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Book Review

- **Comparative Adult Education 2008: Experiences and Examples*,
Edited by Jost Reischmann and Micheal Bron
Alan B. Knox 304

*Indicates articles accepted under the editorship of Patricia Cranton, Edward W. Taylor, and Elizabeth J. Tisdell.



Book Review

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Reischmann, J. & Bron, M. (Eds.). (2008). *Comparative Adult Education 2008: Experiences and Examples*. Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Peter Lang. 282 pp. \$57.95 (paperback)

Reviewed by: Alan B. Knox, *University of Wisconsin-Madison, WI, USA*
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Most American adult education practice and scholarship has focused on diversity and societal influences on current local experience. However, our basic commitment increasingly includes global interdependence. For decades, adult education practitioners and scholars worldwide have engaged in international comparative adult education and accumulated valuable insights applicable to our current local focus and our global future.

A recent volume by members of the International Society for Comparative Adult Education is replete with practical comparative adult education guidelines derived from varied perspectives, which can help us strengthen our programs. Because the editors and many authors are familiar with pertinent publications and perspectives, reading the chapters yields a type of meta-analysis.

Illustrating various types of adult education programs along with their distinctive missions, the chapters written by Reischmann, Popovic, Hunayan, Hake, and Avoseh emphasize the desirability of multiple systems within and across countries. Detailed, accurate, diverse, and documented action-orientated case descriptions and data on inputs, processes, and outcomes, combined with explicit analysis of similarities, differences, and major societal influences yield insightful interpretations of value to readers interested in comparable program dynamics. This is similar to using benchmark examples for a local program review. This type of comparative analysis provides useful conclusions, such as valid interpretations of selected adult education programs and their past and current societal influences and an explicit framework for sound interpretation of similarities and differences during the cross-case analysis.

Teamwork and collaboration are emphasized throughout the volume (Reischmann, Arthur, Bron, Merrill and Bron, Holland, and Hake). Such cooperation has many benefits. One benefit is the varied and complimentary roles and perspectives of scholars and practitioners from diverse cultural settings, which can enable them collectively to provide explanations of program functioning that include both operational and policy dimensions. A second benefit is effective communication, which can help the people who guide the total comparative project, who collect and report program data, and

who edit or translate project reports, to achieve explicit agreement throughout on the project framework, methods, interpretations, and implications. Such teamwork is similar to participatory research in which all partners contribute and learn. A third benefit is encouraging and sharing reflections by team members with diverse perspectives, which can help avoid pitfalls and enhance sound conclusions.

Various quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis procedures are used for comparative adult education research. Such methods tend to be more similar to historical and case study research than to survey research. Because interpretation and utilization of conclusions from diverse international examples is central in this volume, findings needed to provide sufficient explanation of program characteristics and influences. This enables readers to understand the applicability to their own program interests. The authors highlight how many potential benefits can be achieved and pitfalls avoided by having a flexible but explicit and agreed-on research framework for guiding research team members, selecting examples, specifying major concepts and variables, and especially drawing inductive conclusions.

Several authors (Bron, Popkovic) have addressed feasibility regarding timing and resources. An individual scholar can conduct a very beneficial research project in a few months but typically a major international comparative research project takes years to plan, assemble, and orient team members, even when they are experienced scholars as well as to collect and analyze data, and prepare and publish reports. This process can progress well if the team has experienced leadership, and if team members collaborate effectively in the spirit of participatory research, allowing each team member to realize benefits sufficient to warrant continued cooperation. Team members can realize such local benefits from helping plan the research framework, interviewing and drafting an overview of a local program, recruiting and supervising authors of examples, reviewing a set of descriptions, and revising preliminary drafts of the total project report. When team members at various career stages enjoy such roles and related experiences, there are various potential benefits such as enhanced careers, strengthened collegial networks, sound conclusions, and opportunities for future collaboration.

Finally, this volume contains many guidelines for comparative adult education research regarding various programs in a single country. This book gives helpful advice for scholars actively involved in international exchange, regarding the state of the art for action and reflection. It will be a rich library resource as we move toward adult education for our global future.