

BOOK REVIEW

David Caruana and Peter Mayo (Eds.) *Perspectives on Lifelong Learning in the Mediterranean, Proceedings of the conference 'Lifelong Learning in the Mediterranean', Sliema, Malta, 13-16 September, 2003, Bonn, The Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association, 2003, ISBN: 3885138077.*

This publication constitutes an edited collection of papers arising from the 'Lifelong Learning in the Mediterranean Conference' that was held in Malta in September 2003. The idea of lifelong learning has long been a central catchword in educational studies. Although its definition is often fluid and its usage diverse, lifelong learning is generally used to refer to our efforts in creating a society where everybody is learning all the time.

Lifelong education is thus understood as an institutional movement, a politico-institutional project and even as a discourse on social change but never, of course, as a pedagogy. Consequently, it is not surprising that the last decade witnessed a consistent stream of publications focusing on the concept of *éducation permanente*. This set of proceedings is interesting in that it situates the concept of lifelong learning within a Mediterranean context with its unique set of identities, problems, and interests; in this respect, it recalls another volume, *Lifelong Learning and Participation* (University of Malta Press, 1985), edited by Kenneth Wain, which consisted of the proceedings of a 1984 conference, also held in Malta, entitled 'Lifelong Learning Initiatives in the Mediterranean'. The 2004 proceedings focus on a locus of interest in which data and information are highly sparse largely due to substantial amounts of ideological and propagandistic biases that serve to limit the possibility of a Mediterranean social movement.

Hopefully, this set of proceedings together with the series of conferences on lifelong education in the Mediterranean (the latest meeting took place in Larnaca, Cyprus, last December) will serve as a catalyst for the overturning of such a scenario. The contents of this volume of proceedings can be divided into four major parts.

The first part starts with a reproduction of the opening speech by the Hon. Minister of Education in Malta followed by that of the Deputy Head of Mission at the German Embassy in Malta before finishing with Carmel Borg's address as Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta. The second part includes the conference plenaries where Michael Samlowski's and Peter Mayo's contributions serve as critical introductions to the unique aspects concerning a Mediterranean approach to lifelong learning. Focusing on multi-ethnic relations,

Mayo's piece asks how Mediterranean society can face the acceleration of development and growing change while at the same time ensuring cultural continuity. A Freirean approach to lifelong education, he contends, provides a promising resolution.

In the third part of the proceedings, one finds participant country reports that provide some indication of the issues being faced by adult educators in twelve countries of the Mediterranean ranging from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Egypt to Spain to Lebanon. One must acknowledge here the fact that the Palestinian representative was prevented from participating at the last moment, despite having all travel documents in order (including a visa), because of a curfew imposed by Israeli military forces on her home city of Ramallah. The fourth part contains three papers on various issues that intend to convey a sense of the larger picture concerning lifelong learning and adult education in the region.

Kenneth Wain's paper, providing critical reflections on lifelong education, is clearly the highlight of the whole proceedings. Questioning lifelong learning as the 'great unquestioned nostrum of our times', Wain goes on to present a short analysis of the genealogy of the concept of lifelong learning to conclude that 'it is important to keep a close critical eye on what's happening, on the game of power and on the agendas that shape the political discourse within which current lifelong learning thinking is framed' (p. 84, 87). The final part of the proceedings includes workshop and concluding reports and, most importantly, a final conference declaration.

Overall, this volume of proceedings is a challenging read. Most papers are thought engaging, and, taken as a whole, it promotes a new path for lifelong education. The volume acknowledges learners not as merely objects, but as subjects situated in social, economic, cultural, and political contexts. This volume of conference proceedings exhorts adult educators to use their skills to struggle for social and economic development, justice, equality, respect for traditional cultures, and recognition of the dignity of every human being through individual and social transformations. Most importantly, however, this publication places an emphasis on the unique challenges facing lifelong educators in Mediterranean countries. In this respect, it is a crucial read for anybody interested in local aspects of adult education and lifelong learning.

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