

## Book Review

# Theory and Practice of Adult and Higher Education

Reviewed by Linda Ellington, Southern New Hampshire University, Manchester, NH, USA

*Theory and Practice of Adult and Higher Education*

Victor C.X. Wang

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Victor C.X. Wang is well qualified to edit this book on adult and higher education. His past work has addressed many issues integral to the field, including andragogy and pedagogy, higher education adult learning program development, global education, diversity, and e-learning.

The contributors also are experts in their roles within higher educational institutions, both nationally and internationally. They represent a distinguished group, including senior lecturers, co-founders of academic organizations, inductees into the international Adult Education Hall of Fame, board members of distinguished organizations, and professionals involved in students' social and community experiences.

Although theories and practices of adult education and higher education are being used interchangeably, the proposed objective of the book is to show how adult learning theories are put into action. Thus, the intention of the book is to steadily expand the range of ideas for educators and administrators to not only focus on academic improvement but also to be emerging players in the global learning society of adult education. This book will make a good addition to corporate or academic libraries, as it heightens the cognizance of both andragogy and pedagogy practice in adult education.

The overall structure of this edited book is a collection of 17 chapters that point to three areas for the reader: foundations of adult and higher education, global adult and higher education, and concepts such as neuroscience, faculty development, and technology. Although the topic itself is somewhat narrow, the chapters offer a broad and variegated conversation of teaching and learning within higher education. They do not, however, supply a prescription for how to teach adult learners, but rather a spectrum of opinions and experiences held by the contributors. Thus, the book will be useful in two ways: 1) for those who are interested in developing their academic practice and want to learn from others who have experimented with various ways to achieve this; and, 2) for those who want to address institutional slow operating policies and practices related to nontraditional students and to become more proactive in their teaching to the adult market that is poised to disrupt the traditional higher education student population (Arnett, 2017).

In his contribution, Stephen Brookfield (chapter 1) opens the conversation of racialism, repressive tolerance, and the contemporary discourse of such diversity, which is opening the field of adult education to diverse voices, perspectives and traditions.

In chapter 2, Victor Wang, Dennis Keefe and Amy Sedivy-Benton examine Mezirow's theory of reflectivity by contrasting it to Confucian thoughts of reflection. They illustrate using, The Model of Learning through Critical Reflection, which combines the work of Confucius's silent reflection and Mezirow's critical reflection, and integrate both theories into the conceptual model that expresses the process of reflectivity.

Ted Fleming in chapter 3, discusses Honneth's critical thinking theory that suggests critical thinking is to identify experiences in society that contain system-exploding energies and motivations in pursuits of freedom and justice.

In chapter 4, Victor Wang and Catherine Hansman, build on two models: pedagogy and andragogy in higher education, and the impact, influence, and practice in facilitating learning.

Teresa Carter and Bryan Adkins (chapter 5) focus on situated learning communities of practice and the nature of school environments as situated in practice.

Leslie Hitch (chapter 6) explores divergent thinking of Western and Asian processes and how simply transferring a course or program offered in one country into another may forfeit opportunities for students and faculty to become global citizens.

For chapter 7, Hilary Landorf and Eric Feldman, address global, international, and learning terminology.

In chapter 8, Leslie Cordie, Xi Lin, and James Witte identify e-learning through the lens of a historical perspective, the drivers of demand, and today's student. They bring attention to the expectations and perspectives of students, faculty and organizations; as well as, the significance of policy and legislation.

Catherine Hansman reinforces the value of mentoring relationships in chapter 9. Not only does she define the word, but she goes in-depth in describing mentoring functions, theories of mentoring, and the power and its role in mentoring, whether formal, informal or peer relationships.

In chapter 10, Joseph Chen details how the importance of a psychological perspective on self-directed learning allows for a component of humanistic theory to translate to adult learning.

For chapter 11, Joy O'Neil probes into what neuroscience says about the brain and learning. She hypothesizes that holistic and transformative learning theories are correct in that the body and emotion play a critical role in the learning process.

Theresa Neimann, Uta Stelson, and Stefan Malecek (chapter 12) converse about the importance of understanding the etiology of adult learning deficits that stem from childhood. In adult education, this is likely to be a forgotten factor and possibly not incorporated into adult learning curriculum.

For chapter 13, Steven Frye, Jonathan Taylor and Amy Stafford, point to learners' decisions that set the stage for their entire learning experience and how successful that experience is going to be.

For chapter 14, Anne Benoit promotes reframing faculty development as they themselves are adult learners. She highlights challenges, constraints and impacts on faculty learning.

In chapter 15, Suzanne Buglione introduces the reader to the community college. She sees community colleges going above and beyond because they often deal with the least prepared students.

Patricia Brewer and Catherine Marienau (chapter 16) look at the practice of prior learning assessment and uphold that transforming experience into learning is no easy task.

In the final chapter, Dionne Rosser-Mims, Greg Dawson, and Iris Saltiel address Vygostky's Social and Cognitive Theory. The take-away is to create the context for establishing learning environments that promote learning. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) would expand the material in this chapter to identify for what purpose and what objectives. They stated, "Individual educators and individual learners are likely to be fairly explicit about why they are engaged in a particular learning activity, and such identified objectives need to align with the context of such learning environments" (p. 73).

Some readers may ask, why another book on theory, and that would be a great question. A response could be perhaps there should not be. If you have no questions about quality of learning in

your higher educational institutions, if you are sure it is the best it can be, I suggest you cancel your order for this book and get a refund. However, if you are a leader, a change agent, a learning specialist, a consultant, a higher educational administrator, you should seriously consider continuing to explore learning theories (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). Doing so will increase your understanding of various theories that may not be new to you, but may provide you with an opportunity to reflect on whether, or to what degree, your teaching and learning programs are producing the results that you want.

One of the strengths of this book is that it is written from a perspective that is sympathetic to practitioners working with adult learners and does not simply create a theoretical argument around adult practice within higher education. The book contains insights into differing authors' experiences and yet should not be read as a guidebook of ready-made recipes for teaching adults, but rather examples in action. The insights that this book offers its readers are to be gained from the expositions that play out in the classroom. To strengthen this offer, it would be exciting to use 'change stories', a collection of narrative accounts (pseudo diary) of academics changing their teaching practice. Back (2011) posits that using change stories embraces the success of genuinely liberating practitioners and as a last chapter it would be a valuable circling back to theory into action.

A few critical points: Due to the large differences in cultural philosophies and academic practices between U.S. and China, this book should focus on one or the other, not both. As Victor Wang notes in his preface, there appears to be a strong emphasis that the U.S. is beginning to issue core standards that follow the Chinese educational model, and yet this is not obviously apparent in the book and does not supply a clear-cut validation of the solidified statement. Apart from the few contributors who teach in the Asian environment, there is no trend to illustrate and elaborate this credence by the editor. If this certainty were that critical to this book, perhaps the book could feature more prominently, or balanced, between authors of both countries. Secondly, the interpretation of commonalities of adult learners deserves more attention; the frame of interpretation seems too narrow and could feature more prominently throughout the book. A final point is to invite those who hold contentious insights in adult learning and bring to the fore completely new or radical ideas. This type of academic prickly conversation may provide for new styles of thinking about adult learners, questioning and debating about developing practitioners, and encouraging more 'try on' ideas (Strober, 2011). One example, is the debate about the perplexing nature of the field of adult learning and whether it can be explained by a single theory, model or set of principles (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). Another worthwhile debate is what Aslanian (2017) stated, "the image of the typical college student could not be further from the truth and age no longer predicts learning patterns in higher education" (p. 3).

In this contribution to the field of adult theory and practice, the editor overlooked what may be worth considering and that is the role adult learners could play in this conversation at the faculty level. Instead of being just recipients of this knowledge, adult learners might have something to offer. I shall conclude by saying I heartily appreciate this book because of the conversations about the nontraditional learners who are now the new majority of college students.

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*Linda Ellington, Professor of Business, recipient of the 2017 Dr. Patricia Cranton award, has published a strategic leadership textbook, and more than 20 refereed book chapters and journal articles. These publications address higher educational leadership and teaching, as well as strategic leadership within business / corporate organizations and institutions of higher learning. Currently, Dr. Ellington is Associate Editor for the International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology (IJAVET) and is a peer reviewer for many international books. She has extensive experience in faculty development, curriculum design and delivery, corporate and higher education leadership. Her book, Strategic Leadership has been adopted as a business textbook for major universities in the United States. In addition, numerous universities worldwide including some Ivy League Universities have cataloged her chapters. Dr. Ellington's teaching (including teaching via technology) has reached many states in the United States and South Africa. She sits on several doctoral dissertation committees, including the University of Johannesburg, South Africa.*