Edwards, R., Hanson, A., & Raggat, P. (Eds). (1996). *Boundaries of adult learning*. London: Routledge, 303 pp. (Softcover).

Boundaries of Adult Learning is the first volume in a two volume set designed as part of a MA course offered at Open University called Adult Learners, Education and Training. Its companion volume is entitled, *The Learning Society: Challenges and Trends*. The intent of the first volume is to explore, challenge, and question current boundaries existing in the field of adult education in Australia, Europe, and North America. This is a most difficult endeavour to embark upon because of the plethora of academic writings, learning philosophies, and administrative practices abounding in both adult and higher education. So wisely, the editors mention early on that

> a book on boundaries cannot be aware of its own boundaries and we invite you as readers to challenge the chapters in this book and the boundaries within which they are framed and set in the same way as we hope they are challenging to you. (p .2)

The book is divided into 16 chapters as well as introductory comments included by the editors. *Boundaries of Adult Learning* provides the reader with academic writings and research by a wide range of professionals who introduce, question, and research some key concepts related to boundaries in adult education. Topics explored include reflection-in-action, analyzing adult education literature, andragogy, self-directed learning, feminist pedagogy, British adult education traditions, lifelong education in Sweden, equality of access to adult education, learning and leisure, women's lives and adult learning, learning autonomy, professional competencies and standards, skills and transferability, and higher education reform. It includes chapters written by such adult education academics/professionals as Donald Schön, Stephen Brookfield, and Malcolm Knowles.

Beyond the actually writings in this book, the reader must always remember that this book was designed for future professionals in the field of adult education and for those expanding their options as career adult and higher education professionals. As such, one of the main values of this book is that the writings selected attempt to present those theories and practices which have been the mainstay of adult education like self-directed learning, and then, through reflective writing, question the validity of these practices being accepted as *fate accompli* techniques for adult learning. Expanding on this approach, the book also seriously looks at what practices, approaches,

and institutions have been deemed legitimate in adult education and then questioning the power structures which determine what is legitimate adult education and what is not – specifically labour unions, governments, and societal beliefs. Surfacing from this approach, the reader begins to see that an overriding theme is a search for adult education's legitimacy as a unique and respected profession.

A problem plaguing adult education's legitimacy, as presented in the book, is paradigmatic in nature. Two paradigms that have appeared to help adult education have actually hindered its acceptance as a unique and valued profession. Those paradigms are positivism and andragogy vs. pedagogy. Donald Schön, in chapter 1, challenges some of the major shortcomings in using scientism to answer adult education questions in that "if applied science consists of cumulative, empirical knowledge about the means best suited to chosen ends, how can a profession ground itself in science when its ends are confused or unstable" (p. 9)? In chapter 6, Michael Collins furthers this by revisiting such important adult learning theories and practices as self-directed learning, learning contracts, and learner autonomy. For him, any preoccupation to exercise technique and quantification as a means of explaining or understanding adult education practices fails to legitimize this industry. Michael Collins is suggesting that researchers are using inappropriate methodologies since discussions into the legitimacy of adult education usually flounder because our discussion is based on a rational reality and this rarely exists. He proposes using a theory of communicative action instead.

In looking at the pedagogical and andragogical question, Ann Hanson, in chapter 5 states

> all-embracing theories only get in the way of developing an understanding of the differing strategies necessary to enable diverse adults to learn different things in different settings in different ways. There are differences, but they are not based on the difference between children and adults, of pedagogy and andragogy. They are differences of context, culture and power. (p. 107).

Kathleen Weiler, in chapter 7, supports Hanson's notion of difference when she looks at feminist pedagogy. For her as well, the paradigms should not be searching for differences between children and adults or men and women. For women, these differences of context, culture and power should actually draw out commonalities among them. "Such a pedagogy suggests a more complex realization of the Freirean vision of collective conscientization ... one which acknowledges difference and conflict, but which ... rests on a belief in the human capacity to feel, know, and to change" (p. 147). Earlier on, in chapter

2, Boud, Keogh, and Walker touch on this notion of 'collective conscientization' when they discuss reflection in learning. For them, like Weiler, learning rests heavily upon feeling and experience. They believe that as any individual or group goes through a learning growth process, she or they must work through a reflective process. This includes three key elements of *returning to experience, attending to feelings, and re-evaluating experience.*

Many of the later chapters in the book focus on government policy, accessibility to adult education, lifelong learning opportunities, and accreditation. For example, Bob Bell, chapter 8, mentions that one of the hindrances in the growth of adult education opportunities is that politicians and leaders have all to often felt that there is no real urgency needed in planning an organized adult education profession. They rely too heavily on the fact that industry or local authorities would fill this need. Therefore, key leaders in Britain perpetuate the belief that adult education is a luxury. As such, no real system of professionalism needs to be supported by government and their education departments. This lack of support by government, which fortunately is beginning to change, raises several key issues that are discussed in following chapters.

Like chapter 14, where Hager and Goncze discuss the need to establish competencies within the adult education profession in Australia. They suggest that we must change the view of competencies as a list of performance or behaviour criteria to a more skills/context based approach where professionals look for the ability to make intelligent judgements in a variety of complex situations. Hager and Goncze found in their studies that Australian professionals employ a wide variety of competency standards as such "competency-based assessment strategies for the professions should always use a variety of methods" (p. 258).

As educational professionals develop competencies, these competencies must always reflect the desire to help adults improve and grow. Two areas where this can be reflected is in learner autonomy and transferability of personal skills: each which are discussed in chapters 13 and 15. Both Stephen McNair and Roger Harrison talk about how our economy has shifted into the post-Fordism era where our business sector relies heavily upon a skills based employee. Again, there needs to be a paradigm shift. A shift from teaching work-relevant skills to teaching learning-relevant skills. In an economy that is rapidly changing, a knowledge or technical based approach will quickly find the individual out-of-date. As educators develop these learning skills,

learner autonomy is a natural consequence; which, in actuality, is an expression of a belief in an active and democratic society.

Issues of a more democratic educational process should cause adult education professionals to question accessibility. Rinne and Kivinen (chapter 10) and Marlene Morrison (chapter 12) offer some insight regarding issues of accessibility and equal opportunity in adult and higher education. Unfortunately, they found in their research that "an adult's probability of participation in adult education is thus heavily influenced by social status, cultural capital, sex, region of residence, and generation" (p. 194). New lifelong learning opportunities (chapter 9) are being opened for adults but much needs to be improved and/or changed.

For learners of adult and higher education theory and practice, this is both an informative and interesting read. The book manages to discuss many of the important facets of current adult educational practice. It is unfortunate that after so many years, adult education is still searching for legitimization as a unique and respected profession. Maybe when everyone – including governments, the business sector, and policy makers – begins to realize the value of lifelong learning opportunities, whatever they may be, then adult education will reach its potential and our democratic society will be the benefactor.

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