A Critical Book Review of the work edited by Alfred, M. V., Robinson, Petra, A., & Roumell, E.A. (Eds.) (2021). Advancing the global agenda for human rights, vulnerable populations, and environmental sustainability: Adult education as strategic partner.

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Advancing the Global Agenda for Human Rights, Vulnerable Populations, and Environmental Sustainability: Adult Education as Strategic Partner

About the Editors

Published in 2021 by Information Age Publications, this book has been edited by three distinguished professionals well-known for their work in adult education, Dr. Mary Alfred, Dr. Petra Robinson, and Dr. Elizabeth Roumell. It spans 349 pages and cost $45.99.

Dr. Mary Alfred's scholarly contributions have earned her recognition from her peers, culminating in her induction into the International Adult and Continuing Education (IACE) Hall of Fame in 2017. Dr. Petra Robinson's research interests include colorism, critical literacies, equity, global citizenship, social justice, and cybersecurity education. Dr. Elizabeth Roumell, an Imogene Oakes award recipient from AAACE for outstanding research in adult education, is recognized as an expert in education policy analyses. Together, Alfred, Robinson, and Roumell's complimentary knowledge, skills, and expertise in adult education make them a powerhouse for advancing the global agenda for human rights, vulnerable populations, and environmental sustainability.

Content

Alfred, Robinson, and Roumell have edited this book expertly, presenting it as an urgent call for nations to recognize and address disparities in educational policy and practice affecting vulnerable populations and environments. They promote the critical role of adult education in influencing greater cohesion in the global society. This book is one of nine in the *Adult Learning in Professional, Organizational, and Community Settings* series, spanning 2014 to 2021. The first book is *Building Sustainable Futures for Adult Learners* (Holtz et al., 2014), and the latest is

Advancing the Global Agenda for Human Rights, Vulnerable Populations, and Environmental Sustainability: Adult Education as Strategic Partner.

The editors organized the book into three parts: (a) Human Rights, (b) Economic Empowerment: Laboring to Learn, and Laboring to Earn, and (c) Environmental Sustainability and Adult Education. The content aligns seamlessly with the book's title, as each chapter efficiently discusses its relevant topic. The book's global focus is evident throughout, with case studies from Ghana (p. 209), Turkey (p. 160), and China (p. 247). Hypertension as a health concern in Ghana, along with issues related to Indigenous fishing rights in Canada (p. 317), demonstrates how both formal and informal education are essential for sustaining community health (p. 209) and protecting our natural ecological systems (p. 317).

Evaluation

This book is a rich, comprehensive work that builds a global perspective on adult education as a catalyst for addressing for the needs of marginalized people with low literacy levels. It also provides ideas and findings on various topics in adult education while illustrating the causes and "effects" (p. 147) of unique and common issues in education worldwide.

The book excels in using inclusive language, and thoughtfully considers diverse demographics. For example, they discuss marginalized youth [n]ot in [e]ducation, [e]mployment, or [t]raining (NEET), and shares the stories of student mothers and their challenges with time and space for studying. The editors also focus on accurately classifying student veterans, sharing statistics on their preferred areas of study, and explaining their socio-demographics. In a similar inclusive manner, the book opposes stereotypes and advocates for the rights of specific groups in the context of the relationship between "social justice and the environment" (p. 317). This volume stands out from single-topic books due to its multidimensional and multidisciplinary

approach, offering M&M literature that informs strategic partnerships between adult education and global sustainability agendas.

Alfred, Robinson, and Roumell argue that globally, young people who are NEET, high school dropouts, "young people affected by poverty" (p. 157), jobless college graduates, and those with "health issues" (p.159) have been disenfranchised by systems that fail to consider that people often end up in challenging situations not of their own making. Without the support of communities, institutions of higher learning (p. 179), governments, and the privileged, these individuals often struggle to rise above life's pressures (p. 160). Governments must recognize their obligation to equip citizens with the coping skills necessary to overcome challenges and become productive, contributing members of society (pp. 194, 227, 229).

A potential weakness identified is that although government assistance is crucial for young people who are NEET, the book also presents community-based adult education and human capabilities development perspectives (pp 83, 139), which offer alternative approaches. The issue is not that the contrast between government aid and community-based education; rather, these differences could have been complementary. Community-based adult education, which is tied to community capacity building (Vidal, 2001), empowers people who are NEET. Through this form of adult education, individuals could achieve self-sufficiency via "active citizenry" (Longworth, 2000, p. 3).

Despite its minor weakness, the book aligns with previous literature advocating for a focus on learning rather than solely on economic gain, arguing that the two are not mutually exclusion (Walker, 2010). Emphasizing human capital development does not mean neglecting the development of human skills and potential (Walker, 2010, pp. 488-489). Walker (2010)

posits that training "elite" (p. 488) students as an investment in economic expansion can benefit marginalized groups if social justice and equality topics are part of educational programs.

Further, when privileged students are exposed to information and scenarios promoting "interconnectedness" and interdependence among all people, they might better grasp the relationship between education and the environment (Walker, 2010, p. 498). Alfred, Robinson, and Roumell encapsulated it well by stating that "realities" must be "addressed on the ground" (p. 212). This concept expands on McClure (2014), which posits that prioritizing economics over people leads to disparities in "wealth distribution" (p. 474). The book also advances the work of UNESCO's Institute of Lifelong Learning (UIL), advocating for consistent, reliable, government-led support of adult education (Medel-Añonuevo, 2013; UIL, 2009).

Limitations of the Book

Although the editors provide a global perspective, the sustainability plan by UNESCO underpinning this work relies heavily on reports from its own organization (Walters, 2022). While this promotes "accountability" regarding the progress of participating nations, it may introduce bias. Generalizing the findings should be done cautiously due to possible inconsistencies influenced by cultural, political, geographical, technological, and socioeconomic differences. These factors impact how surveys that inform the reports are "administered" globally (Walters, 2022., p. 2).

Recommendations

I recommend Alfred, Robinson, and Roumell's work to national education agencies, higher education institutions, teachers, social workers, students in workforce and adult education, lifelong learning, and community workers. These individuals are often responsible for influencing education and social policy decisions. Their understanding of the impact of policies

on their nation's social, cultural, and economic landscape is critical for incorporating the human development perspective into policy. Finally, climate change discussions should be inclusive and widespread, reaching all levels of education from birth to old age, due to the "acceleration [of the] invisible" (p. 260) potential outcomes.

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