

Book Review

The Jossey-Bass Reader on Contemporary Issues in Adult Education

Ryan Bronkema¹

Citation: Merriam, S. B., & Grace, A. P. (Eds.). (2011). *The Jossey-Bass reader on contemporary issues in adult education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. ISBN: 978-0-470-87356-4

Publisher Description: This essential resource is compiled by experts in the field and contains the best, most recent previously published literature on the contemporary issues and includes trends affecting adult education. Compelling to practitioners in the field as well as useful in foundations or introductory courses on adult education, it covers topics such as social justice; diversity and marginalization; human resource development; lifelong learning; globalization; the role of mass media and popular culture; technology; and health, welfare, and environment, all within the context of adult education.

Contemporary Issues in Adult Education is a thorough survey of modern literature concerning adult education. The book's 30 unique chapters are subdivided into five themed sections. Each section is opened with a summary written by Merriam and Grace describing the connections of the section's material to the common theme of adult education. As a whole, this book is filled with helpful insights to current issues that dominate adult education and provides context for readers who may not have had much exposure to the topic, and a current literature review for those seasoned adult education readers.

The first section of the book (chapters 1-7) discussed the foundational issues that provide context for the current status of adult education with outlines defining adult education, pedagogy, and underrepresented adult learners. The section opens with a definition of adult education as the place "where vocational education leaves off" and that "experience is the adult learners text book" (p. 9). This context is key to connecting themes discussed within the following chapters of the book, as some of the connections are difficult to make if the reader is thinking of the classroom as an educational method. There is also a rich base of cultural history included within this section that provides a background to the current biases and trends found within adult education. These themes offer a great base to review the history of adult education and add context to its future while setting up additional material.

Section two (chapters 8 – 13) included a description of how global context impacts the scope of adult education throughout the world. There are varied perspectives discussed, from policy research to cultural norms that affect the opportunities facing various adult constituents throughout the world. These contrasting views help to define

¹ Ph.D. student in Higher Education Administration at Bowling Green State University, bronkrh@bgsu.edu

the various struggles adult learners face within different areas of the world. Definitions like these help to compose the complexity that the field of adult education faces when trying to get a pulse on its future.

The third section (chapters 14 – 19) discussed the competing interests of adult education and the learning opportunities that are frequently utilized by adults. Topics including social classism and financial access to education throughout the world are discussed. Additionally, shaping the development of these challenges in the future is given consideration. Global adult learning interests are also addressed briefly within this section to add depth to the varied learning necessities worldwide. For example, some areas of the world utilize adult education to reduce continued poverty while, in other areas, human resource management is used as a form of adult education to reduce gender inequities. The two examples both have merit, but use different contextual frameworks of privilege and are presented through an adult educational lens.

Section four (chapters 20-25) discussed the changing landscape of adult education. Topics like adult learning theory, emotional implications of adult learning, and mass media impacts are addressed. This section also addresses potential future themes of adult learning research and would be a great place to start reading for those researchers interested in current potential adult education research topics.

The fifth and last section (chapters 26-30) discussed emerging areas of research related to adult education including popular culture, postmodern pedagogy, and activism. This section serves as a catch all for relevant topics to the future of adult education that did not appropriately fit under a prior section theme. While scattered in subject, the chapters of this section were some of the most informative within the whole book.

While the content of the book was insightful there were several noticeable grammatical and formatting errors throughout. Also, at times, identifying the common definition of adult education was difficult as it related to the context of the entire book. The first chapter starts with defining adult education as any learning that happens after formal classroom learning ends. Throughout the book some chapters align with this theme well, while other chapters do not seem to have any alignment other than their concern for issues adults face. This convoluted writing made synthesizing the large number of diverse topics into the theme of adult education, even with the introductions by the editors, more difficult than necessary.

Contemporary Issues in Adult Education has applicability to any practitioners, faculty, or researchers that have interest in information about adult education. The discussion questions provided through the introductions of each section also serve as reading cues to dive deeper into the material. The unique chapters are useful tools for both teaching about and orientation to current materials. However, as a complete work there may be little application to any one reader given the breadth of topic coverage.