

Indonesia, as the “indigenization of knowledge,” where the problem is not so much about accommodating local content to established pedagogical processes, “but how to theorize indigenous experiences and make them sources of knowledge” (p. 123). Therein lies the challenge for the academic community of adult education. *Global Perspectives* is an invitation to adult educators to share in the practice of adult education with a much larger, more inclusive, globally indigenous public.

Paul Kolenick
University of Regina

HANDBOOK OF ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION, 2010 EDITION

Carol E. Kasworm, Amy D. Rose, and Jovita M. Ross-Gordon (Eds.). SAGE Publications, Los Angeles, CA, 2010, 512 pages.

This *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education* is part of a series published every 10 years. Its aim is to provide an overview of the organizations, methods, and research that are important to the field (p. ix). As the editors note, assembling a handbook such as this is a formidable task in a field with few clear boundaries. In addition to providing a basic overview of the field to assist the novice, the editors express a hope that the analyses will be meaningful to professionals in the field and that the book will identify the state of research within adult and continuing education. The editors’ use of “an intellectual commons” (see Introduction) as an organizing framework is both innovative and highly fruitful, and the six themes speak well to the past, the collective present, and the vision for the future of adult and continuing education. Building on this metaphor, the *Handbook* is organized around six broad thematic approaches that try to capture the principal concerns and commitment of the field.

1. The centrality of the adult learner and adult learning

The five chapters in this section address a wide variety of issues regarding adult learners and learning, with a specific focus on key theories on adult learning and development and their implication for practice. This section does a good job of introducing the reader to the core perspectives informing the mainstream adult education understanding of learner, learning, and development, while to a certain extent also pointing out some of the controversies surrounding some of the dominant ideas. While recognizing that the adult learner can be understood not only as an individual but also as a member of a learning group, as part of a workplace, or as a member of a community or a wider society, this introductory section has a distinct individual and psychological bias. In all fairness, one key section later in the *Handbook* focuses on the centrality of social justice in adult education, but it would have been valuable to at least briefly address more sociological-oriented learning theories and discussions on collective learning, learners’ subjective understanding of adult learning, and how this is framed by the context in which they live their daily lives. Similarly, the important access and participation discussion might provide a deeper understanding if attention were

given to how the context of work and life in general impacts an individual’s opportunities to engage in learning activities. For a substantial number of people, neither work nor everyday life encourages them to engage in learning. Recent research on participation and barriers could be a valuable addition to what is reported in this section.

2. The creation of open exchanges of knowledge, theory, and practice

This section of the *Handbook* continues the examination of assumptions informing theory building, research, and professional practice in adult education that began in the 2000 edition. The intention is that the chapters will provide newcomers to the field with insight into the historical background and present thinking that inform research and practice in adult education. This is not an easy task, and despite the eminent knowledge of the authors, this section is, in my opinion, the least satisfying in the book. Each chapter provides interesting and valuable information, but to engage fully with them and reflect on the underlying discourses, the reader likely needs to possess a good understanding of what is being presented. Naturally, one can always discuss what has been included and what has been left out. While being cognizant of the restricted space of a book, one would still expect that the influence of situated cognition and learning communities would have been addressed, as well as the enormous importance of large international data sets like the International Adult Literacy Survey (see <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/bsolc/olc-cel/olc-cel?catno=89-588-X&lang=eng>) for comparative education, and the increasing role of transnational governance and its impact on national policies on adult learning.

3. Adult and continuing education as a field of practice

The *Handbook* is premised on the assumption that adult and continuing education constitutes a distinct field of practice and, therefore, requires its professionals to possess a unique skillset. In a practice as diverse as adult education, this raises questions about the commonality and differences between required skills in different parts of the field. The six chapters in this section discuss the commonalities of the field and the makeup of the profession and present key principles and scholarship that inform current practice. Core areas addressed within the context of adult and continuing education concern the design of programs, program planning, assessment and evaluation, and management and leadership. In contrast to the previous section, the material presented here is readily accessible and highly relevant to practitioners in the field. The texts provide good insight to the broader debates as well as the knowledge base on which the practice rests.

4. The diversity of adult learning venues and collective endeavours

Diversity and multiplicity of contexts are defining characteristics of adult and continuing education. It is, therefore, not surprising that this section is by far the largest of the volume, with no fewer than 14 chapters devoted to presenting the various key contexts in which adult education is occurring. Taken together, the chapters provide insight into the range of adult education providers and the roles they play within these various settings. The following contexts have been selected for closer examination: two- and four-year post-secondary education; the workplace, including both employee and employer efforts; the military; community- and faith-based endeavours; health and wellness organizations;

cultural institutions; environmental efforts; and Internet-based education. Despite the fact that each chapter has to be relatively short, the reader gets a good understanding of the richness of the field and how different contexts are shaping the work of the adult educator.

5. *The centrality of social justice*

No previous *Handbook* has as clearly as the 2010 edition put social justice on the map. The editors stress that a concern for the disenfranchised is a key aspect of the intellectual commons of adult and continuing education, and that social justice is a core value within the field. As evidence they point to the continuing interest in the works of Eduard Lindeman and Paulo Freire and to the central position of social movement learning within our field. While many applaud the seriousness with which the *Handbook* addresses the topic and states that “adult education for social justice has become one of the predominant concerns of the field” (p. 6), the sad reality is that this is not the case. In fact, with adult and continuing education being increasingly driven by economic concerns, the opposite is probably true. Thus, while adult education intellectuals as well as many practitioners subscribe to the value of social justice, the field is being driven by external forces embedded in a neo-liberal value system pushed by rampant global capitalism. This sad state of our field should not take away from the importance of what is being discussed in the six chapters that make up this section. The reader gets a good insight into historic and contemporary understandings of social justice, as well as how gender, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, age, disability, class, and place play out in social injustice. While the *Handbook* is rightly focusing on the U.S., it might have been enlightening to provide some comparative reflections on social justice and the role different welfare state regimes play in this regard.

6. *The future of adult and continuing education within a global context*

While focusing on the U.S., the *Handbook* recognizes that we are increasingly living in a global world where local practices are affected by what happens elsewhere. Unfortunately, this section hardly explores globalization and the way it affects adult education. In fact, three of the four chapters do not engage with globalization at all, and the reader is left pondering how the interesting ideas being presented relate to globalization processes. In view of how globalization and internationalization have been addressed in the *Handbook*, one has to ask if it still makes sense to produce such a U.S.-focused volume in which, with the exception of a handful of Canadians and one European, all authors are from the U.S.—which of course helps explain why an overwhelmingly large portion of references come from U.S. sources. As is so clearly evident from the national reports prepared for the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI), a major and rapidly growing portion of scholarly writings on adult and continuing education is being produced outside North America.

In summary, the strength of the 2010 *Handbook* is its insightful examination of the practice of adult and continuing education. Both novice and experienced adult educators will find that the texts provide new and exciting material that can deepen their reflection on their own practice.

Kjell Rubenson
University of British Columbia