



THE JOSSEY-BASS READER ON

# Contemporary Issues in Adult Education

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Sharan B. Merriam

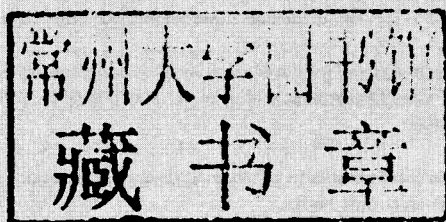
André P. Grace


**EDITORS**

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Sharan B. Merriam, André P. Grace



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# Preface

There's something of a contradiction when speaking of the field of adult education. On the one hand, adult education programs are everywhere—in the workplace, hospitals, libraries, communities, colleges and universities, and online. On the other hand, adult education as a professional field of practice is nearly invisible, with many educators of adults unaware that they are part of a larger enterprise. This paradox also encompasses adult learners themselves. While the most recent U.S. survey revealed that 44% of adults participated part-time in formal adult education activities and 70% were learning informally (NCES, 2007), most adults don't consider themselves learners unless they are "taking a class."

These contradictions are not surprising given that the field of adult education has never been easily captured within one definition, one history, or even one theory. Whether we are talking about diverse adult populations, practices, philosophical perspectives, program planning models, or theories about how adults learn, there has always been a colorful collage of various and sometimes competing components comprising adult education as a field of practice. Professional adult educators do believe, however, that there is some common ground that links us together as a field. Learning, for example, is something human beings do throughout their lives; it is indeed lifelong and lifewide. Further, adult education can be a positive force in our lives and can contribute to individual betterment and a more just and equitable society for all.

As with professionals in other fields of practice, adult educators learn to become educators through experience and study. For example, a nursing supervisor

in a hospital might be asked to develop a program to train others in the use of new medication; a community resident might organize other residents to help educate the community about safety concerns; an experienced worker might be tapped for some on-the-job mentoring of a new employee; or a carpenter might teach a woodworking class at the local community school. These are all examples of adult education in practice in real-life situations.

While many do learn to be adult educators through experience, others combine experience with formal study, sometimes on their own, but more likely as students in master's and doctoral programs. It is in these programs that learners are systematically exposed to the literature in the field. And as with the field itself, there is a wide diversity of resources with which to study the field. There are numerous research and practice-oriented journals; magazines and newsletters; online resources; a *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education* that is published every ten years; a monograph series titled *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*; and dozens of textbooks on various aspects of the field including program planning, adult learning, theory building, philosophy, and history. There is, however, no single volume that functions as a reader on contemporary issues and trends in this very dynamic field of practice.

*The Jossey-Bass Reader on Contemporary Issues in Adult Education* is designed to be both a stand-alone reader for those self-directed adult educators who want to sample some of the thinking about adult education, and a reader that surveys an array of historical and contemporary issues important to study and critique in undergraduate or graduate courses in adult education. *The Jossey-Bass Reader* is particularly appropriate for introductory, overview, or social context courses in graduate programs of adult education. Such introductory courses not only provide the base for other courses in the curriculum, but they also typically explore issues and trends in the field.

## ■ OVERVIEW OF THE CONTENTS

Two selection processes took place to develop *The Jossey-Bass Reader on Contemporary Issues in Adult Education*. First, a panel of North American adult educators was invited to brainstorm a list of current issues and trends in the field. These lists varied from four and five broad issues to more than twenty more specific possibilities. A close study of these lists revealed five themes in common, and these structure the book. The next step was to decide on selections for each theme.

The two editors independently suggested possibilities for each theme; these lists were combined, and both editors read all the nominated pieces. Finally, the editors decided on selections to be included; this list had to be further adjusted to stay within space allocations. There are a total of 30 selections distributed across five topics, each topic with between five and seven selections.

Part One, "Defining a Field of Practice: The Foundations of Adult Education," contains selections related to social justice, ethics, and the historical evolution of the field. Three pieces are by historical "giants" in the field—Eduard C. Lindeman, Alain Locke, and Paulo Freire. Four pieces by contemporary scholars reflect upon the marginal place of the field in universities and society, African American adult education during the Harlem Renaissance, the evolution of the knowledge base, and ethics in the field.

Part Two is titled "Positioning Adult Education in a Global Context." While globalization, or the movement of goods, services, people, and ideas across national boundaries, is not new, the speed with which this movement is occurring is unprecedented. Part Two contains readings that consider the position of adult education in today's world from various perspectives including lifelong learning, policy, women's roles, social movements, and individual empowerment.

Part Three, "Adult Education's Constituencies and Program Areas: Competing Interests?," presents a sampling of the diversity of constituencies and program areas. As there were dozens of possibilities for this section, we tried to select pieces that went beyond description; rather, the selections we chose are thought-provoking, raising questions about an area of practice that we might not have considered before. There are readings on social class and adult education, poverty and its link to adult basic education, the need to bring health promotion and health education together, a feminist critique of human resource development, the "dark side" of the learning organization, and finally, program planning considered from the perspective of negotiating power and interests.

Part Four, "The Changing Landscape of Adult Learning," addresses the heart of all adult education practice. Adult learning is the key to understanding how areas as diverse as adult literacy programs, continuing professional education, workplace learning, and a nature hike in a national park could all come under the umbrella of adult education. As with other parts in this reader, our selections are intended to offer a sample of ways to look at and think about adult learning. There are readings on the changing meaning of reflection, transformative learning, and social learning. The final three selections consider the role of emotions in learning, how



mass media is a global system of informal adult learning, and what non-Western perspectives have to tell us about learning and knowing.

Part Five is a selection of readings that we've aptly titled "New Discourses Shaping Contemporary Adult Education." Adult education has always been a dynamic and changing field of study and practice, one informed by various disciplines and philosophical schools of thought. In Part Five we offer a sampling of new thinking about our field. The first piece sets the stage by considering the role of theory in adult education. The other four selections explore anticonsumption activism, what it means to engage in a postmodern pedagogy, queer pedagogy, and critical social learning.

Finally, in our prefaces to each of the five parts, we introduce each of the selections in more detail so that readers will have an idea of what to expect as they engage in the readings. At the end of each preface, we have included several reflection and discussion questions to further engage readers in issues germane to adult education today.

## ■ ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This reader is the brainchild of David Brightman, our editor at Jossey-Bass, who had a vision of what this book might be. David and editorial coordinator Aneesa Davenport have been enormously supportive in helping us bring this book to fruition. We thank you for your assistance throughout the project. We also want to thank the panel of North American adult educators who helped us brainstorm themes and issues—Ralph Brockett, Tal Guy, Cathy Hansman, and Vanessa Sheared. Finally, we are indebted to our colleagues in adult education from across the globe who authored the selections we chose for this reader. Without your work, this book would not exist, nor would our field be such an exciting and dynamic place to be!

*Sharan B. Merriam*

*André P. Grace*

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# The Editors

**Sharan B. Merriam** is professor emeritus of adult education and qualitative research at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia, U.S. Merriam's research and writing activities have focused on adult and lifelong learning and qualitative research methods. For five years she was coeditor of *Adult Education Quarterly*, the major research and theory journal in adult education. She has published 26 books and over 100 journal articles and book chapters. She is a four-time winner of the prestigious Cyril O. Houle World Award for Literature in Adult Education for books published in 1982, 1997, 1999, and 2007. Her most recent books are *Learning in Adulthood* (2007), *Non-Western Perspectives on Learning and Knowing* (2007), and *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (2009). In 1998 she was a Fulbright scholar to Malaysia, and in 2006 she was a distinguished visiting scholar at Soongsil University in South Korea. From 2009 to 2010 she was a senior research fellow at the Institute for Social Sciences, University Putra Malaysia.

**André P. Grace** is a professor in educational policy studies and director of the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services in the Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada. He is a past president of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education, and he is also a past chair of the Steering Committee for the Adult Education Research Conference in the U.S. His work in educational policy studies primarily focuses on comparative studies of policies, pedagogies, and practices shaping lifelong learning as critical action, especially in the contexts of Organization for Economic Cooperation and

Development (OECD) countries. Within this research he includes a major focus on sexual minorities and their issues and concerns regarding social inclusion, cohesion, and justice in education and culture. He and Tonette S. Rocco, coeditors of the Jossey-Bass book *Challenging the Professionalization of Adult Education: John Ohliger and Contradictions in Modern Practice*, won the 2009 Phillip E. Frandson Award for Literature in the Field of Continuing Higher Education from the University Continuing Education Association in the U.S. At the 2010 Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults, University of Warwick, UK, he won the Ian Martin Award for Social Justice for his paper entitled *Space Matters: Lifelong Learning, Sexual Minorities, and Realities of Adult Education as Social Education*.