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BOOK REVIEW

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# THE HANDBOOK OF ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

Rocco, T. S., Smith, M. C., Mizzi, R. C., Merriweather, L. R., & Hawley, J. D. (Eds). American Association for Adult and Continuing Education & Stylus Publishing, 2020, 480 pages.

People want to be happy and free to make their own choices and political decisions. They want to be emancipated from oppression and empowered with agency. Thus, one would expect to find these universal desires as aims of any adult educational program. However, simply including these aspirations in education does not guarantee that they will be accomplished. This is because empowerment, emancipation, and happiness vary from one person to another and from one context to the next. Thus, education is indeed a complex and ever-evolving process of being and becoming emancipated and empowered.

The *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education* advances such discourses by providing different contexts and perspectives on the ways in which Adult and Continuing Education (ACE) evolves in different times and spaces while dialoguing with systems such as power and privilege, race and religion, popular culture and workplace, migration and the environment, and other forces that make up our contemporary society. The editors eloquently define ACE as “a discipline that foresees a better tomorrow” (p. 7), and they bring diversity to the forefront of lifelong learning. The authors acknowledge the past of ACE in parts one and two of this book. They honor the present of ACE in parts three, four, and five, and they contemplate the future of ACE in their final remarks.

Part 1 is the foundation of ACE. Here, the editors re-visit, re-define, and re-imagine ACE as a political, philosophical, and international inter-discipline of lifelong learning that requires specific skills and understandings. They advance the purpose of social action through concepts of social justice and critical thinking, highlighting the works of Paulo Freire and Howard Zinn, as well as more recent adult educational philosophers such as Stephen Brookfield, Sharan Merriam, Michel Alhadeff-Jones, and Jovita Ross-Gordon. Although from different parts of the globe, and working under different spheres of ACE, these thinkers are all concerned with society and its ever-evolving mechanisms of power and privilege, and with the individual self.

Part 2: “Understanding Adult Learning”, expands concepts of ACE by intertwining individual motivation, cognitive development theories, community engagement, and mentoring, while also explaining how previously published Handbook(s) of Adult and Continuing Education applied more standard frames for adult learning, such as *habitus* and *stimuli*. Part 2 challenges these previous frames by contemplating integrated ways of learning that involve emotions, spirituality, and the arts, and discusses the role of Indigenous ways of knowing to connect body and mind to the land.

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In Part 3, titled “Teaching Practices and Administrative Leadership,” it is explained how the organization and administration of ACE programs, also known as program management, are different from adult education per se. This is because educational program management includes all the different ways in which ACE operates, is administered, and delivered. The third part of the book elaborates on adult education as an institution.

Part 4: “Formal and Informal Learning Contexts” is about adult literacy and adult basic education, and their associated policies. Part 4 also contrasts formal and informal contexts in terms of costs and policies, and explains how formal training feeds neoliberalism and, consequently, the formation of a low skilled workforce. Part 4 brings forth issues connected to the learning of English as a Second Language, Workplace Learning, Prison and Military Education, Environmental Education and Social Movement Learning, in which cultural contexts, migration, motivation, family literacy, and informal learning are the common threads that tie these very broad concepts together.

Part 5: “Contemporary Issues” elaborates on the much-needed decolonization of adult education, and explores issues of class, gender, race, power, and privilege. For the authors of these chapters, colonization is a multifaceted social and historical process that encompasses political and economic forces that enable power over entire nations. Decolonizing ACE is about deconstructing, reshaping, and rewriting history and truths about Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and reassessing how we teach, learn, and research in the field of adult education.

Overall, the *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education* is for Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators, art animators, community leaders, teachers, graduate students and instructors who seek a truly liberating and emancipatory adult education which centres diversity in the educational process. In its entirety, this book tackles the following major questions:

1. What are the purposes of adult education?
2. What did adult education look like in the past? What does it look like now? And what can we expect from the future of adult education?
3. What are the constraints of educational policies, especially around formal training? And how do these policies contribute to neoliberal agendas and thus perpetuate inequalities?
4. How can we decolonize ACE?

The *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education* evidences the dialogical and dialectical nature of contemporary ACE and conceptualizes Paulo Freire’s (1978) conscientização as its core purpose. From this perspective, ACE responds to learners’ and their communities’ needs, interests, and different ways of knowing, which may, in turn, legitimize and empower marginalized worldviews in unimagined ways.

What is the purpose of education? The different and yet interrelated sections that form this book answer this very question. According to the co-editors, independently of the context and the community, the purpose of education is emancipation, empowerment, and happiness, or what Freire (2001) identifies as the “pedagogy of possible dreams”, which refers to a type of adult education that emerges from an individual practice aiming to make “possible what may sound impossible” (p. 27) at a first glance. This type of education, through dialogue, allows the adult educator and participants in the education process to

(re)imagine another reality for themselves, perceiving alternative ways of operating in the world.

Bruno de Oliveira Jayme  
University of Manitoba

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