

Teaching, Coaching and Mentoring Adult Learners: Lessons for professionalism and partnership

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Abstract: This book review examines the book “Teaching, Coaching, and Mentoring Adult Learners: Lessons for Professionalism and Partnership”, edited by Heather Fehring and Susan Rodrigues. The book brings together contributions from professionals and scholars across diverse disciplines to explore theory and practice of mentoring and coaching in adult education.

Key words: Book review; Mentoring; Coaching; Adult learners

The edited book *Teaching, Coaching, and Mentoring Adult Learners: Lessons for Professionalism and Partnership* by Heather Fehring and Susan Rodrigues (2016) offers valuable insights on the practice of mentoring and coaching for educators developing and delivering programs for adult learners. As an edited collection, this book draws from professionals and scholars across diverse disciplines with an aim to address the challenge of designing and delivering adult education programs that are inclusive, adaptable, and responsive to the varied characteristics and expectations of adult learners (Campbell & Nieuwerburgh, 2017; Knight, 2022). Its primary aim is to bridge the gap between theory and practice by offering practical examples that educators can integrate into their professional contexts. In the introductory chapter, Rodrigues (editor) argues that professional education for adult learners must address “diversity, cultural competency and international quality assurance expectations” (p. 1), laying the foundation for themes that are explored in the book. The book concludes with Fehring (editor) synthesizing the key contributions of the scholars and professional by drawing together the central themes, and creating a cohesive link across the chapters, thereby reinforcing their practical relevance for educators.

The 12 chapters within this collection are thoughtfully organized into four distinct sections: Identity and Professionalism; Addressing the Needs of Adult Learners with Diverse Linguistic and Cultural Backgrounds, Visual Impairments, and in Medical Contexts; Case studies and Developing the Essential Skills for Engaging with Adult Learners in the 21st Century. The structure is both logical and accessible and the inclusion of a provocation section at the end of each chapter encourages self-reflection on the presented content. Furthermore, there are number of case studies in the book that provide practical applications for the context of the topic. The first four chapters delve into the strategies of mentoring and coaching while underscoring the importance of professional identity. These chapters also describe how individuals can have multiple identities and place emphasis on “the importance of enhancing professional reflection systematically through collaborative ways” (Guzmán-Valenzuela & Cabello, p. 35). They also emphasize that one’s reflexivity and ethical awareness are vital for relationship-building and transformation (Knight, 2022). The second section of the book which focuses on the aspects of inclusive education and includes interviews with adult learners from diverse backgrounds is one of the strongest contributions within the book. It provides insights on how to effectively support learners from various backgrounds in their educational journey. This resonates with the work of Aguilar (2016), Brown (2021), and Knight (2022) who emphasize the importance of fostering inclusive coaching environments that are grounded in equity, trust and respectful collaboration, where learners feel seen, valued, and empowered in their educational journeys. The book’s advocacy for applying an equity lens in coaching and addressing systemic barriers (Woulfin et al., 2023) is timely and relevant. The final section of the book explores team development, presents case studies, emphasizes the promotion of 21st-century skills and demonstrates how theory can be applied in practice. Throughout this section, the significance of context is consistently acknowledged which reinforces the idea that professional learning and coaching must be responsive to the environments in which they occur (Hollweck & Lofthouse, 2021). Ultimately, the aim of these approaches is to enhance learners’ intrinsic motivation and support their self-determination (Rannikmäe, Holbrook & Cavas).

The book includes several practical tools such as “Checklist for including learners from diverse cultural backgrounds” (Barden, Youl & Youl, p. 70) in Chapter 5 and Solution-Focused Practice in Chapter 10 (Gibson & Vinnicombe). The structured questioning approach presented by Gibson and Vinnicombe offers accessible strategies

that practitioners can readily adopt. The discussion on structuring conversations around four Solution-Focused Practice questions is particularly compelling. For instance, the authors propose guiding prompts such as: “What do you want? How will you know when you have it?; What are you doing already to get there?; What would be happening if you were a little closer to what you want?” According to the authors, these questions can be effectively integrated into adult education contexts where “progress needs to be made” (p. 125). Similarly, Fehring’s Action Research model in Chapter 12 provides a clear framework for improving adult learning programs. The model outline phases such as “Assess, Target Teaching, Monitor, Adjust Teaching, Re-assess and Evaluate Program, and Revise and Target Teaching” (Fehring, p.148) which are undeniably critical steps when it comes to mentoring and coaching in any profession. Fehring further suggests that by integrating the Action Research model in combination with the recommendations by the experts in the book, “an adult educator can enhance the learning of all adult learners” (p.156).

This book provides both theoretical grounding and practical tools for educators, mentors, and coaches working with adult learners. It affirms the importance of inclusivity, self-reflection, and adaptability in professional learning. Most importantly, it challenges us to see adult education not as a one-size-fits-all endeavor but as a relational, context-dependent, and evolving practice. However, one point worth noting is the book’s tendency to blur the distinctions between coaching and mentoring. If your primary goal is to clearly differentiate between mentoring and coaching or to concentrate solely on one of these roles, this book might not provide a distinct separation. In fact, it blurs the lines between a mentor, coach, supervisor and educator. Although this reflects the reality of overlapping professional practices, the lack of conceptual distinction may be challenging for new practitioners seeking clarity about role boundaries, ethical responsibilities, and the scope of practice.

Overall, this book not only sheds light on the adaptable and ever-changing role of an educator but also empowers us to assist 21st-century adult learners in realizing their maximum potential. It’s a recommended read for anyone in the field of education or mentoring-coaching, as well as those interested in understanding the complexities of modern adult education.

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