Book Review of Global Perspectives on Adult Education

Deborah K Sterner, University of South Florida

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/dsterner/4/
Book Review

Ali A. Abdi and Dip Kapoor

Reviewed by: Deborah K. Sterner and Waynne B. James
University of South Florida, USA
DOI: 10.1177/0741713611401722

When we received this book to review, we were excited about the title, the potential content, and the emphasis on global information on adult education. Unfortunately, the contents of the book did not live up to our expectations. All authors still primarily had North American biases and connections. Although many had experience in what the editors called the “global South,” the quality and rhetoric of each chapter differed by author.

The first six chapters present the concepts of globalization and global perspectives, including considerable discussion about Paulo Freire and Julius Nyerere, which is appropriate for a book on global perspectives. The last nine chapters present case studies on specific countries, which include discussions from Asia (Bangladesh, China, and Indonesia), Africa (Ghana and Zimbabwe), South America (two on Argentina and one on Brazil), and one chapter on the Caribbean. These case studies are intended to reiterate the problem of the worldwide financial entities narrowing international educational goals to support materials production. The chapter on street children in Brazil is an example of how adult education at the praxis is stretching the use of marginalized populations without actually addressing the concepts of adult education.

From the overall perspective, it was difficult to discern for which audiences this book was intended. The reading level, as calculated by the Gunning-Fog readability formula, was extremely high (over a doctoral degree level for some of the chapters), and ensures that it will only be read by the most highly educated adult educators, who are willing to wade through material about biased global perspectives depicted as the “global South.” The global “South” is defined as low-income countries in the world, presumably because most of the developing or low-income countries are in the Southern Hemisphere; however, not all low-income countries are south of the equator. It appears that the concept of the global South is an analogy to the North American perception of the southern part of the United States as being historically less developed. The concept of the global South is sure to be confusing for those individuals familiar with the culture of the south in the United States. This is compounded by the realization that the less developed countries of the world are not all in the Southern Hemisphere.
The statement about the “need to utilize adult education programs to economically advance people and socioethnic groups traditionally excluded” (p. 2) is appropriate for discussion about global perspectives on adult education. The authors, however, fail to deliver on a truly global perspective across all low-income countries.

The rhetoric of some chapters almost assures that the issues the authors are discussing are lost on the intended audience. For example, the sentence “[globalization] threatens to appropriate the shared, collective knowledge of non-Western systems into the private, proprietary knowledge of the few” (p. 43) is complex. Analyzing the actual verbiage and the thoughts contained within the sentence demands that the reader focus on the meaning of the words rather than the authors’ true intent.

Overall, the book is primarily aimed at individuals concerned with three continents, but written or conceived by individuals from a fourth continent. The audience is obviously intended to be the most highly educated, and with a price tag of $90, the book almost becomes excessive in cost. We cannot recommend spending the money on this book.