



Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research  
Revue canadienne de recherche sur les OBSL et l'économie sociale

Vol. 4, No 2  
Autumn / Automne 2013  
pp. 79–80

## Book Review by Omar V. Mora

**Volunteer Work, Informal Learning and Social Action.** Edited by F. Duguid, K. Mündel, and D. Schugurensky. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2013. 258 pp. ISBN: 9789462092310.

A great deal of scholarship exists on the connection between work and learning; however, much of this scholarship takes formal education and paid employment as the primary area of analysis. Literature on learning is overly saturated with the study of formal education, that is, institutions ranging from elementary schools to universities. One presupposition is that learning happens primarily in schools. Another is that it is easier to research learning in formal institutions than in the elusive dynamics of everyday life. Perhaps the presupposition is that learning happens primarily in schools. Or perhaps it is easier to research learning in formal institutions than in the elusive dynamics of everyday life. While some degree of attention has been paid to learning in non-formal educational settings, including adult education programs, workshops, and the like, very little research has been done—comparatively speaking—on informal learning. Similarly, academic literature on work tends to focus on paid employment. Although people devote great amounts of time and energy to household work and volunteer work, these areas have not attracted much research interest—again, comparatively speaking. If these two bodies of literature (informal learning on the one hand and volunteer work on the other) are marginal in the literature on education and work, it is not surprising that very little has been written on the connections between informal learning and volunteer work.

The book *Volunteer Work, Informal Learning and Social Action*, edited by Fiona Duguid, Karsten Mündel, and Daniel Schugurensky, constitutes an interesting attempt to address this deficit. The book takes a close look at a cross section of volunteer work, and the depth of informal learning that it yields. The volume is well organized and flows well, encompassing eleven chapters that move the reader through theoretical analysis, empirical research, and practical recommendations.

Schugurensky's introduction to the book provides a brief history of volunteerism and discusses current dynamics of volunteer work and learning in the context of the "knowledge economy." Particular attention is paid to tacit learning (learning that occurs unconsciously and unintentionally), raising provocative epistemological questions and outlining some of the challenges faced by researchers. The first chapter, co-written by the three editors, goes deeper into the themes discussed in the introduction and presents a solid conceptual analysis that sets up the overall framework to better contextualize the realities examined in the case studies. The second chapter, by Susan Stowe, analyzes data on volunteer work and informal learning in Canada and in other countries, and helps us to interpret that information in the context of contemporary economic and social policies.

The subsequent chapters focus on case studies, which are organized in three areas of volunteer work: community service, community representation, and community development. Service (Chapters three, four, and five) includes activities like delivering meals to seniors, coaching sports teams, driving children to music camps, helping in a food bank, teaching local language and culture to new immigrants or to migrant workers, coordinating a toy drive, or organizing a festival. Community representation (Chapters six, seven, and eight) refers to volunteer work undertaken on behalf of a community—acting as an unpaid representative in decision-making bodies like boards, committees, or councils. Community development (Chapters nine and ten) includes the three classic approaches proposed by Jack Rothman: social planning, locality development, and social action. In the concluding chapter, the editors, together with Megan Haggerty, connect the insights emerging from the case studies and provide a good analysis of motivations to volunteer, the breadth of learning acquired by the volunteers, and the connections between profiles of volunteers and types of learning.

This book provides us with important connections between what volunteers learn and how they learn it, which affords us further insight into unseen motivating factors for volunteerism and most importantly, why volunteers learn in ways that researchers and practitioners have not previously focused on. Taking into account the case studies, they revisit and amend the typology of volunteer work that they had presented in the first chapter. In other words, they challenge the presuppositions that volunteers tend to freely choose their work; that they are unpaid; that volunteers are typically part of a nonprofit organization; and that their work benefits the community in positive ways. Expanding these conceptions of what volunteerism looks like helps us better understand how informal learning occurs in nuanced ways.

All of these case studies were thought provoking because they provided a robust context in which to reconsider volunteering as work. I found the most riveting case study to be Chapter 5: “The Experiences of Immigrants Who Volunteer to Access the Labour Market: Pushing the Boundaries of ‘Volunteerism,’” by Bonnie Slade, Yang Cathy Luo, and Schugurensky. The very term “volunteer” presupposes volition and autonomy. This chapter problematized that construct by showing how many immigrant communities are effectively coerced into “volunteering,” and that some of this volunteering takes place in for-profit companies.

While the book articulates a nuanced way of looking at volunteer work and informal learning, these studies were conducted primarily in a Canadian social context. This presents some limitations for international and interdisciplinary discourses. For instance, if the book had looked more broadly, what epistemological considerations would be necessary to strengthen international perspectives comparatively? Irrespective of this minor shortcoming, I believe this book would be valuable in courses that centre on social transformation or social economy themes.

Much praise should be paid to the editors for pushing the discourse on how we study volunteers and their motivations, and most importantly what they themselves garner from the process. Furthermore, challenging the hegemony that many discourses on pedagogy have held historically, these scholars have furthered our epistemological consideration of what learning is, and how it helps us challenge our notions of service and action.

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