

Book review

Making Connections: A selection of writings 1983 - 2009

Delia Bradshaw, 2022. Textcraft, Melbourne, Australia. 366 pp.,
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Making Connections is a must-read for anyone interested in adult education. The book showcases the evolution of Delia Bradshaw's thinking and writing about the transformative potential of adult education through keynote speeches, articles, reflections, lesson plans and workshop activities. A passionate and committed educator, during her four decades of engagement with adult education, Delia worked in numerous roles in a broad range of organisational contexts. The book principally focuses on making connections between her roles and different 'voices' as a teacher, writer, researcher and public speaker.

Structurally the book follows a chronological sequence and is divided into five main sections with subsections. Throughout the book, Delia's contemporary reflections preface the piece that follows. The conversational tone of these reflections personalises the work, offering insights into her work involvements, influences and thinking at the time.

In returning to her earlier writing, she notes that evaluation, with the word 'value' at its centre, was central to her thinking and practice, and this is evident throughout the book.

The first section is the prelude to her expositions on adult education. Titled *1993-1999: Who Am I?* it sets her work in context in writings exploring personal, cultural and political identity. She answers the question Who am I? by outlining the sources and meanings of her names and reflects on the importance of naming in identity formation. Among other things, she reflects on some key life influences including exposure to educational, intellectual and political ideas, loved books, people who have inspired her, and her own aspirations. Her aspirations (abbreviated here) could equally serve to describe her achievements as an educator: to excite adult educators about the powerful personal and social possibilities of their work; to write well with passion and clarity; to participate in pioneering projects on the margins; to be a thoughtful and energetic contributor to her varied communities; to commemorate key life experiences through arts-based rituals; and (the list ends with) to laugh and dance more.

Three more pieces follow in this section. A letter to a friend about what feminism means to her is prefaced by her reflection that *'feminism is at the core of my identity'*. "Since coming here..." (1984) a piece on her work as a project officer for a migrant women's recreation project she loved, illustrates her willingness to take risks, to be on the margins, diving into opportunities without knowing exactly what was expected of her. A lifelong habit of questioning meanings and purposes led her to ask of the project titled "Recreational Opportunities for Migrant Women", what images spring to mind when we talk about recreation? And recreation for migrant women? To avoid the constrictions of typical 'sporty' connotations of recreation the project developed the more liberating definition of "opportunities for migrant women to re-create themselves and their lives". This broader definition, involving deep listening to the women as they interpreted their own needs and aspirations for transformation and regeneration, became widely adopted in neighbourhood houses and learning centres.

The first section highlights important aspects of her pedagogy, questioning, reflecting and bringing her whole self to the work. For the following four sections, I have selected key insights from each section

showing how her values were embodied and shared in her thinking and practice as an educator.

The second section *1985-1993: Working at the Council of Adult Education (CAE)*. The five pieces in this section were written during the time Delia was manager of the Adult Basic Education and Literacy programs at the CAE. A short manifesto about the ABEL programs details the two basic educational goals and the necessary learning environment believed to offer the combination essential for adults to 'read the world as well as the word' in action. The published piece *From Fill-ins to Foundations: Changing Views of Literacy (1992/5)* raises the question, who determines what happens in class? and explores the fundamentally political decisions inherent in views and approaches to literacy. After critiquing several historic and more current approaches to literacy Delia, in her voice as manager, leads us to the three important ethical principles she uses to judge all human behaviour, including literacy practices. They are 1) what contribution does it make to social justice, that is the degree to which wealth and power are shared, 2) its contribution towards the creation and sustenance of a healthy world that allows people to live a peaceful, fulfilling and ecologically mindful life, and 3) the degree to which it throws light on the storehouse of truth, on life and the human condition. She argues that the only defensible literacy position is the critical social literacy perspective that is premised on the position that being literate automatically incorporates critiquing in the name of truth and justice. Teachers must take the lead in deciding class purpose, content and activities, critiquing discourses in pursuit of constructing a more just society, rather than correcting the use of language.

The third section *1997-1998: Questions of Identity*, includes two pieces with different attempts to identify herself as an ALBE worker. In *Ourselves as Texts (1997)*, she presents an example of how she set about examining the interaction of her personal values and politics with her teaching practices. She sets out a credo of her beliefs about the work of adult literacy teachers to initiate students into the cultural, social, and political worlds of meaning-making through a series of practices, including for example broadening ways of viewing and representing the world, interrogating the values and power relations of both groups and texts, and revealing education as knowledge construction. Here she identifies her own intentions of modelling, enacting, embodying those

practices, interrogating and transforming herself through constantly reinventing her educational practices along with her personal and vocational selves. In a workshop exercise with teachers, it was clear that questioning her ethics, epistemologies, methodologies, and making spaces for internal and classroom conversations was not an easy task for her or the participants. Echoing an early theme ‘naming’ – the name teacher matters, and the work teachers do matters. However, with increasing casualization, and isolation of teachers from one another, there is little opportunity to share educational ideas with each other, making the culture of teaching increasingly fragmented and at risk.

In the fourth section *1997-2002: Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities*, also the name of the published Victorian further education curriculum framework, we hear Delia's voice as a researcher. The first piece *Redefining Knowledge, Transforming the Future (1997)*, sets out the process that culminated in the development of the framework. She was appointed as the project worker to develop the ACFE Board's response to state and national reforms to curriculum and accreditation. Kress's (1995) idea that curriculum is always a design for the future, had Delia asking questions about what we have in mind for the future. At the time a paradigm shift was occurring in thinking about education, towards pluralism and interconnectedness away from uniformity and fragmentation. The framework identified four key principles – multiplicity, connectedness, critical intelligence, transformation – and four curriculum aspects – educational practices, learning outcomes, recognition outcomes, and pathway outcomes – as the way to realise the eight lifelong learning goals (See pages 11 and 16-17 in *Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities*). Delia was widely known as the author of this seminal and influential work on adult education theory and practice.

The final section, *2002-2004: Professional Development Workshops*, presents pieces, and we hear again Delia's voice as a teacher. “What I take into the Workplace with me” Workshop (2002) asks participants to consider the beliefs and values they bring to their classrooms. “Pathways Planning” Workshop (2004) uses a wide range of activities to consider the pathways outcomes domain of the TLTC framework. A book chapter, *All Mapped Out?: The dynamic relationship between worldviews, democratic imaginations and educational practices (2004)*.

Delia's writing is engaging, creative and inspiring. If you enjoy talking, reading and thinking about adult education, either as educator or manager, this book is a must-read. It takes us back to the critical fundamentals of transformational adult education, locating its purpose and values within the quest for a just, compassionate and harmonious world where learners are encouraged to 'read the world as well as the word' in action, and teachers embody and continually question their own practices and beliefs.

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