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Collective Capacity Building: Shaping Education and Communication in Knowledge Society

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BOOK REVIEW

COLLECTIVE CAPACITY BUILDING: SHAPING EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION IN KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

The release of *Collective Capacity Building: Shaping Education and Communication in Knowledge Society* makes a timely contribution at a time when many are struggling with finding and developing community support in this increasingly complex society. Adult education is well positioned to provide solutions on many different levels, one of which is through capacity building. With an increasing amount of knowledge and information available to learners, it is the responsibility of educators to help their students with developing their capacities, skills, and abilities for critical reflection to navigate the challenges found in a knowledge-based society and to find a sense of belonging. This is one of the main objectives of *Collective Capacity Building. Collective Capacity Building* encourages conversations and reflection on themes of democracy, culture, policy, and education which are some themes with far-reaching significance to life and society. At the same time, they are very generalizable themes which makes the tasks of having substantiative discussion on these themes difficult for a single volume to fully address. The motivation for this book comes from the recognition that there are urgent educational, social, cultural, geopolitical, and economic challenges present in our knowledge society not being addressed by traditional approaches to teaching and learning. The editors of this book argue that adult education can have a role in addressing these challenges, which include declining civic engagement and democracy, through dialogue and a focus on encouraging capacity development. Therefore, this book is about exploring capacity building from different viewpoints to emphasize the complexity of the concept and the need for inter- and transdisciplinary scholarship on this topic. The editors define capacity building using the United Nation's definition as "a long-term process of development run by all types of stakeholders" (p. 1), although the editors go on to note that the term itself is rather vague due to applications in various contexts. They do however consider that the "strength of the Collective Capacity Building (CCB) theory lies in its quality of reshaping the educational field" (p. 7), specifically its relevance to furthering and strengthening the knowledge society.

The book has fourteen chapters separated into two parts. The first part, which comprises Chapters 1 to 8, focuses on the theme of "Interdisciplinary Approaches to Collective Capacity Building". The second part, which contains Chapter 9 to 14, focuses on the theme of "Collective Capacity Building in Higher Education". Capacity building is said to cover

four main domains – political, social, organizational, and educational – and the chapters present examples that intersect with each of these themes, although as the separation of chapters indicates there is a strong focus and representation of the educational domain. Each individual chapter is unique and shares insights from research on diverse topics and contexts. For instance, capacity building through enculturation and intercultural understanding is the focus of Chapter 2. Chapter 5 explores the use of religious symbols in political campaigns to discuss the capacity to overcome manipulation of beliefs through critical thinking and reasoning. Chapter 7 presents Belgrade urban activism as an example to show capacity development "goes beyond the training and etching, can include even social initiatives and movements" (p. 89); and Chapter 10 shares a model to encourage collective capacity building to promote learning sustainability in educational systems. However, due to this wide variety of examples, the book lacks coherence and feels disjointed due to the different conceptualizations and applications of CCB, not all of which are clearly defined. The emphasis the editors place on CCB and the connection to the knowledge society varies between authorship. Furthermore, the book's shorter chapters improve readability for the reader but come at the sacrifice in-depth engagement with understanding of the concepts and content in some cases.

Another shortcoming of the book is the relevance and applicability of the examples, which are geographically limited to Europe, and thus may not be of as much use, interest, or benefit to a global audience, particularly for communities in the Global South. That all the content and examples come from a European context undermines the editors claims for showing diversity of the conceptualization of CCB and is a shortcoming given the shift in global culture and contexts towards diversity and decolonization in teaching and learning. The limited Eurocentric scope of the examples falls within the narrow scope and normalizing the linear path of development discourse within capitalism. Moreover, there is a certain primacy and dependency placed upon building the capacity of people within institutions and the state, which again is a limitation in the scope of the book. The authors could have sourced content and included voices from the Global South to enhance diversity, representation, and relevance of the text. Providing more information on the situatedness of the context (i.e., Europe) would have been helpful to setting the readers' expectations.

Based on the content and case studies, this book would be most useful to education professionals in higher education and to institutional leaders. However, there are some examples and chapters in the first half of the book that may be of interest and have implications for adult education more broadly. For instance, Chapter 8 in the first section presents a discussion on the processes of critical reflection and is concerned with adult education in a more general sense, as are the examples of adult learning through cultural heritage, public pedagogy, social media networks, political and urban activism in earlier chapters. Taken as a whole, the examples in the chapters throughout the book encourage readers to critically reflect on their own practice, which addresses a major aim of this book: to support practitioner-researchers to develop their theoretical perspectives on CCB. The issues are current and highly relevant, and the overarching principles and discussions will encourage students, practitioners, and researchers of adult education to face present predicaments and challenges for some time to come.

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