

Appreciating Adults Learning: From the Learners' Perspective

*David Boud and Virginia Griffin (Eds.)
London: Kogan Page, 1987, 248 pages.*

Although the title of this book reads a little awkwardly, it nevertheless accurately reflects the contributions of the 19 authors. As stated in the introduction, this book is about "what learning is like for those engaging in it." It consists largely of reports of qualitative research on the nature of learning, and on the consequences of the learning process for the learners themselves. It is an admirable contribution to this neglected area—and kind—of research.

The book is divided into four sections. The first deals with "ways of thinking about learning" and the next examines learning in relation to personal development. The third section contains research on learning in formal courses, and the last includes separate articles by the two editors in which they present analytical and theoretical comments.

A friend of mine intended to edit a book of autobiographical articles dealing with the meaning of learning in the lives of the authors. The book never happened, but the title he intended to use, "The Affirmers," kept coming to my mind as I read *Appreciating Adults Learning*. This book stems from the same basic notion of learning about yourself while learning about something else. There is a real concern here for the joys and the difficulties which accompany the process of learning.

Third force or humanistic psychologists and their ideas are never far away in this book. The useful bibliographies accompanying each chapter contain many references to Maslow, Rogers, Perls, Knowles, and Mezirow. We also see ample evidence of the personal influence of one of the editors, Virginia Griffin, who has clearly inspired many of the authors and is described in one article as an "unsettling" teacher.

In any such collection of writing, all readers find some articles more memorable or appealing than others. Stephen Brookfield's chapter about the learning that goes on within close personal relationships struck home with me, as did Lynn Davie's four perspectives on the evaluation of learning.

Gwyneth Griffith's ideas about the interdependence of learning and teaching were arresting. The two concluding chapters by the editors are valuable both as independent contributions and also in terms of pulling together themes dealt with throughout the book. It is perhaps not inconsistent with the spirit or nature of this publication to suggest that a further reading, under altered circumstances, would likely bring a lively response to other sections as well.

There are a small number of editorial shortcomings that could have been avoided: works cited in the text and not included in the bibliography, inconsistent inclusion of page numbers for direct quotations, the numbering of lists of sub-points with no apparent logic. There are few such items, however, and the book is freer of such "errors" than many that appear these days. As well, the index seems to work well—not an easy accomplishment for such a volume.

This reviewer recommends this book highly to those interested in the study of the learning process, particularly for those who value the qualitative approach. There are a number of "personal journeys" described here, but the stories are not just told but are carefully examined for their significance.

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