as a coping mechanism. Chapter 11 discusses the disparities in adult learning practices in highly technical biopharmaceutical organizations that provide only technical training opportunities to laboratory equipment operators but allow for reflexive independent learning opportunities for scientific staff. Chapters 12 to 14 each present a picture of the difficulties immigrants face in trying to transition to safe, full-time employment in Canada. These chapters provide numerous case studies of immigrants, especially women, as they find themselves taking on volunteer and precarious work in places such as call centres or garment factories in an attempt to gain access to the Canadian labour market. Chapter 15 highlights motivations, some of which are socially driven, and obstacles, such as health issues, for learning amongst the older population as they transition into retirement. Chapter 16 examines issues of dis/ability transitions from education to work and the ableist assumptions about disabilities that act as barriers to employment in the knowledge economy.

These chapters collectively provide a thorough examination of issues people face when transitioning within learning institutions, from education to work, and within the workplace. The research and case studies provide considerable evidence that transitions are not linear or universal, and as Sawchuk and Taylor state in their introduction, these chapters provide a scholarly response to the narrow conceptualization of the transition process (p. 20).

The chapters of this book are all written by different authors, which can sometimes create a challenge in establishing a flow. The editors, however, accommodate this by organizing the chapters in an appropriate sequence, leading the reader through discussions of transitions within educational settings, from learning to work, within work structures, and finally from work to retirement. The overview of the transition literature presented by the editors in the introduction provides relevant background information to help the reader understand exactly what it means to take a critical vocationalism approach. However, providing an overview for each chapter here and again in the introduction for each section is unnecessarily repetitive.

Practitioners and policy makers can gain great insight from this book into the difficulties faced by many marginalized groups in Canada as they attempt to gain access

to education, training, and full-time employment. The research and case studies could be used as models for future programs and policies. This volume reinforces the fact that many have not experienced a textbook linear progression from education to work to retirement, and that the non-linear route is more likely the norm for many people. The editors end the text with useful suggestions for improvements in policy and practice as well as ideas for future research focus.

Corina Walsh  
Mount Saint Vincent University

## **PASSION AND POLITICS: ACADEMICS REFLECT ON WRITING FOR PUBLICATION**

**Eileen Carnell, Jacqui MacDonald, Bet McCallum, Mary Scott (Eds.). Institute of Education, University of London, London, 2008, 220 pages.**

Even amidst the dramatic changes besetting the U.K.'s post-secondary institutions, this volume still offers rich insights about the realities of academic writing and publishing. The co-editors base their text on interviews with colleagues from the University of London's Institute of Education. All of these colleagues—selected to represent a balance of gender, disciplines, specialisms, and career experiences—have held senior positions with the Institute, have published extensively and successfully, and have distinguished records of contributing to education, theory and policy, and research. Additionally, a few have worked in areas of translation, most have worked as editors of others' works, and almost all have participated in collaborative writing arrangements. What the editors collectively offer as "academic publication" is refreshingly broad, including empirical studies, journal articles, books, reviews, syntheses, materials for teachers and students, press releases, writing for politicians, and fiction. Potentially, then, this work presents an impressive and substantive collective expertise on academic writing for publication. Happily, this proves the case.

The text itself is structured in two parts. Part I (constituting one third of the book) is divided into nine chapters that outline the history of the study, profile the 18 authors, illustrate the "rite of passage narratives" of each writer, and then focus more closely on the particulars of how authors actually go about writing. These latter chapters include, for instance, how writers find time, produce texts, locate themselves in debates, choose their writing tools and arrangements, accommodate the "game" of academic publication, and link writing with thinking and learning. Chapter 9 offers a useful summary and commentary on Part I, including references. Part II presents the transcripts of the interviews with each writer. The volume concludes with two brief appendices detailing the conduct of the research and the interview questions framing the areas of inquiry.

Though the structure of the text creates some redundancy (pithy quotes appear both as excerpts and in transcripts; summaries of the research are offered in multiple locations),