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Reviews / Comptes rendus

Adult and Lifelong Education: Global, National and Local Perspectives

Edited by Marcella Milana, John Holford and Vida A. Mohorčič Špolar
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Adult and Lifelong Education: Global, National and Local P erspectives, a collection of essays edited by Marcella Milana, John Holford, and Vida A. Mohorčič Špolar, is a reprint of a 2014 edition of *Globalisation, Societies and Education*. The collection is in many ways an educational manifesto: its first premise is to advocate for a return to the word as well as the idea of "adult education" rather than "lifelong and lifewide learning," more recent terms in use in the last 20 years and a sign of the "global education governance" that continues to transform educational policies on the international, national, and even local levels (1). As the editors and each of the contributors argue, this shift in governance and oversight (from local and public to international and corporate) is built on a foundation of neoliberal globalization and has far-reaching effects for educators as well as learners. Essentially, the authors argue that neoliberal globalization has transformed adult education into an issue of transnational competitive development and learners into economic rather than social investments.

It can't be denied, of course, that education is and always has been an economic as well as a social investment, but the recent shift in the rhetoric surrounding adult education is stark. Several chapters express concern for the ways in which government and business infiltrate educational cultures. In her chapter on adult literacy policy in England (Ch. 6), for instance, Mary Hamilton notes that even if adult literacy policy is still "a focus for action," it is "currently submerged within concerns for employability" (p. 122). Learners do not simply increase their "cognitive" ability, they also increase their "workplace" worth (p. 122). Lynn Tett, in her chapter on literacy policy in Scotland (Ch. 7), terms this "the employability agenda" (p. 139). Other authors are decidedly more pessimistic. In their chapter on adult education in Portugal (Ch. 4),

Fatima Antunes and Paula Guimarães contend that Portugal has failed its adult learners: as neoliberal globalization took hold in the 1990s, Portugal's "socio-political climate did not favour the idea of education as a human and social right pertaining to the development of individuals and communities, preferring to see it as a private and individual consumer product which is subject to the terms of trade" (p. 72).

The last three chapters, all dealing with the implications of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) on national adult literacy programs in England, Scotland, and Canada, respectively, offer a rich comparative analysis of how distinct policy regimes adopt, interpret, and react to the globalized "governance by comparison" (Tett, p. 128). Other articles, notably Mary Hamilton's on adult literacy in England (Ch. 6) and Shibao Guo's on active citizenship through volunteering in Vancouver's Chinese immigrant community (Ch. 3), speak to each other across their pages through their shared invocation of adult education as resistance.

This notion of adult education as social resistance, core to Guo's, Hamilton's, and especially Marion Bowl's article on adult educator agency in New Zealand and England (Ch. 2), provides the real political thrust that gives the collection its critical momentum. According to the parameters set by each chapter, national literacy policy is set by a collaboration between states and corporations, and learners are viewed as cogs in a machine of global competitive development. Significantly, the adult educators who are responsible for delivering programs and putting policy into practice are virtually absent from the debate. Indeed, as Pasqua Marina Tota argues in her chapter on the involvement of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) in international policy-making (Ch. 5), the INGOs' acceptance of their place at the negotiating table renders their very presence complicit in the corporate, non-democratic agenda. Tota, whose chapter is one of the strengths of the collection, reasons that "[e]conomic dependency and the inclusion in transnational policy-making are likely to compromise INGOs' autonomy and advocacy for an alternative educational agenda, by "softening" their critical voice, and *incorporating* INGOs into the IGOs' [intergovernmental organizations] agenda and procedures" (97). Thus by accepting corporate or governmental funding in order to exist as a learner advocacy group, such INGOs as the Global Campaign for Education compromise their ability to provide "critical advocacy" on behalf of learner communities (105).

The problem with raging against this particular machine is, as Bowl notes in her chapter on individual adult educators (Ch. 2), the question of from where else is the money to come? It's an important first step to recognize the dangers of economic dependence on autonomous opinion, but it is not a simple decision to walk away from funding, even if that funding comes with policy strings attached. Indeed, one of the weaknesses of the collection is that this economic entrapment is observed and lamented, but no suggestions on how to circumvent it are offered, even hypothetically. A solution exists, but it seems it is not for academics to articulate. Rather, the solution is revealed in the paths the educators themselves take when "adult education policy becomes stripped of its social purpose and dominated by instrumentalism": they

resist (Bowl, p. 36). In her interviews with individual adult educators, Bowl records the considerable "dilemmas arising from conflicts between their beliefs and the expectations laid on them by neoliberal and managerialist policies," but notes also that the educators she spoke to had all found some way "to hold on to, or push against the boundaries of the shrinking terrain of adult education" through a careful mix of subterfuge and compromise (pp. 38, 45). Adult educators are activists: they are, locally and globally, "committed to the implementation of the basic right to education, culture and development" (Antunes and Guimarães, p. 74). Implicit in the collection is thus an advocacy not only for adult education but also for adult educators, for without these committed social activists the fundamental human right to literacy and education might be forgotten. These individuals are, both implicitly and explicitly, the heroes of adult education in the collection and in the real world.

Review by
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