

BOOK REVIEW

Merriam, S.B., & Caffarella, R.S. (1999). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. (502 pages.)

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Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide, brings together the theories, literature and research about adult learning, adult development, adult learner characteristics, and adult education practices in a well laid-out and readable book. I first used this book in 1999 while a graduate student taking a course on adult learning theory and adult development, and it has been a staple in my library ever since.

The book is divided into 5 parts. Part 1 addresses the context and provision of adult learning; basically, how, why and where adults learn. What motivates adults to learn? Who participates in adult education? Where and what kinds of learning opportunities are available for adult learners? This section covers the socio-economic reasons why an adult might participate in learning; where learning opportunities are available; the formal and informal settings found in adult education; and who decides what learning opportunities are made available and what the benefits of adult learning may be. All the chapters in this section are well connected and well written, and they pique your interest so you wish to continue on to part 2.

Part 2 focuses on adult development and learning. The chapters cover the theories of development, the factors that contribute to the development of an adult, and how those factors impact how adults learn. Sociocultural, biological, and psychological aspects all play a part in how adults develop and learn. Our heritage, where we were raised, the aging process, what events have happened in our lives, how much education we have had, and the jobs we have held, all play a part in our development and, in turn, in how we learn. These chapters give the adult educator information and insight about the many factors that affect adult development and learning. Being aware of these factors can only help teachers become more compassionate, responsive and effective facilitators in the classroom.

Part 3 is about the learning process itself. How adults learn, what affects learning in adulthood and theories about adult learning are covered. It begins with a chapter on memory, cognition and the brain, and how these functions affect learning. Following is an extensive and excellent chapter on adult experiences and learning, focusing on how these experiences affect who we are, how we learn, and what prior knowledge we bring to the learning experience. In addition, the theories

about adult learning and experience are covered. The section ends with a chapter that outlines key theories on learning. Theories, such as behaviorism, humanism, and constructivism are defined, discussed and contrasted. A table containing 5 orientations to learning is provided (p. 264), which details learning theorists, the specific theories, and the characteristics of those theories. I found this table useful in helping me to identify not only my teaching orientation, but my learning orientation as well. I had assumed my preferred teaching and learning methods would be the same and when I discovered they were not, I had to examine my assumptions. It was a very eye-opening experience.

Part 4 is about the learning transaction with adults. It begins with a thorough review of Malcolm Knowles' concept of andragogy and goes on to discuss other models of adult learning such as Cross' characteristics of adult learners (CAL) model, and Knox's proficiency theory. The authors follow with chapters on self-directed learning and transformational learning, finishing the section with a chapter on critical theory, postmodern and feminist perspectives.

The final part of the book is devoted to reflections on practice. The subject of ethics and adult learning is discussed. Adult educators and program planners face ethical issues and dilemmas as a matter of course. The authors discuss questions such as, what are the responsibilities of the instructor and the learner? And, do we have the right to expect learners to grow? Ethical questions are never answered simply, and this chapter helps to raise the reader's awareness of some thorny issues. The book concludes with a chapter integrating theory and practice that ties together the concepts found throughout the book.
