



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## Book Review

Adult Education Quarterly

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Carpenter, S., & Mojab, S. (Eds.). (2017). *Youth as/in Crisis: Young People, Public Policy and the Politics of Learning*. Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense. 204 pp. US\$43.00 (paperback)

**Reviewed by:** Bronwyn E. Wood, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

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*Youth as/in Crisis* is an edited collection of Canadian authors in the field of adult education who share an interest in youth. To explain this youth focus, Carpenter and Mojab outline how their interest in “youth” stems from a desire to see this as a social category that is equally regulated by the same social, economic, and political forces as the category of “adult” (p. 2). Such constructions they argue “fundamentally obscure the social relations that constitute human life” (p. 2) and lead to individualized and atomized approaches, thus failing to see the contradictory and complex positions captured by the status of being young.

In addition, they suggest that alternative approaches are needed as the prevailing approaches within youth studies (on transitions, social institutions, and generations) fail to adequately explore the relations between youth, capitalism, and the state. Drawing on the foundational adult education texts of Freire, Gramsci, and Marx, and their seminal interpretation by authors such as Paula Allman (2007) and Sukarieh and Tannock (2015), all authors in the collection reinvestigate their contexts (policy, work programs, community-based programs, postsecondary institutions) through a primarily Marxist lens to consider what fresh insights this may offer for understandings of youth in the 21st century.

At the center of the book is the sense of crisis—for and about youth. The book is divided into three sections beginning with three theoretical chapters that position the book within debates about youth and social crisis, drawing attention to the tendency to abstract the experience of “youth” from social, material, and historical relations.

In the opening chapter, Carpenter and Mojab argue that this crisis is centered on contradictory positions that youth find themselves in—youth-at-risk on one hand, and youth-as-assets on the other—and the need for a much longer and more critical gaze:

We suggest one way to read the papers collected here is not simply as an attempt to capture the contours of youth, or the state’s response to a “youth crisis”, but to glimpse a set of preconditions that are important in terms of understanding the kind of historical change we currently live within. (p. 3)

Ritchie's critique (chapter 2) of the dominant youth studies approaches of "youth as transition" and "youth as generation" stands out as a key standpoint on which the book is based. Along with most authors in this book, she argues that both transition and generation approaches undersell the significance of historical and social conditions in which young people's lives are embedded. In response, she advocates for a "materially situated" analysis that accounts for the collective and historically constituted material conditions in which young people find themselves.

Section 2 examines policies and programs aimed at youth across Canada, such as those relating to work and employment (chapters 4 and 5), "at risk" youth (chapter 6), and sexual and gender minority youth (chapter 7). I enjoyed all these chapters, which underscore the thinness of the entrepreneurial, neoliberal, and individualizing discourses surrounding youth today and how these perpetuate gendered, classed, and highly racialized futures for youth.

The final section of five chapters examines the implications for adult learning for immigrant and refugee youth (chapters 8 and 9), Black and sexual minority men (chapter 10), civic education (chapter 11), and leadership development (chapter 12). A common critique across these chapters is how education in all categories of "at risk" or minority youth tends to rely on normative and stereotypical notions that pathologize youth and fail to embrace their individuality, potential, and diversity. Authors explain how more radical approaches could transform adult education as it currently stands.

The book offers a strong critique of current dominant discourses within adult education and youth studies. While the book had a somewhat scattered approach to the sites and themes of interest, the adoption of a common lens of critique (primarily Marxist) and a number of common readings (such as Allman, 2007; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2015) held the book's narrative together in a compelling way. While the book is focused on Canada, I found strong applicability to themes within my own country of New Zealand and imagine the same may apply to many other countries.

I recommend the book to youth and adult education researchers and educators and scholars with an interest in critical and Marxist theory. I enjoyed the wide representation of scholarship and authorship from both the academy and the community as this enhanced the "groundedness" of the book and enabled wide applicability to multiple audiences.

## References

- Allman, P. (2007). *Critical education against global capitalism: Karl Marx and revolutionary critical education*. Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense.
- Sukarieh, M., & Tannock, S. (2015). *Youth rising? The politics of youth in the global economy*. New York, NY: Routledge.