

Book Review

Review of *Contested Spaces of Teaching and Learning: Practitioner Ethnographies of Adult Education in the United States*

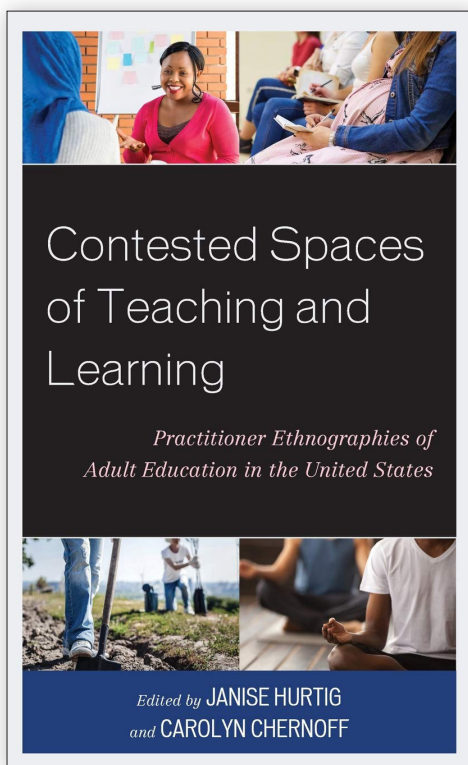
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The purpose of *Contested Spaces of Teaching and Learning: Practitioner Ethnographies of Adult Education in the United States* is to examine how adults make sense of and change their teaching and learning environments to advocate for social justice. Through practitioner ethnography, the authors (1) argue that adults dispute the educational options they are given in a variety of ways by explaining how adults advocate for their needs and (2) reflect on how their roles as practitioner and researcher affect their own analysis of these processes. Avoiding the typical isolation of teaching and learning as separate practices, these chapters instead demonstrate how teaching and learning are inextricably linked. Critical frameworks support the analyses, and paired with the diversity of contexts, offer the reader multiple options to consider their own experiences as an adult learner and adult educator.

The chapters are divided into three coherent sections, spanning efforts of contention in community education spaces, institutional spaces, and public spaces. In the first section (Chapters 1-3), the practitioner-researchers focus on how adults challenge conventional curricula such as maps, digital literacy curriculum,

and writing curriculum.

In these cases, the adult learners both indirectly and directly communicate their needs among themselves and with educators, and in doing so, transform the curricula. Within the second section (Chapters 4-7), authors emphasize alternative approaches of co-educating and co-learning in the contexts of yoga for incarcerated men, Black Sunday school teachers' training, a professor's university classroom, and union organizers becoming co-educators. Authors in



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this section highlight the teaching and learning practices of teachers who learned about pedagogy through non-traditional means, examine their own teaching and learning practices and expose the complicated terrain of the dual roles of teacher and learner. In the final section (Chapters 8-11), the ethnographers describe how teaching and learning occur in the public arena, especially for people who have experienced marginalization. In public spaces such as choirs, cultural programs, mutual aid associations, and parades, the authors address how identity formation takes place in collective learning environments. In doing so, they provide careful description of the conflicting viewpoints and complicated nature of teacher and learner roles in informal learning contexts.

As is claimed, the ethnographers provide thick description of how these acts of protest at the micro level can reveal resistance to macro-level structural forces. Though not all chapters specifically address the concept of neoliberalism, each chapter presents detailed accounts of one context and connects it to larger efforts toward social justice. This includes examples such as how resettled populations in ESL classes transform from their given role of consumer to teacher and community leader (Chapter 1) and how incarcerated men who teach yoga class resist traditional notions of masculinity and collectively establish and maintain their own teaching and learning community (Chapter 4). Additionally, within this thick description, the authors position themselves and the tensions of their work as practitioners within neoliberal structures, thoroughly outlining their thought process in undertaking these studies. The collection itself includes practitioner-researchers who occupy varying roles and identities, from practitioners reflecting on their own practices to researchers who play a volunteer role.

This book is relevant for adult education practitioners, adult education scholars, and critical education scholars. For adult education practitioners who share social justice aims and the goal of creating an educational environment that promotes adult learners' own needs, these case studies may reflect what they see in their own contexts or offer new ideas for adults to have a greater say in what and how they are taught. For adult education scholars who are interested in ethnographic methods, this collection suggests several ways that researchers can situate themselves in their research and provides rich, contextualized examples of how to use ethnographic methods to depict practices of adults advocating for justice. Lastly, the detailed, varied accounts of how teaching and learning are contended provide a worthwhile resource for critical educational scholars who wish to examine how social justice initiatives take place in non-formal and informal learning contexts. The case studies are presented in separate chapters, each with detailed stories, making the text highly readable and an appropriate resource for many contexts such as graduate-level education coursework or working groups of adult education practitioners.

Ultimately, the editors follow through on their promise to deliver a resource that highlights how adults negotiate education in order to promote social justice aims. The ethnographers supply concrete, complex examples of how this process unfolds, and in doing so, expose the messiness and conflict that can occur within groups of adults and among the overlapping and sometimes contradictory roles of co-learners and co-teachers as they attempt teaching and learning. The practitioner-researchers' ability to apply critical theory to their cases is comprehensive, giving the reader several ways to consider how critical theories can illustrate the concrete practices of how adults

make their educational experiences better align with their needs and goals. Though the notion of contesting conventional education is discussed throughout the book, at times it is unclear how the authors conceptualize conventional education or what adults are contesting.

Despite the immense value of this book and the author's detailed discussion of their positionality and application of critical theories, as a novice education researcher with limited experience with ethnographic methods, I sometimes wanted more details on precisely how the ethnographers had conducted their ethnographic methods, especially in how they designed and implemented their

complex observational and interview processes. Given that one goal of this study is to promote ethnography in adult education, it is important to note that other novice researchers may also desire more detail about how to conduct ethnographic studies. Even though the methodology description is limited at times and the concept of conventional education and contestation remain a bit ambiguous, this book makes a significant contribution to the field of adult education. The book demonstrates that supporting the creation of educational spaces for contestation is not merely empty language, but a set of specific deliberations and educational practices by teachers and learners.