

2012

Review of Handbook of Research on Adult Learning and Development

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Recommended Citation

McRory, Marian (2012) "Review of Handbook of Research on Adult Learning and Development," *Level 3*: Vol. 10: Iss. 1, Article 9.

doi:10.21427/D7X734

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/level3/vol10/iss1/9>

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BOOK REVIEW

TITLE: Handbook of Research on Adult Learning and Development

AUTHOR: Cecil Smith

YEAR: 2008

PUBLISHER: Routledge

ISBN: 978-0-8058-5819 Hbk

NUMBER OF PAGES: 802

KEY WORDS: theories of adult learning; aging and the brain; careers; adulthood; cognition; emotion.

This is a very well edited book covering the key areas of research in adult learning. Its publication is valuable as it encompasses the theoretical perspectives, research methods on adult learning and development, the effects of aging on the brain, and public policy and social trends in today's aging society. Adult learning and development is now recognised as a very rich area that deserves authentic research and this book offers a comprehensive resource for all serious researchers.

The format of the book divides into six areas each with a diverse range of articles by over fifty contributors. Part 1 has some of the best articles in the book beginning with *Challenges for the Current Status of Adult Developmental Theories* by Blanchard-Fields and Kalinauskas which examines some of the scientific research concerning the brain and the effects of aging. It also presents research on social cognition, health and cognition, and emotion and cognition within the context of four stages of adulthood. *Emerging Adulthood: Learning and Development during the First Stage of Adulthood* by Tanner, Arnett and Leis examines learning issues for the adolescent; an area that is growing in awareness as a specialised field of research. In *Cognitive Development as the Dance of Adaptive Transformation* Sinnott offers some interesting neo-Piagetian perspectives on adult cognitive development.

Part two presents more measured analytical data in terms of research methodology. Part three incorporates several facets of research on adult development. Magolda, Abes and Torres discuss the development of personality in young adulthood - during college years and beyond. Their source of reference, in terms of learning and developmental framework, centres mostly on Mezirow's theory of transformational learning. It describes the inner journey a young person makes in order to find their own meaning of life free from the inherited beliefs of parents and teachers and is enlightening from educational, psychological and emotional perspectives. Also included in this part of the book are articles on marriage, family relationships, career development, well-being and spiritual development - the latter being increasingly popular amongst researchers in social science, particularly in music and the arts.



Part 4 has a very diverse spectrum beginning with two articles based on the history of research on adult learning and cognition by Thompson, and Alexander, Murphy and Kilikowich explore four research programmes – Ackerman, Alexander, Lajoie and Sternberg – in terms of adult development, learning and expertise. What is most valuable about the latter is that it offers some predictions about future research in this area over the next decade. Other articles cover a wide range of topic from problem-solving across the life span, goal striving and how people learn to select goals, adult literacy, informal learning in the workplace, civic and community participation and psychological disorders in adults.

One unique aspect of this handbook is found in parts 5 and 6 which covers not only implications for learning in later life (Mast, Zimmerman and Rowe) but also the value of wisdom and integrity in very old age (Ardelt and Jacobs). Often very old age is discussed purely in terms of its effect on the brain, memory etc but here the authors identify the importance of wisdom and life satisfaction that comes with age.

This book offers a rich resource for researchers in social science, education, psychology, philosophy, spirituality and public service. It encompasses every stage of adulthood with an impressive diversity of articles on almost every aspect of adult learning, development and research. As a handbook it is an invaluable source of reference for all those interested in adult learning and development.

REVIEWER:

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