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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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# HIGHER EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH: CREATING A GLOBAL VISION

Ronaldo Munck, Lorraine McIlrath, Budd Hall, and Rajesh Tandon (Eds.). Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2014, 264 pages.

Taking the reader on a journey across time and place, *Higher Education and Community-Based Research* explores the realities and lived experiences of situating research in community spaces. Before reading this book, I was aware of the pressing need for post-secondary institutions to build strong and sustainable relationships with communities. However, I quickly realized I have been woefully ignorant about how complicated an undertaking this can be. After all, community-based research (CBR) does not exist in a vacuum. It informs, and is informed by, the people, interactions, and structures that make up community.

Organized into three well-flowing sections, the book shares various understandings of CBR and provides illustrations from diverse settings. The editors commence with an overview of the topic and quite aptly introduce the three Cs of CBR: complex, contextual, and contingent. CBR is not formulaic, and a complex interplay between policy, research, and practice is further nuanced by socio-economic, political, and economic factors. Ultimately, CBR relies on human agency and is contingent on committed advocates who can move efforts forward on both higher education and community fronts.

The initial overview section serves as a backdrop for a subsequent section that provides more detailed examples of CBR from around the world. Thus, the journey for the reader commences with glimpses of various experiences in the overview section, then progresses deeply into diverse CBR locales.

An engaging exploration of the genealogical roots of CBR in the South and in the North demonstrates the influence of local movements in the development of unique CBR initiatives; more detailed explorations follow in three later chapters. First come reflections on policy and practice in Australia, where, according to Michael Cuthill, CBR is virtually non-existent. This chapter details, quite succinctly, real-life issues with CBR and offers recommendations, including what would be required of faculty to make CBR successful. In a subsequent chapter based in South Africa, Ahmed Bawa shows how CBR is visible through community engagement. The chapter commences with a historical account of how community engagement has developed and then turns to research on food processing and preservation in South Africa, which serves as a locally relevant example. This directs the reader's attention to non-Western illustrations in the CBR landscape, an important undertaking in itself. From South Africa, the reader voyages to Latin America, where the origins of participatory and action-oriented research provide fertile ground for CBR. Through the examples provided, the reader is reminded that CBR is relational and requires

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engagement rather than detachment. In particular, the example of a waste management and recycling project in Brazil provides a wonderful illustration of mobilizing academic and local knowledge to support positive social change across various sectors.

What about experiences in the North? The reader is invited to tour Europe and encounter science shops as a way in which universities conduct research in different disciplines in civil society. Science shops are non-profit entities that work to extend scientific research into the community. Although community partners aren't necessarily involved in conducting research per se, science shops are mutually beneficial, allowing both the community and university students to benefit from learning opportunities. In another chapter, authors provide an excellent account of CBR policy and practice in the UK and the challenges faced in higher education to establish policy that is supportive of CBR. The description of forces that universities and other institutions face is particularly perceptive and situates CBR within the broader paradigm of research. Finally, the reader is transported to Ireland, where policy and practice are further explored through vignettes of different experiences with CBR. Although distinct, the examples demonstrate shared goals and challenges associated with CBR.

The above chapters provide details on diverse manifestations of CBR that are nevertheless tied by a shared preoccupation with participation in this type of research. This takes the reader back to the overview section of the book, in which a chapter on the uncertainty of participation suggests reconceiving it from a linear model to a complex, systems-based one. Vanessa Liston truly sets the way for the reader to explore more fully in later chapters the shared concern that practitioners and researchers have with participation in CBR.

Interspersed brilliantly throughout the journey is an uncovering of the etymology of words that comprise the term *community-based research*. The suggestive messages encouraged me to question my own understandings and assumptions of what knowledge, community, and research are. For example, in one chapter I am asked to ponder the goal of gaining knowledge. Is it to transfer or to transform? In another, I am invited to ponder what knowledge is and whose it is. At times authors play with ideas of indigenous knowledge, and at other times I am reminded that knowledge is embedded in cultural traditions and practices. Having explored the past and present, the book finally tinkers with the future and suggests a thoughtful re-framing of CBR to community-oriented research. I found the basis for, and implications of, this suggestion to be most insightful.

Having read, appreciated, and learned a great deal about CBR from Munck, McIlrath, Hall, Tandon, and various contributing authors, I wonder about two areas. First, related to organization and structure of the book, I would have found the chapter on cultural change and CBR, which comes later in the text, to be more helpful early on as an orientation of sorts. Second, a wonderful historical account of past Muslim societies paid much-needed attention to the rich and diverse traditions of learning from our collective past. Unfortunately, the author attributed the founding of Al-Azhar University in Cairo to the Abbasid dynasty, when in fact the Fatimid rulers who established Cairo were also responsible for the founding of this great university. This only serves to remind me of the void in education of the contribution of Muslim civilizations, among others, and the necessity to learn from their heritage of pluralistic relations with community.

Having taught graduate courses on various dimensions of community in the adult learning specialization of a master's in education program, and being deeply engaged with community development efforts myself, I found *Higher Education and Community-Based*

*Research* to be a sophisticated exploration of CBR across time and place. I am left with little doubt that CBR is complex, contextual, and contingent, and I am eager to learn more indeed!

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## MOVING FORWARD, GIVING BACK: TRANSFORMATIVE ABORIGINAL ADULT EDUCATION

Jim Silver (Ed.). Fernwood Publishing Company and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Winnipeg, 2013, 168 pages.

This is an important and inspiring book in an area of scholarship and practice critical to Canadian adult education. *Moving Forward, Giving Back* brings together the stories of aboriginal adults who overcame immense barriers to education—racism, sexism, colonialism, poverty—both to heal and to transform their lives and those of others through adult education. The book speaks not only of powerful individual journeys of decolonization, of freeing minds, hearts, and bodies, but also of aboriginal learners becoming agents of change. These are the stories of aboriginal people who have been giving back for many years to others, as educators, community leaders, activists, and family members. The book is central to social justice traditions of Canadian adult education, critical and outraged, yet at the same time compassionate of suffering and passionate about the role of adult education in creating a better, more just world. The book is centred on aboriginal adult education experiences from the inner city of Winnipeg, but has broad relevance to other learners and locations, Canadian and international.

The personal stories, conceptual analysis and case studies of aboriginal adult learners and educational programs in this collection are based in large part on the work of the Manitoba Research Alliance for Transforming Inner-City and Aboriginal Communities, an alliance of academic researchers, community members, and government partners producing community-based, policy-relevant research (see <http://mra-mb.ca>). The fact that the lead partner is the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives underscores the relevance and quality of the research presented in the book.

Chapter 1, by editor Jim Silver, provides a rich conceptual framing of aboriginal education and its role in struggles against poverty, racism, and colonialization. He aptly explains how asset-based approaches to community development (as opposed to prevalent deficit perspectives) and related convergence approaches position poor and marginalized people—in this case, aboriginal people—as the agents of change. Silver explains the importance of decolonizing and transformative adult education and a curriculum based in the real-life experiences and knowledge of students, who (in Freirian tradition) then themselves become teachers, creators of knowledge, and authors of change. But this is not just adult education theorizing: Silver and the book as a whole give numerous, detailed examples of how transformative aboriginal education has worked in practice to transform the lives of low-income and otherwise disempowered aboriginal learners in Winnipeg's inner city. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 then comprise sometimes painful but ultimately inspiring

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personal and collective life journeys of positive change through adult education. Among these are the stories of aboriginal educators and activists such as Claudette Michell, Larry Morrisette, Myra Laramée, Mearle Chief, Deborah Diubaldo, Darlene Klyne, Wendy McNab, and Linda Smith.

Following the powerful case these initial chapters make for the importance of transformative education in the lives of aboriginal people, Chapters 5 to 10 then give case studies of educational programs in Winnipeg through which numerous aboriginal learners have reshaped their lives. All programs are based on the premise of decolonizing adult education as the necessary first step to further education. There is first an unlearning of negative identities ascribed by the violence of colonialism, residential schooling, racialized poverty, and prejudice, and then a resurgence of confident, self-aware, and activist aboriginal learners who have now become educators, counsellors, academics, and community leaders. Transformative aboriginal adult education programs detailed in these chapters include second-chance programs like Winnipeg's Urban Circle Training Center and Building Urban Industries for Local Development; the University of Manitoba's long-standing Inner City Social Work program; and the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre and its educational partnership with the University of Winnipeg's Urban and Inner Cities Studies Program. All of these programs position aboriginal adults not only as learners, but also as educators of the university, community, teachers, staff, and administrators with whom they work. The final chapter of the book, again by Jim Silver, illustrates how adult education can also act as community development. He explains how (mostly) aboriginal residents and adult education helped to revitalize Lord Selkirk Park, a public housing project in Winnipeg's North End. Here again is a story of transformative, asset-based adult education addressing the structural foundations of racialized poverty—in this case manifest in sub-standard housing.

*Moving Forward, Giving Back* is an important book for all adult educators, scholars, researchers, and activists interested in learning about solid, long-term successes in transformative adult education in impoverished urban settings, for aboriginal learners and otherwise. It is also a book for those desiring to know how effective university–community–government alliances might be conceived and practised, focusing on local voices, knowledge, experience, and concerns. However, the heart of the book is the life stories so generously shared by aboriginal learners and educators. Among these is that of the late Claudette Michell, member of the Barren Lands First Nation, mother, and grandmother, who left formal schooling in Grade 7, was locked up in a so-called delinquent home, and was first in her family to attend and graduate from university. She tells us that she came full circle to give back to her family and community and to provide access to education for other aboriginal people:

Every day I draw upon the experiential knowledge that I have acquired both as a younger Aboriginal person struggling to find myself in a colonized and racist society, and then as an adult who, because of adult education, my university experience, and my exposure to my aboriginal culture, opened up gradually to an understanding of who I am and what we as an Aboriginal people have been through. I am now able to live and work as an Aboriginal woman who knows where she is and where she comes from, and is proud of it. If as a society we can continue to

build upon what we have learned from our collective experiences as adult Aboriginal learners, and can develop the political will to open up ever-increasing numbers of Aboriginal people the opportunities that each of us benefitted from, great social gains are possible. (p. 28)

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