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BUILDING ON CRITICAL TRADITIONS: ADULT EDUCATION AND LEARNING IN CANADA

Tom Nesbit, Susan M. Brigham, Nancy Taber, and Tara Gibb (Eds.). Thompson Educational Publishing, Toronto, 2013, 365 pages.

Building on Critical Traditions offers a thorough read of the state of adult education in Canada today. Bringing together Canada's prominent thinkers in the field, the book offers 32 concise chapters spanning historical beginnings and theoretical frameworks while offering learnings from well-documented case studies that straddle both non-formal and formal sites of education. While acknowledging the disparate and fragmented nature of the field of adult education in Canada, Nesbit, Brigham, Taber, and Gibb provide an overall framework for the volume that, in presenting broad trends in these neo-liberal times, works to bring adult educators together across diverse practices. In that way, the editors situate adult education within social movement theory, firmly grounding their approach in critical and transformative pedagogies while interrogating the role of adult education within social movements—or, for some, as a social movement unto itself.

The first two sections of the volume provide a rich review of the historical roots of and theoretical approaches to adult education in Canada. This important history, beginning with Michael Welton's chapter, demonstrates how—even in its very beginning—adult education was often concerned with social justice. As adult education evolved, the layers of analysis also evolved to recognize the need for an intersectional approach. Thus, articles examining Aboriginal approaches to education (Marlene Atleo), how language has shaped responses to adult education in francophone Canada (Claudie Solar and Marie Thériault), gender literacy (Leona English), gay rights education as a form of counter-hegemony (André Grace), and critical race theory as foundational to social justice practice (Susan Brigham) help contextualize the current state of adult education in Canada. Moreover, in adopting a critical approach, many of the authors ground their academic practice in the seminal work of Paulo Freire and Edmund O'Sullivan, ultimately striving for the development of critical consciousness and a paradigmatic shift in thinking and acting through the work. By providing a solid framework for the evolution of critical adult education in Canada, these sections help readers ground their understanding of current trends and issues, which the next series of chapters focus on.

Overall, the case studies in the remaining four sections of the text demonstrate the specific ways in which today's educators are confronting pressing social issues in non-formal education through creative and diverse critical pedagogical approaches. Maureen Coady situates health promotion and learning within a transformative praxis, connecting

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this work to social change, while Jennifer Sumner, in discussing the food justice movement, challenges readers to recognize that the very act of eating can be pedagogical and, in that way, a means of challenging dominant food systems. Sue Carter and D'Arcy Martin review the labour movement's rich history in adult education on the shop floor and its multiplier effects. Others offer important contributions to decolonizing environmental education (Pierre Walter), understanding associations between adult literacy and learning disabilities (Maurice Taylor and Meagan Roberts), connecting the arts with adult education (Darlene Clover), and applying a critical pedagogy to working internationally (Robert Mizzi and Zane Hamm). Together, they are a robust example of how today's educators are working to challenge power in a multitude of contexts, giving good breadth to the state of adult education in Canada today.

A last thread prevalent in the final sections of the book—though not always overtly—is the encroachment of neo-liberalism through government policies and the implications on workplace training, knowledge production, ESL education, and formal/non-formal education that happens in post-secondary settings. In describing the ideal workplace, where learning should be connected to workers' ability to participate and resist—in essence, encouraging a deep understanding of human rights—Tara Fenwick demonstrates how the reverse trend is actually true, and this is being documented through research on workplace learning. The theme of individual skill development in response to neo-liberal economic trends carries into Maren Elfert and Kjell Rubenson's chapter, in which they thoroughly explore adult education policies related to literacy and work, exposing these policies' focus on the individual's employment status (work training) as a replacement for collective action and investment in social security programs. Tara Gibb and Judith Walker document the discourse surrounding the shift to the knowledge economy and the implications on education. Undertaking an extensive analysis of federal policies, they demonstrate the contradictions between the shifts to a knowledge-based economy on paper versus the on-the-ground priorities of developing the resource extraction sector, thus highlighting inequities in practice. Shibao Guo documents how immigration policies focus on advancing government priorities and values rather than ensuring the inclusion of different cultural practices, calling into question the claim that Canadian policies are not assimilationist in nature or objective. While Paul Bouchard focuses on distance learning within the university context, offering many examples of learning opportunities, including MOOCs (massive open online courses), he generally provides an optimistic outlook on the future of informal learning, falling short in thoroughly interrogating these "opportunities" within the neo-liberal paradigm in which MOOC's operate and what this might mean for academia and critical pedagogy more broadly.

While introducing readers to some of the challenges posed by neo-liberal policies and discourse, more explicit connections could be made between the overarching themes of critical pedagogy and social movement building and the implications of the encroachment of neo-liberal ideology. Indeed, the one outstanding question here is how can we bring the rich and vibrant field of adult education together to organize and advocate collectively in true social movement tradition?

Despite leaving us wanting more, Nesbit et al. conclude with a well-articulated summary of each of the six sections. The overall contribution that *Building on Critical Traditions* makes to the field of adult education should not be underestimated; it is a timely exploration of

critical approaches to adult education in Canada despite the challenges facing educators and learners. As such, it makes for a useful text for both students and practitioners alike.

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