



Adult Education in Changing Times: Policies, Philosophies and Professionalism

Bowl, Marion

International Specialized Book Services, 2014

Book Review

Tags: adult education | adult learners | changes in higher education

Reviewed by: Jonathan Roach, *Stratham Community Church, United Church of Christ*

Date Reviewed: March 5, 2015

Marion Bowl's *Adult Education in Changing Times: Policies, Philosophies, and Professionalism* explores the impact of changes in global policy on the field of adult continuing education. She teaches as a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education at the University of Birmingham in the UK. This title is Bowl's most recent in a long line of publications on adult and continuing education.

Bowl states "this book explores how adult educators - their work, their expectations, and the expectations laid upon them - are being affected by the changing political and economic environment" (5). She asks "why, when lifelong learning has been a policy priority for the past 40 years, does publicly funded adult education appear to be fighting for its life? And why do so many qualified, skilled, and experienced adult educators find themselves in an educational landscape that does not recognize or value their contribution?" (1). She begins by tracing the development of neoliberalism and its impact upon adult education specifically in England and New Zealand, examining the scope and definition of adult education and exploring adult educators' beliefs and values.

She then divides the rest of the volume into two sections: "Historical and Political Contexts for Adult Education" and "Adult Educators' Working Lives Researched." The first section presents a brief historical overview of adult education, including the impact of the Protestant Reformation, the Enlightenment, colonial expansion, urbanization and industrialization, post-World War II institutions, and globalization. The author pays particular attention to institutions, including UNESCO, OECD, the World Bank, and the European Union. She ends her historical survey by examining the role of professionalism and professionalization in the

development of adult education.

In the second section, Bowl explores policy and practice using her interviews with sixty-two educators in the field of adult education, evenly split between England and New Zealand. Interviewees were invited to discuss their career histories, their values and philosophies, how the field has changed over their careers, and perceived challenges and opportunities (76). She brings their narratives together to fashion a picture of adult educators' working lives. Her findings on these educators' attitudes toward theory, particularly the approaches of Paulo Freire and Carl Rogers, provide some interesting conclusions. In addition, her discussion of the factors impacting career identity are very insightful.

Bowl ends her book by offering lessons for changing times (153). This is arguably the strongest chapter of her book and deserves to be expanded. She argues that the shifts in adult education – the growing emphasis on economic ends, marketization, the view that adult education is an individual responsibility, and tighter monitoring of educator standards – have deeply impacted the field. She advocates for a stronger linking of political engagement with pedagogical approaches; argues against hegemony in education, including preordained outcomes; supports more scrutiny of the use of power; and argues in favor of a stronger exercise of agency by educators. Finally, she notes that educators must be more willing to engage theory and politics for a “re-birth of radical education” (166).

This book is well written and contains an excellent bibliography which provides a road map to these areas of the professional literature. The historical overview, however, is very limited. For example, the Protestant Reformation receives only one paragraph, and the book's scope covers only England and New Zealand. Despite these limitations, Bowl's scholarship provides a great starting point for explorations into these subjects in other contexts. Even though Bowl does not address theological education, adult education remains an important topic for theological education. Theological continuing education needs more discussion about its theoretical foundations and approaches, and Bowl provides a good starting point. *Adult Education in Changing Times* would make a good addition to progressive theological libraries with strong educational programming and terminal degrees with tracks in religious education.

https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/book_reviews/adult-education-in-changing-times-policies-philosophies-and-professionalism/