

# Reviews / Comptes rendus

## The Nature of Transformation: Environmental Adult Education

*By Darlene E. Clover, Bruno de O. Jayne, Budd L. Hall, and Shirley Follen  
(Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2013, 128 pages)*

*The Nature of Transformation: Environmental Adult Education*, a slim volume in the International Issues in Adult Education series published by Sense Publishers, focuses on “weaving environmental issues in to . . . adult education practice in community, workplace or institutional settings” (p. 2). The volume is divided into seven chapters with the last chapter presenting an overview of the references used and suggestions for further resources. The book is geared toward a broad spectrum of educational practitioners—adult and community educators, trainers, literacy and health care practitioners, social activists, community artists and animators, labour educators, teachers, and professors (p. 2).

The Introduction presents the three underlying premises that have shaped the authors’ presentation of their content. The first premise states that “environmental problems are political, and therefore [their] emphasis . . . must be political” (p. 2). The second premise encompasses the belief that “collective learning and action is more powerful in terms of socio-environmental change than individual learning action” (p. 3), and the third premise supports the belief that “sharing information, statistics, and scientific data by experts is an important way for adults to learn” (p. 4). As the authors believe themselves to be pioneers in both the theory and the practice of environmental adult education, which emerged after the 1990s, this book is also a chronicle of their journey in creating this theory and practice and reflects their experiences with creating and refining the activities presented in this book.

The introductory chapter is followed by an overview and more in-depth discussion of the five foundational theories of environmental adult education: adult education; gender difference and feminist adult education; arts-based adult education; anti-racist adult education, and outdoor experiential learning. This discussion ends with a section summarizing environmental adult education and explains how traditional environmental and outdoor education aimed at elementary and secondary school students has been adapted for educating adults by the addition of the “concept of ecological knowledge” (p. 27), “environmental citizenship” (p. 27), and to some extent, political activism. In the view of the authors, the ultimate aim of environmental adult education is “the fundamental transformation of human/earth relations” (p. 28).

The third chapter describes some of the approaches used by the authors in the design and facilitation of their environmental adult education workshops, paying particular attention to the difference between issue-based and process-based workshops and how best to create a learning/teaching milieu that is respectful of the multigenerational, multi-ethnicity, multisectorial, and multigendered perspectives presented by the workshop participants. The authors advocate no more than 10–15 workshop participants as the optimal group size, and I would agree with this assessment, based on how intensive some of the activities are. Overall I found this chapter to be quite practical in that it continually grounded the discussion in ensuring that the resulting workshop would be “truly contextualized within an ecological framework” (p. 41), and the chapter concludes with a checklist to help the reader achieve this context in the design of the workshop.

The stated aim of this book is to “illustrate educational processes which are engaging and creative and not simply didactic and/or expert or fact-driven” (p. 4). With this goal in mind, Chapters 4 and 5 provide practical outlines for a variety of activities that can be combined to create workshops of varying lengths. These activities have been tested in a variety of contexts, and the authors make it clear that they are meant to be adapted to specific circumstances. The activities are presented chronologically, beginning with introductory activities with shorter time spans such as the “Green Activist’s Calisthenics” (p. 45), whose purpose is “[t]o have fun and get our bodies moving” by moving various body parts with politicized labels, such as the “Leadership Twist (twisting from one side to the other in order to respond to all the demands that come from all sides)” (p. 45). Facilitators can then move on to activities meant to engage the participants with the ecological context, via either hands-on activities, such as “To Weed or Not to Weed” (p. 77), whose purpose is to have the participants “explore weeds: appearance, why they are considered weeds, uses and benefits” (p. 77), or more reflection-oriented activities, such as “Variation: Nature as Foe” (p. 58), whose purpose is “to analyse negative memories of the rest of nature and how they have been constructed or mediated” (p. 58). The activities are loosely grouped around themes such as “Broadening the Analysis of Oppression: Weaving in the Rest of Nature” (p. 50) and “The Politics of Consumption” (p. 69), to name two. Each activity lists the time, purpose, requirements (materials and/or space as applicable), and how-to (with appropriate discussion questions) that enable the educator to customize the workshop agenda as necessary.

Chapter 5 details as case studies some of the workshops completed by the authors in various parts of the world and provides further illustration of how creativity and art, such as the creation of quilts, banners, and videos, can be used effectively in conveying the transforming nature of environmental adult education. However, in the discussion of the effects of the activities it becomes apparent to the reader that the activities only lead to discussion and personal reflection and thus ultimately only to individual transformation, rather than to political action and more importantly political influence.

A short postscript to the preceding chapters discusses some of the lessons learned by the authors in presenting their workshops—lessons about how to deal with inviting participants to go outdoors and come back indoors, how to ensure that silenced voices from women and marginalized groups are heard, and how to have facilitators work as a team.

The book would have benefited from a thorough final edit to avoid unnecessary spelling and grammatical errors, and to ensure the presentation of activities flows more smoothly. Ultimately the value of this book resides in the myriad of activities modelled and presented and in the way it addresses a wide variety of scenarios for application and use by experienced as well as novice facilitators.

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