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BOOK REVIEW

GLOBALIZATION, DIVERSITY, AND THE SEARCH FOR CULTURALLY RELEVANT MODELS FOR ADULT EDUCATION

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Curriculum Development for Adult Learners in the Global Community (Volume II, Teaching and Learning). Victor C.X. Wang (Ed.), 2009. Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company

This book, edited by Victor Wang, is intended for adult educators who wish to develop skills in curriculum design and development in the field of vocational and adult education. The contributors to this volume are scholars and practitioners in the field of adult education who consider curriculum approaches that might serve adult learners well in the global community. With primary attention given to adult education in the U.S. and China, the book reinforces the notion that globalization provides both opportunities and challenges in the search for culturally relevant models for adult education. Each of the book's seven chapters, which are divided into two parts, offers different variables and models to be considered in building learning-based curricula for adult learners situated in diverse sociocultural, political, and economic contexts.

"Part I: Curriculum Development in the Global Context" comprises three chapters which explore changing demographics and how social and cultural forces affect curriculum development for adult learners. The first chapter, by Talmadge Guy, is informed, in large part, by well-known multicultural literature that discusses how learning is shaped not only by the subject matter but also by the complex array of subjectivities and positionalities of learners and teacher. Because the adult classroom, like any classroom, is situated within systems of power (such as class, race, and gender), these cultural dynamics shape learners' educational experiences and the ways in which they see and interpret their world. The recommendation for curriculum developers is to incorporate the cul-

tural knowledge of adult learners so as not to marginalize them from the subject matter and thus to foster a more inclusive, democratic learning environment.

In the second chapter, Mary Alfred seeks to make visible the sociocultural contexts of migration and the ways in which those contexts influence learning among immigrant students in adult education. The author argues that adult education has an important role to play in providing effective education for immigrant groups coming to the U.S., predominately from developing countries in Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Alfred reminds adult educators that learners use values acquired in their home countries to address challenges in their host country. Thus, cultural models must move away from solely cognitive approaches to learning and give value to the myriad social and cultural contexts that frame the experiences of immigrant learners. The author is careful to note, however, that constructivist methods in adult learning may differ from the approaches the learners experience in their home countries or familial settings.

A unique contribution for the field is Chapter Three by Wei Zheng on English-language education for adult learners in China. With the largest English-learning population in the world, China is a particularly interesting case study of curriculum development in a global context. Zheng aptly explains how curriculum is reflective of the needs and beliefs of the society at large. China's drive for modernization and its entrance into the global market led to English as a required school subject. The author's thorough examination of English curriculum development in China reveals how English is more a communicative tool to aid the country's economic development than an ideological tool to be regulated by the state. Although globalization has transformed goals, assessment, and teaching approaches in English-language education, particular historical and cultural factors in China tend toward an overemphasis on reading and writing, high-stakes examinations, and teacher-centered approaches.

"Part II: Teaching and Learning in the Global Community" comprises four chapters. In the fourth chapter, Kathleen King examines teachers of adults in the global community and provides some insight into globalization, global communities, and their meaning for learners and educators. For King, adult education curriculum must be global, technological, and contextual. The conceptualiza-

tion of globalization put forward by the author is that of rapid information flow made possible through various communications technologies. Portraying the global community as communicative, dialogic, and relational, King identifies a set of global competencies to help adult learners function successfully in a global world. The ability of learners to understand the nonuniversality of culture, religion, and values will be particularly important, as globalization's homogenizing influences are often met with resistance and require significant adaptation in diverse cultural settings. Although the author cites the fields of human relations and multicultural communications as central to the development of global competencies, the field of comparative education would provide a comprehensive critical framework for understanding "self" and "other." A course in comparative education would enable adult learners to explore similarities and differences across cultures and countries, consider various conceptions of globalization, and examine how theories of national development presume particular social values and cultural beliefs.

Similarly, in Chapter Five, Barbara Heuer discusses information literacy as a way to help adult learners "learn how to learn." While attention is given to the importance of creating people who can produce and manage knowledge, more discussion is needed about the disempowerment that citizens face in sharing and producing particular kinds of knowledge. A question that must be asked is, whose knowledge is valued and embraced and why? The author advocates for constructivist practices to guide curriculum design on information literacy. However, the characteristics often associated with adult learners, such as their need for practical and directly applicable knowledge, seem to portray learners who do not see themselves as knowledge producers, but rather as dependent on instructors for meaningful adaptation of curriculum to their learners' lives. There is a danger that the more parochial or local needs of the learner could undermine the benefits that information literacy might provide.

In Chapter Six, Fredrick Nafukho discusses design, implementation, and assessment of e-learning curricula for adults with diverse learning needs. The current technological age has enabled the growth of distance learning programs, which can promote student-centered learning. For instance, Nafukho states that e-learning enables adult learners to learn at their own pace and in

the comfort of their own homes. Because online discussions are usually asynchronous, students are not pressured for immediate answers but have time to think about issues and to print information that can be reread at any time. Distance learning is also said to remove psychological and social barriers in student-student and student-teacher interactions. A major benefit of e-learning is that it lowers course and institutional costs of instruction. Drawbacks of on-line instruction include limited socialization, which is an important part of face-to-face learning, as well as challenges learners encounter with time management, technological connectivity, and navigation of the on-line environment. The author suggests that instructors incorporate texts, graphics, audio, video, and discussion boards into an overall multimedia design to aid student learning. This chapter would benefit from actual examples from an adult education course to illustrate how curriculum functions in the on-line setting.

Victor Wang, in Chapter Seven, explores the challenges and benefits of implementing andragogy (the art and science of helping adults learn) in China. Andragogy is based on humanistic psychology and a philosophy of teaching and learning characterized by freedom and autonomy, trust, cooperation, active participation, and self-directed learning. A strength of the chapter is the reporting of a mixed-methods study conducted by the author to examine the extent to which Western andragogy has been sought and implemented in China, an authoritarian state. Wang's findings reveal that andragogy has not gained a foothold in China due to the traditions there of text-driven, subject-centered, and teacher-dominated instruction. The Chinese adult educators reported that they see themselves as knowledge providers rather than learning facilitators. Because curriculum development is not in the hands of adult educators but government officials, freedom and autonomy is resisted in China, and social stability promoted. The author concludes that Western andragogy will require "buy-in" on the part of Chinese leaders, but how andragogy might be modified for its usefulness in China and other non-Western sociocultural contexts is less clear. Moreover, China's open-door policy has aided technological and economic progress but has not led to the development of a democratic culture, as reflected in China's authoritarian teaching style and emphasis on memorization and high-stakes examinations.

A major assumption in this text is that the adult learning models considered most appropriate to building learners' global competencies are constructivist and democratic in nature. However, this assumption should be regarded with caution: those who seek to implement Western educational approaches may not be greeted with the same enthusiasm nor experience the same results with adult learners elsewhere. This is due to the differing conceptions of "teacher" and "learner" held by different societies. Moreover, those who engage in curriculum development vary between countries. China's centralized planning processes, as opposed to more decentralized processes in the U.S., reinforce the need to build a democratic culture among those responsible for implementing democratic-oriented adult education curriculum. The book succeeds, nonetheless, in explaining how globalization has accelerated factors that make culturally relevant curricula a critical need in adult education. Thus, the text is an important contribution to the field of adult and vocational education.

The book does not consider, however, the notion of mutual sharing of educational theory and practice among nations. For example, the authors elevate constructivist perspectives but do not consider what theories and learning practices of other nations might benefit educators and students in Western settings. The authors contend that the adult learning models most aligned with the characteristics of adult learners and the kind of competencies needed in the global community are democratic in orientation. While this is an important goal, one must also consider the cultural contexts in which adult learning theories have developed and the degree to which such theories and practices are applicable to other cultures and countries. Diverse contextual realities and politics must be considered in curriculum development for adult learners in the global community. The book, at times, is also at odds in asserting that globalization requires self-directed learners but characterizes adult learners as needing practical and directly applicable curriculum. Adult learners' needs for the practical could undermine the depth of content necessary to understand globalization's complexities. Thus, it is paradoxical to contend that adult learners are to be collaborative problem-solvers, on the one hand, yet on the other hand, adult educators are to provide support structures to continually guide their students' learning.

Attention to the adult learner will only increase as nations em-

phasize the centrality of lifelong learning to economic development and societal progress. Adult educators will be assigned primary responsibility for equipping learners with competencies for life and work in a global world. Thus, the book illuminates important aspects to be considered in curriculum development, including the knowledge that diverse adult learners bring to the educational setting, the technological push for e-learning strategies and curricula, the need to build on existing principles for sound adult education curriculum, and, most importantly, the recognition that culture and context matter in curriculum design, implementation, and assessment.