

BOOK REVIEW

Slade, B., Mayo, P & Bogossian, T (Eds.), *Adult Education and Difference*, Leiden, Brill 2024, 276 pp., ISBN 9789004692626 (ebk)

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Adult Education and Difference is a powerful and highly relevant intervention in the ongoing discourse of adult learning. Published as Volume 36 of the International Issues in Adult Education series, the collection of abstracts, the majority of which were written by (former) students of Erasmus Mundus International Master in Adult Education for Social Change (IMAESC) cohorts, consciously moves beyond a simplified perspective of lifelong learning as a mere mechanism for acquiring vocational skills. Instead, it advocates for critical, social justice-oriented adult education, grounded in the validation of difference, from both a social and ecological perspective.

The book is structured into five distinct parts, each exploring key areas where the field of adult education must directly confront issues of difference and power dynamics. The editors assert that no single form of difference - be it class, gender, race, or disability - can be properly understood in isolation. Instead, the lived experience of marginalisation is largely the product of a complex, interwoven interplay of these factors, which requires both practitioners and scholars to consistently interrogate power by asking, "Who benefits from current adult education provision?" (p. 3), and "Which particular cultures are being valorised, and which are being marginalised?" (p. 3). The ultimate aim is transformative: to educate for the achievement of a world "not as it is but as it should and can be" (p. 3).

Part 1: Interrogating Identity - Gender and Sexuality

This section addresses issues of participation, equity, and liberation through the lenses of gender and sexuality. Contributors challenge traditional binaries and mainstream assumptions, most notably by emphasising the necessity of using inclusive research methodologies when engaging with transgender and gender non-binary individuals (Joksimović). This focus is a direct call for recognising that traditional frameworks have historically and systematically excluded these voices. Furthermore, the section explores the potential of popular culture (de Castro) as a contested yet vital place where critical adult education can effectively unpack complex issues of sexuality and gender representation. The message is clear: adult education must be proactive in recognising evolving identity and using cultural tools to challenge deeply rooted patriarchal norms.

Part 2: Structures of Inequality - Race, Ethnicity, Migration, and Social Class

Here the focus is on systemic barriers, concentrating on the acute social inequalities frequently exacerbated by exclusionary state and political policies. The essays explore the intense challenges faced by adult migrant learners (Yessenova), highlighting the triple burden of simultaneously acquiring a new language plus foundational and functional literacy. The solutions proposed are rooted in the importance of learners experiencing relational and culturally responsive teaching practices. The chapter proposing a mutually beneficial relationship between Universal Basic Income (UBI) and Adult Education (Bouttell) suggests that UBI could function as a disruptive force against prevailing neoliberal pressures, offering individuals the economic stability and freedom necessary to engage in meaningful learning. Other chapters (Bouttell & Livingston) detail the profound efforts of community educators to create genuinely 'welcoming spaces' for refugees and asylum seekers in the face of 'hostile environment' policies, underscoring the vital political and humanitarian dimension of adult learning.

Part 3: The Intersecting Self - Intersectionality and Inclusion

This part moves forward to explore tangible, lived experiences of layered difference. The contributions clearly demonstrate how intersectionality is not just an academic term but an essential and practical analytical tool for creating genuinely inclusive adult education. Case studies from diverse regions, such as the grassroots efforts for social change for disabled learners illustrated in Paraguay (Gimenez), offer concrete examples, while others reflect on the interconnected discourses surrounding disabilities and mental health (Gomez

Deantonio). The authors (e.g., Khurshid & de Castro) powerfully reinforce the central idea that effective education for any group, such as women, cannot treat them as a uniform body; it must account for diversity across ethnicity, class, and ability.

Part 4: Learning Beyond the Institution - Social Movement Learning

This section emphasises the indispensable role of informal and non-formal learning in driving large-scale social transformation. Here the book expands the traditional social justice agenda to include that of the environment. The editors argue compellingly for a critical environmental adult education (Bogossian & Park) that surpasses a 'poor cousin' status to become a core message and practice for social change. By centering human-earth relations, the book advocates for fundamental, bottom-up change, challenging superficial liberal environmentalism in favour of a genuinely transformative approach. The analysis of grassroots anti-racism campaigns in the Global South, such as LUNDU's pedagogical work in Peru (Medel), provides a concrete and valuable model of how social movements operate as powerful educational sites, fundamentally impacting development and education politics.

Part 5: Shifting the Gaze - Beyond Eurocentric Knowledge

The final section delivers a potent and timely call for decolonisation. It challenges the continuing and often unnoticed dominance of Anglo-Saxon knowledge and research methodologies, advocating for a profound intellectual shift towards the Global South (Dagar & Khurshid). The contributions offer critical alternative paradigms, including studies on women's education in the Arab world (Abdullah) and insightful socio-cultural perspectives from non-formal schools for Muslim women in Nigeria (Sa'ad). The book culminates with a reflection on new, future-oriented paradigms for lifelong education that must be planet-centred, peaceful, and sustainable in an era increasingly defined by Artificial Intelligence (Uflewski & Tordzro). This final theme encapsulates the entire aim of the book: to not only critique the deficiencies of the present but to comprehensively sketch intellectual and practical foundations for a more just, ecologically conscious, and globally equitable future for adult education.

Conclusion and Utility

This book is essential reading for graduates and scholars seeking to ground their work in critical theory and the framework of intersectionality, while adult education practitioners will find practical, actionable models for creating welcoming spaces and implementing culturally responsive teaching.

Community organizers and policy analysts will benefit from the forward-looking discussions on economic structures, particularly the proposed reciprocal relationship between UBI and adult education. Finally, researchers focused on critical environmental adult education will discover a vital and much-needed new framework for centring human-earth relations within the broader social justice agenda.

In summary, *Adult Education and Difference* is not simply a collection of essays, but a cohesive and practical mandate for the field. It provides a detailed map of difference and serves as a crucial resource for all those committed to mobilising adult education as a tool to actively redress systemic inequalities, challenge inertia, and overcome indifference.

Having navigated the intersections of race, gender, and class in the first edition, a second could explore how the drive for digital literacy in adult education creates new barriers for neurodivergent learners, the elderly, and those in the Global South facing infrastructural poverty. Looking ahead, high-speed connectivity and AI fluency should not just be positioned as technical skills, but as fundamental human rights within the social justice framework.