



## **Tectonic Boundaries: Negotiating Convergent Forces in Adult Education (New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, Number 149)**

Nanton, Carmela R., ed.  
Jossey-Bass Wiley, 2016

Book Review

Tags: adult education | adult learners | engaged teaching

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This slender volume presents a collection of essays examining concerns for adult education. The first chapter frames the problem with the concept of “liquid modernity,” which is the idea that structures such as family, occupation and career, and social life are fluid in an unprecedented way (12). Education and informal learning serve learners if they teach them how to navigate complex contexts and to recognize and adapt to changing circumstances. The metaphor of “tectonics” is used to describe forces which are sometimes convergent, divergent, and/or transformative in adult learner’s lives (93). This metaphor underscores the paradox that for adult learners, education needs to complement the structures of their lives while at the same time responding to the modern world’s shifting demands.

Other chapters explore various contexts of adult learning. Chapter Two discusses the concerns of adults learning English as a second language. As immigrants, these learners are in transition, adjusting to new circumstances and a new culture. In order to make their education meaningful and engage them in learning, the authors describe strategies of using prompts to get students speaking and writing about their lives and their experiences to practice English, to engage students, and make their education meaningful (25). Chapter Three describes the growth of job clubs among communities of African-American women. These clubs are often attached to other institutional social networks in their lives, such as faith-based communities. These networks facilitate informal learning by providing tips and resources for members to update their skills. Chapter Four addresses education for the dissemination of health information, describing interrelated cultural, social, and economic factors that impinge on health education and which in turn impact health care outcomes. Chapter Five takes the digital native versus digital immigrant divide to examine intergenerational differences in approaching

education. The challenge for educators is to design educational content which engages natives yet is also friendly and inviting for immigrants, and to shift the mode of adult education from thinking about teaching to thinking about learning. Chapter Six describes the significance of the ancient art of storytelling, not just to preserve culture, but to evoke and shape the meaning of life experiences for adult learners. Chapter Seven begins with the context of a post-recession economy in which low-skilled workers are increasingly vulnerable. This context provides the foundation for a discussion of the role of adult education: to build human capital, to make better citizens, and to enrich the course of learner lives. Chapter Eight outlines problems of delivery, credit, and accreditation that result from the tectonic shifts of the modern digital age. These shifts include such varied educational modes and attainments as badges, MOOCs, and "direct assessment competency-based programs" (87).

The book's strength rests in its ability to point to the concerns that frame contemporary adult education, although it does not describe pedagogical strategies in an equally consistent fashion. The book ends with the important reminder that in adult education, *negotiation* is key. Adaptability and flexibility complement the issue of fluidity. Good pedagogy meets learners where they are and recognizes their needs and concerns.

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