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International Perspectives on Older Adult Education: Research, Policies and Practice

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Review

Findsen, B. & Formosa, M. (eds.) (2015). *International Perspectives on Older Adult Education: Research, Policies and Practice*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing. ISBN: 978-3-319-24937-7.

Although education has been, generally speaking, at the forefront of international agendas for development, the focus is usually on the education of younger generations. The ‘Millennium Development Goals’ platform listed achieving universal primary education (for boys and girls of school age) as one of the core goals for 2015. The ‘2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ (United Nations, 2015) built on these concerns, and we saw lifelong learning, as well as adult literacy and numeracy, emerge as areas of critical importance, in need of specific intervention.

The “3rd Global Report on Adult Learning and Education” (UNESCO, 2016), published in preparation for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, reported on the relevance of adult learning and education across many sectors of society. It also brought to light how little is known about older adult (50-75 years of age) education, namely in terms of the participation rates of older adults in adult learning and education programmes: half of the countries contributing for this report had no statistical information of this kind.

While the discussion about the aims, objectives, benefits and hardships of adult learning and education (ALE) has been long and prolific, and despite the obvious demographical changes (with the older adult population reaching undeniably high proportions, all throughout the globe, and in the contemporary western world in particular), the area of older adult education is still reasonably marginal in the sphere of ALE.

Brian Findsen and Marvin Formosa serve as editors for the 22nd volume of Springer’s *Lifelong Learning Book Series*, titled *International*

Perspectives on Older Adult Education: Research, Policies and Practice. In its foreword, Alan Tuckett (International Council for Adult Education) reminds us that “lifelong learning includes older people”, but also that there seems to be “a gap between the rhetoric of international agreements” and how (or if) older adult education is being operationalized.

In explaining the rationale behind this edited volume, Findsen and Formosa account for the increasing political and social interest for older adult education, but also for the apparent tremendous internal diversity of this area of knowledge and intervention: “a vast array of agencies and participants, (...) a variety of learning contexts, (...) various modes of provision and educational approaches”. This book emerges as an effort to map older adult education in an international (not comparative) perspective, embracing the multiplicity therein.

International Perspectives on Older Adult Education features contributions from 42 countries/chapters: the American continent is represented by seven chapters; the African continent, by ten chapters; the Asian continent, by nine chapters; the Australasian continent, by two chapters; and the European continent, by fourteen chapters (two of which, multi-national). The internal organization of each chapter, albeit variable, is somewhat framed by the response to the editors’ request for a discussion about: the historical background of older adult education (OAE); organizations and individuals relevant for the implementation/development of OAE; the current state of affairs in OAE; the conceptual/theoretical framework supporting OAE; the influence/relevance of government policy and intervention; the main beneficiaries of (and those excluded from) OAE initiatives; success stories and/or good practices; and, finally, a forecast for OAE.

For its comprehensiveness and multitude of perspectives, the book presents an opportunity to identify main international trends in OAE, but ultimately, it helps raise a number of interrogations and challenges, with a potential for influencing research, policy development and professional practice. For example, a transversal reading seems to support the need for a more systematic investment in the collection of data on OAE, namely in terms of the organizational aspects, as well as information on users/audiences. Policy-wise, there seems to be a generalized feeling of

(more or less) ‘benign neglect’, wherein OAE initiatives are left free to do as they please (and/or as their audiences wish), but in return receive very little (if any) support from the State. As far as practice is concerned, the emergent theme seems to be a need to invest in the professional development of OAE facilitators.

This book provides an epistemologically and empirically sound discussion about OAE, allowing for both cross-national, cross-regional and country-specific analyses of lifelong learning policies and strategies, useful for researchers, ALE professionals and policy makers.

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