

Book Reviews Recensions

¡VIVA! COMMUNITY ARTS AND POPULAR EDUCATION IN THE AMERICAS

Deborah Barndt (Ed.). State University of New York Press and Between the Lines Press, Albany and Toronto, 2011, 168 pages (plus DVD).

¡Viva! *Community Arts and Popular Education in the Americas* is an excellent internationally focused addition to the growing literature on arts-based adult and popular education and research. According to the editor it is an educational resource aimed at anyone seeking a more just, sustainable world and wanting to learn how to better integrate the arts into their community/popular education and participatory research practice. This edited volume includes a variety of case studies from across the “Americas,” accompanied by colourful images and a DVD containing Spanish and English videos that visually capture discussions of and the processes behind the projects outlined in the ensuing chapters. The book and DVD provide an aesthetic show-and-tell of critical and creative practices of lifelong learning for children and adults in community and educational institutions.

This volume is divided into three major sections—Recovering Cultural Histories, Transforming Urban Spaces, and Community–University Collaborations—with eight chapters, a preface, an epilogue, and an introduction. The preface defines the meaning of the term *viva*—a call to memory and action—and the transnational collaborative research project behind the book, a partnership of eight non-governmental organizations and universities in Canada, Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, and the United States. The introduction sets the theoretical and methodological stage, describing the colonial context of the Americas and the foundations of the project, placing power and inequality at the centre of the “cauldron of diverse cultural practices” (p. 15) to follow, and outlining key elements of popular education and community arts and their links to participatory research, the common methodological foundation of the projects.

The majority of chapters provide a critical analysis of the complex social situations with which the authors are confronted, the various challenges they have faced in their work coupled with a profound understanding of the specific artistic genre they use and its subversive and educative possibilities. For example, Chapter 1, by Jesús Alemanía, begins by describing a cultural reclamation research project in Panama that combined environmental education and participatory research. From this emerged the idea for a children’s colouring book and a series of arts workshops for children, aimed at simultaneously recognizing and promoting children’s ecological and cultural knowledges and adding new understandings to help them become better environmental citizens. Back in Toronto, Diane Roberts in Chapter 2 describes a project entitled Personal Legacy. This is an embodied and identity-based dramaturgical educative process that renders visible and felt the history of those who have been excluded and marginalized. Ruth Howard in Chapter 3 focuses on the work of Jumblies Theatre, Toronto. Among many other important aspects, this chapter asks critical questions about the politics of being an artist and the problematic

depoliticization that can come from working with social service agencies. Chapter 5 takes us to Mexico. Leonardo de Anda Gonzalez and Sergio Martinez Mayoral describe the work of Tianguis Cultural de Guadalajara, a cultural gathering place for music, art, and ideas. Like other authors in this volume, they speak not only of the potential of their work, but also of the many challenges, including the dismantling of Tianguis by the municipal council. In Chapter 6, Sergio Valdez Ruvalcaba tells a story of a participatory mural project entitled *Painting by Listening*. Born within the Zapatista movement, mural making across various communities became a practice of identity formation and reclamation, but also of political resistance. From this work emerged not only new tensions but a diploma program for training community mural facilitators. Other chapters explore teacher preparation activities in Los Angeles amidst poverty, racism, addiction, and violence; communications programs in the complex multilingual, multiracial, and multi-ethnic society that is Nicaragua today; and a train-the-trainers program by Catalyst Centre in Toronto. The epilogue brings together some of the common threads or themes in the book and speaks to the value of “critical hope.”

The projects outlined in many of the chapters are a mixture of research, training, education, and activism. While some may see this as a weakness, as a feminist researcher who struggles with the unnatural separations set out in the academy, I found it helpful to see these elements so intimately entwined with little attempt to delineate difference. Is learning not inherent to socially responsible/responsive research and vice versa? Another clear strength of this book is the Latin American element. Much of the growing literature on community arts-based educational work comes from the Global North. What could be more persuasive in terms of the potential of the arts than to see them at work in diverse locations around the globe? I also appreciated the generosity of the authors in sharing their struggles as well as the many wonderful poems, songs, and visual images. The DVD is also a wonderful addition to the book. It brings the projects to life through the words of the primary protagonists, and in many cases shows how the educational or research work actually unfolded. A final strength of this volume is the sustained critical focus of the book coupled with its clear aesthetic grounding. By this I mean the work outlined in the chapters never loses sight of equity, justice, and social transformation; it never shies away from confronting the difficult issues in society or trespassing into the forbidden terrain of politics, despite the setbacks; and it never fails to honour the creative process by striving for and/or teaching aesthetic rigour and quality. People not only become more conscious and empowered, but are trained in the importance of the artistry itself.

One weakness is the theory aspect to the introduction. While it provides a concise outline of participatory research, community arts, and popular education, and includes a post-colonial perspective, it feels somewhat dated and fails to really problematize these areas. However, it is written in very plain language and will be a good first introduction to these educative and enquiry processes for those struggling to get the basics. A second weakness is structural. I personally find it tiring to have to look to the end of the book for references, which I prefer to see coupled with the chapter with which they belong. A third problem is the vehement clash between Canadian and American spelling. I realize this is a bi-national publication, but choosing one spelling or the other would have made the reading smoother. Finally, the final chapter from Nicaragua is quite weak in both description

and analysis. This is a shame, as it seems like a very interesting project, but the chapter lacks the depth of the others.

This is a very valuable book that combines images, videos, poems, songs, and critical and aesthetic analyses with stories of creativity, struggle, challenge, and hope. It brings a more global vision to the burgeoning field of community arts-based education and learning, grounded in the courage, tenacity, and imagination of community artist-educators. It will be useful to professors, students, and community-based artists interested in the power and potential of the arts as a method of research, education, and socio-environmental change.

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TAKING PART? ACTIVE LEARNING FOR ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP, AND BEYOND

Marjorie Mayo and John Annette (Eds.). National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, Leicester, England, 2010, 322 pages.

Understanding the complexities of citizenship as well as the policies and practices that impact adult learning and empowerment is the focus of Marjorie Mayo's and John Annette's *Taking Part? Active Learning for Active Citizenship, and Beyond*. Mayo and Annette bring an in-depth look at citizenship, participation, and British efforts to increase active citizenship in their 17-chapter edited collection. *Taking Part?* is divided into three sections incorporating perspectives from key stakeholders from government, academia, and community partners. British initiatives are used to reflect on and analyze the relationship between adult education and approaches for learning active citizenship.

Mayo and Annette provide a historical overview of British adult education policies in the area of citizenship, intertwined with lessons learned from community development models of engagement. Five chapters are dedicated to setting the foundation while exploring perceptions, definitions, and approaches to citizenship. Using a model called Active Learning for Active Citizenship (ALAC) as a case study woven throughout the text, Mayo, Annette, and the contributors create a common point of reference to deepen discussions regarding effective engagement using community-based citizenship development.

In the first section, Mayo contributes a chapter focused on the broader concept of citizenship, sharing the complexities and diverse perspectives and thus setting the stage for further reflection.

The entire second section (nine chapters) is reserved exclusively for reflection from practice. The diversity of approaches shared, the depth of reflections revealed, and the impacts of the reviewed British initiatives allow the reader to move from a theoretical perspective of citizenship to visualize and feel the impacts of adult education aimed at