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BOOK REVIEW

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ADULT EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING IN CANADA: ADVANCING A CRITICAL LEGACY

Susan M. Brigham, Robert McGray, & Kaela Jubas (Eds.). Thompson Educational Publishing: Toronto, 2021, 359 pages.

What even *is* ‘adult education’? If you identify as an adult educator, chances are you have been asked this question, perhaps more than once. Like me, you may find it challenging to provide a clear answer that satisfies the curiosity of the questioner. While they do not provide a simple ‘elevator pitch’ response, by compiling the collection of chapters that comprises *Adult Education and Lifelong Learning in Canada: Advancing a Critical Legacy*, editors Susan M. Brigham, Robert McGray and Kaela Jubas have done an excellent job of developing a rigorous, critical, and wide-ranging answer to this perennial question. Not only does this compilation offer a provocative reply as to the definition of adult education, it also builds a compelling case as to why adult education is vital in a contemporary society marked by inequality and increased precarity on various fronts. Written within an academic and policy context in which the very idea of learning outside of formal education is highly suspect and marginalized, this book offers an important future-facing argument for the continued study and practice of adult education in Canada and globally.

Adult Education and Lifelong Learning in Canada comprises five sections. Each section contains several chapters, for an impressive total of 32. Equally impressive is how the editors have brought together a very diverse set of 43 contributors from across Canada. By blending the voices of early and mid-career academics with those of seasoned scholars and practitioners from the field, the book offers perspectives on a remarkable assortment of areas of concern to adult educators as they negotiate an uncertain future. In keeping with the dominant adult education scholarship in the Canadian context, this book is firmly situated in the critical tradition, and all chapters offer a critique of power in the interest of advancing social and political transformation.

With this commitment to critical pedagogy firmly in place, the first section, titled ‘Ways of Knowing and Being’, offers an important reflection on how adult educators can and must engage with epistemological and pedagogical approaches that emphasize the experiences of marginalized communities of learners. With this in mind, this section offers a critique of Western philosophical assumptions that for too long have been at the centre of the educational field. Most notably, this section begins with three chapters that, together, offer a highly topical reflection on lifelong learning and the praxis of truth and reconciliation, thereby addressing a major gap in adult education practice and scholarship. In doing so, the book thereby responds to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action, and places decolonizing education as a key part of the reconciliation process. The remaining

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chapters in the first section explore the meaning of lifelong learning from the perspectives of feminist critique, gender diversity, and Africentrism. In so doing, more than any other current adult education textbook on the market, *Adult Education and Lifelong Learning in Canada* situates itself on the cutting edge of critically reflective and culturally responsive scholarship in the field. This first section builds the epistemological foundation on which the remainder of the book rests.

Engaging with the public pedagogy of adult education and lifelong learning, the second section, entitled ‘Contexts of Adult Education,’ provides a rich overview of the places and spaces within which contemporary adult learning takes place. The chapters in this section largely explore how adult learning, particularly informal learning, occurs in public spaces such as libraries and museums, as well as through engagement with the arts, popular culture, and community service learning. The middle three sections of the book, entitled ‘Adult Education and Health, Environment, and Peace,’ ‘Literacies and Technologies,’ and ‘Canadian Adult Education in a Global Context’ offer 10 chapters that integrate a critical understanding of lifelong learning with some of the most pressing issues facing society today. In the first of these sections the authors focus attention on thinking through the transformative potential of adult environmental education, on exploring the Social Determinants of Health through the lens of critical pedagogies, and toward imagining the possibilities of social transformation through the framework of adult peace education. The ‘Literacies and Technologies’ section that follows provides an important update to a storied history of literacy scholarship in the field of Canadian adult education. Building from a socio-cultural understanding of literacy as a practice that is embedded in social context, these chapters explore Canada’s policy responses to literacy, analyse the tensions between policy and practice, and examine the changing literacies in a digital world, including how new technologies may facilitate the development of new literacy pedagogies. In the following section on ‘Canadian Adult Education in a Global Context,’ the authors: explore the history of Canada’s role in adult education policy development globally, examine the political economy of adult education and international development, and address issues to do with lifelong learning and social inequality among immigrants to Canada.

A particularly welcome addition to this contribution to the CASAE book series—which started back in 1998 with Thomas, Scott, & Spencer’s (Eds.) *Learning for Life: Canadian readings in adult education*—is the section that follows, which is devoted to exploring different methodological approaches to the study of adult education in Canada, with a focus on qualitative research, the dominant paradigm in the field. The authors in this section centre on on arts-informed and participatory research, two approaches deeply informed by critical pedagogies.

In an effort to highlight how the critical view of adult education has come to dominate the field in Canada, the book ends with a powerful section, entitled ‘Work and the Political Economy of Adult Education,’ that emphasizes how the politics of education are changing, and how, as scholars and practitioners, we must maintain vigilance in our efforts to support social transformation on various fronts. In these final chapters, authors examine how political shifts, such as the rise of both neoliberalism and fascism, offer a stark reminder to all of us about the need to expand our commitments to critical inquiry and practice.

This book is an excellent and comprehensive contribution to CASAE’s two-decades-old book series on critical research in the area of adult education and lifelong learning, and is

highly recommended for scholars, university students, and practitioners, both novice and old-timers, in Canada and globally.

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