

Volume 32 Issue 2

cjsae

the canadian journal for the study of adult education

la revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes

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BOOK REVIEW

*The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education/  
La revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes*

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*Special Edition Editors: Kathy Mantas and Carole Roy  
[www.cjsae-rceea.ca](http://www.cjsae-rceea.ca)*

32.2 October/octobre 2020

ISSN1925-993X (online)

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L'Association canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes  
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# POWER AND POSSIBILITY ADULT EDUCATION IN A DIVERSE AND COMPLEX WORLD

Fergal Finnegan & Bernie Grummell, Editors, Koninklijke Brill, The Netherlands, 2019, 200 pages

It was interesting to have *Power and Possibility*, with its emphasis on a complex world, arrive at my office just days before my university, like much of the rest of the world, moved into coronavirus lockdown. It made the sub-theme of the introductory chapter—old themes in new times—even more poignant and was thus a wonderful companion through those first very difficult weeks.

This is a valuable book in how it straddles the worlds of policy and social justice. It is timely and distinctive with an entire section devoted to migrant and refugee issues within an adult education context. These issues are not only extremely pertinent to Europe, but also many other parts of the world experiencing the rise of extreme anti-immigrant populism and xenophobia. The introduction to this edited volume sets this stage, as well as grounding us in present day neoliberalism. The book came about from the conversations and debates, which I remember well, that took place during the 13th triennial conference in 2016 of the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA) at Maynooth University, Ireland. Titled *Imagining diverse futures for adult education: Questions of power and resources of creativity*, conference participants explored together in paper sessions and seminars, field visits, and over a pint or two of Guinness, the complexities of power, questions of policy, the dehumanising of migrants, and the place of hope in social transformation. These became the five major themes around which the book is organised.

Part One entitled *Taking the Long View* invites us to look at how change has occurred (or not) in the discourse of lifelong learning. Two of the chapters in this section explore this through document analysis. Maren Eلفت in Chapter Two examines the fate of two United Nations reports instrumental to conceptualising and promoting the discourse of lifelong learning: The Faure Report (1972) and the Delors Report (1996). Recognising their potentials, but equally the limitations of their ideas and ideals, Eلفت illustrates how we can use reports such as these to assemble critique and imagine new possibilities for adult education. Marcella Milana follows in Chapter Three with a comparative document analysis of how adult educators have been taking up global policy issues in their studies. Using what she calls a meta-investigation of academic publications, Milana illuminates narratives of problematic power dynamics across international organisations, governments and communities as she recognises the work of adult educators as counter-narratives to ‘taken-for-granted’ policy assumptions. In Chapter Four, Tom Sork and Bernd K apflinger take us into the world of programme planning practice. Grounded in Cervero and Wilson’s theory

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of programme planning from their book *The Politics of Responsibility*, Sork and K pplinger explore the evolution of change in programme planning from the 1960s. Using the lenses of power, political astuteness, technological capability, and ethical responsibility, they argue that although little has changed, programme planning remains essential to our work.

Part Two takes us into the complex world of policy making and breaking. In Chapter Five, Rosanna Barros focusses on transnational bodies in lifelong learning and their ‘politics of assessment’, a series of tensions and conflicting agendas that began with social justice only to descend into a summative rationality of outcomes-based assessments mired in the current economic order. Although this chapter centres on prior learning assessment in Portugal, it has global relevance. Following in Chapter Six, Mary Hamilton takes us into a different assessment space, that of literacy + numbers. More specifically, she concentrates on the outcomes of the OECD Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey. Through her analysis we see how problematic technical narratives of literacy have circulated through words, but equally, numbers and images. Chapter Seven by Henning Salling Olesen continues along the path of assessment. Focussing on themes ranging from competence recognition to motives of learning and from the language of validation to issues of qualification, Olesen illustrates how the problematic and contradictory nature of competence requirements can also be shaped to enable the “individual and collective empowerment of learners” (p. 83).

Part Three entitled *Theorising Power* begins with Lyn Tett’s exploration of two case studies of family literacy programmes in Scotland. She applies the lenses of redistribution, recognition, and participatory parity to showcase how these programmes work to achieve greater equality for people who have “experienced the greatest injustice” (p. 95). Picking up on this theme of social injustice is Leona English who in Chapter Nine argues the importance of incorporating a critical feminist perspective into our pedagogies. In a process of looking backward and forward, English outlines feminism’s antecedents in adult education and some of the differing versions of feminism before settling into an analysis of what the justice-orientated leadership of Mary Parker Follet brings to adult education. In Chapter Ten, “Enacting Equality”, Kerry Harman provides an alternative conception of emancipation through the theories of Ranc re. Specifically, she focusses on his ideas of aesthetic experience, non-hierarchical engagement, and enacting equality in the present, rather than simply preparing the way for the future. In Chapter Eleven, Michel Alhadeff-Jones takes a rhythmanalytical approach to adult education through an interesting discussion of ‘time’ and its connections to inequality. He argues the need to challenge the ‘scarcity of time’ by finding and validating our own rhythms and times rather than simply struggling to manage those imposed by others.

Part Four is devoted to the issue of migration. The various chapters raise questions about access, power, control, educational supports and in many ways, what it means to be human and to treat people like humans. In Chapter 12, Brigitte Kukovetz and Annette Sprung take us into the world of humanitarian refugee relief, exploring how volunteerism can be seen as an important form of adult learning in the midst of crisis when it is linked to processes of solidarity and analyses of structural power. Karen Dunwoodie, Susan Webb and Jane Wilkinson in Chapter 13 focus on higher education and its limits to addressing inequalities with vulnerable people. They evidence the violence done to refugees and asylum seekers through supposedly ‘neutral’ admission policies and practices that simply reinforce relations of power and domination. In the final chapter in this section, Joke Vandenabeele

and Pascal Debruyne focus on workplace learning, specifically, the lived experience of workers labouring on the 'super-diverse' shopfloor of an automotive plant in Ghent. In particular, they highlight how solidarity is practised through cooperation between workers and immigrants through sharing of material and immaterial resources and taking collective responsibility for a better world.

Part Five, the final section, is a wonderful ending because it is about hope or better said, making hope practical. Staring things off is Linden West who takes us on a thoughtful journey into how hopelessness in the United Kingdom has created a racist and xenophobic culture which made Brexit possible. He advocates for adult educators to engage in careful dialogue that can illuminate the narrative of political power that has positioned cultural diversity as a threat. Straddling Argentina and Slovenia, in Chapter 16, Marta Gregorčič speaks to the process of participatory budgeting. She argues for the creation of nurturing and authentic learning spaces which not only democratise existing practices of governance but also empower citizens and educate city councils. In the final chapter of this section, Walter and Kluttz respond to perhaps the most pressing issue of our time: climate change. They challenge the colonial and anthropocentric deafness of the world today through the lenses of intersectionality, positionality, place, social action and resistance.

This book will appeal very much to adult educators, researchers, graduate and undergraduate students who are interested in and/or working in the area of policy, particularly in Europe. I must admit that policy is neither my academic interest nor strength. However, I learned a lot and this volume re-enforces the importance of policy, and particularly global policymaking, to our field. For adult educators and researchers like me who are more interested in social justice and inequality issues, this is an excellent read. This volume brings us into insightful conversations about the continued importance of dialogic approaches as a source of power for change. It provides new theoretical lenses that expand understandings of aesthetics as it delves with confidence and care into the issues of migrant populations. There is a refreshingly unapologetic call for strengthening feminism in adult education and a critical thoughtful attention paid to activism for the environment. This edited volume also reveals how community educators work tirelessly and with little support to bring about change as it illuminates a way forward to re-humanise our pedagogical approaches and ways of seeing the human and the non-human world.

Darlene E. Clover