

Therriault, V. (2018). Book review - Lifelong learning participation in a changing policy context: an interdisciplinary theory. *Studies in the Education of Adults*.

Lifelong Learning Participation in a Changing Policy Context is Ellen Boeren's first monograph and the culmination of more than 10 years of experience in researching participation issues in adult education. The book's narrative is deeply rooted in the author's academic journey, which gives it a personal and easy-to-relate-to quality. It is a short but information-rich book with the ambitious aim of proposing a new interdisciplinary approach to 'adult lifelong learning participation', drawing on a wide range of disciplines which include economics, educational research, political sciences, psychology and sociology. The monograph is divided into three parts and nine chapters.

Part One provides background information about the field of lifelong learning participation. Boeren begins by defining the terms informal, non-formal and formal learning and highlights that informal education is usually not measured in large-scale international surveys. Consequently, the book focuses on participation in formal and non-formal education. The author also distils recent research about economic and social benefits, and potential outcomes of participation in lifelong learning activities. Boeren points out that the lack of longitudinal data on the topic makes it difficult to measure the long term benefits of lifelong learning.

Boeren then describes the changes observed in the field of adult education where neoliberalism has become the prominent ideology. She notes that an increased focus on individualisation, competitiveness and benchmarks is symptomatic of this ideological shift. The influence of key international organisations such as UNESCO, OECD and the European Commission is then considered relative to this observed shift, but the author provides a balanced view of these organisations' work, suggesting that their current large-scale surveys offer a useful yet incomplete portrait of lifelong learning participation. Discussing international comparisons further, an overview of current trends in lifelong learning participation across the world is presented. Based on this exploration, Boeren reveals that 'disadvantaged groups' (e.g. people living in rural areas, with low levels of qualification, or from lower socioeconomic backgrounds) are largely underrepresented in lifelong learning participation.

Part Two provides a thorough exploration of research about lifelong learning participation from four different viewpoints: psychological, sociological, institutional and national. Psychological models and typologies (related to motivation, for instance), the perceived benefits of participation and life cycle and life events theories are presented in order to understand why adults decide to participate, or not, in lifelong learning activities. Boeren maintains

that a focus on psychological and individualistic models is insufficient and thus turns towards sociological theories (e.g. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capitals) to advance our understanding about lifelong learning participation. Based on this body of research, Boeren highlights that people with higher levels of qualification and from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to participate more than less privileged groups, which poses serious problems from a social justice point of view. Potential institutional barriers to participation are explored, and Boeren argues for more affordable and varied learning opportunities with flexible modes of study for the most disadvantaged and hard to reach learners. The final elements presented are the macro-level determinants that include, but not limited to, countries' economical contexts, levels of unionisation, labour market situations and education systems. Boeren underlines the importance of policies and education systems that grant adult learners a second chance.

The book's highpoint is the introduction of Boeren's 'Integrative Lifelong Learning Participation Model' (p. 147) that includes three main elements: individual (social and behavioural characteristics), learning providers (learning institutions and workplaces as learning environments) and countries (macro level factors). Boeren emphasises the importance of considering all these three elements as being in constant interaction with one another when looking at participation in lifelong learning, although the links between the various elements of the model are not made fully clear.

The book ends with a list of ways in which research could be further advanced based on Boeren's model. According to her, current large-scale surveys do not allow for an interdisciplinary analysis of participation in lifelong learning as they only offer fragmented information. She also acknowledges the challenges associated with measuring lifelong learning participation, as it can take various forms and meanings according to national contexts and cultures in which it is situated. The author finally offers recommendations for policy-makers, practitioners and researchers. For instance, she calls for major investments in the creation of longitudinal studies of lifelong learning participation. Concerning practice, Boeren recommends, amongst other things, the multiplication and diversification of access routes into education for adult learners. She suggests researchers, for example, draw on a wider variety of methodologies to study participation such as mixed-methods approaches and multilevel research.

All in all, the book achieves its aim; however, I offer three main criticisms. A notable feature of the book is its author's careful attention to recent historical developments in lifelong learning participation as she identifies key typologies and models and traces their evolution. This approach is commendable, but leaves the reader with a voluminous amount of information to process. Also, I would have liked to see more discussion around some of the dualistic divides implied: literate versus illiterate, developing countries versus developed

countries and gender defined as men versus women. These terms are highly debated and an acknowledgment of that and further problematisation would have been a welcome addition. The author mentions the methodological limitations of large-scale international surveys but does not discuss in great detail how they might exacerbate the creation and reproduction of educational colonialism. It would have been interesting to explore these ideas since one of the recommendations is to collect more data about lifelong learning participation in so called 'developing countries'.

Regardless of these criticisms, the book will likely appeal to a wide range of audiences. Boeren's integrative model offers a good foundation for structuring teaching sessions for undergraduate students about participation in adult lifelong learning. The book would also interest postgraduate students who want to get an overview of key authors and current debates in the field of adult education. The stimulating recommendations made at the end of the book will hopefully garner support from the academic community as well as receive the attention they deserve from policy-makers and education providers.

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