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# BOOK AND MEDIA REVIEWS

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## Connecting Adult Learning and Knowledge Management (Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning, 8)

by *Monica Fedeli and Laura L. Bierema*

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Monica Fedeli and Laura L. Bierema's (Eds.) "Connecting Adult Learning and Knowledge Management" is part of a series by the International Association for Knowledge Management ([www.IAKM.net](http://www.IAKM.net)) and Springer that presents a multidisciplinary view of adult learning and knowledge management (KM) theory and practice. It is a collection of literature reviews, frameworks and case studies by a worldwide group of authors that outlines new methods and strategies for adult teaching and learning. The book is divided into three parts: Part I – adult teaching and learning methods and theories; Part II – knowledge management in education; Part III – case studies and best practices for learning in classrooms, change needed in higher education change and organizational development. The primary aim of the book is fostering teaching and learning for change.

Part I begins with Laura L. Bierema's "Adult Learning Theories and Practices." It is an excellent introduction to the theory and practice of adult learning, including definitions of key terms and a framework for adult learning. Bierema referred to educators, learners, processes, contexts and methods as the who, how, where and what of adult learning. Bierema continued with another chapter, "Incorporating Active Learning into Your Educational Repertoire." It considered the difficulties for learners that ensue from instructor-centric educational and offered suggestions for instructors to make learning more active, engaging and retentive. The clear strength of this chapter is the diversity of practices presented for instructors to increase learner engagement, something not all learners are prepared for. The next chapter with the tongue twister of a title, "Linking Faculty to Organization Development and Change: Teaching4Learning@Unipd," by Monica Fedeli conveys the importance of a durable institutional commitment to devote money and resources in faculty development. The development program at the University of Padova began in 2016 to support and increase innovative teaching practices. Unsurprisingly, Fedeli noted that changing teaching practices takes time, needing to overcome significant inertia in the ways faculty learn to teach. Edward W. Taylor' chapter "Student-Teacher Relationships: The Elephant in the Classroom" explored the challenges and complexities that dominate student-teacher relationships. It reviews related empirical work before presenting the author's theoretical frameworks and core constructs for understanding these vital relationships. It concluded with strategies for improving them in many instructional contexts. In the chapter "Linking Active Learning and Capstone Projects in Higher Education," Tullio Vardanega and Monica Fedeli used evidence from cooperative learning



and problem-based learning at the University of Padua, Italy, to make the case that interactive practices created more engaging and meaningful learning experiences for participants. It is not surprising that some students found the change to problem-based learning jarring, and it was a lot more work for the faculty. Both of these challenges need to be addressed by program design, but this was not part of the chapter. The chapter "Teaching for Globalization: Implications for Knowledge Management in Organizations" by Maria Cseh, Oliver S. Crocco and Chilanay Safarli focused on KM systems in organizations. They noted that leaders need to account for the different national and ethnic backgrounds of employees engaged in collaborative work as they learn and share knowledge. Concluding Part I is Tomika Greer and Toby Egan's chapter, "Knowledge Management for Organizational Success: Valuing Diversity and Inclusion Across Stakeholders, Structures, and Sectors." As the title suggests, the chapter focused on KM, particularly through communities of practice (CoP), to take advantage of organizational and structural diversity. The authors provided several examples of KM through such communities across NGO, government and for-profit organizations that will be useful for readers in their own contexts.

Part II of the book focused on KM in education. In its opening chapter, "Knowledge Management: Theories and Practices," John S. Edwards provided an overview of the past 30 years of KM theories and practices. He emphasized the tendency of many KM programs to over-emphasize KM supply through a focus on teachers, professors and trainers and insufficiently address the demand side of learners and students, a key flaw in many programs. Niall Corcoran and Aidan Duane pointed to the breakdown of collaboration amongst higher education institutions' staff in their chapter "Using Social Networks and Communities of Practice to Promote Staff Collaboration in Higher Education." They presented a case study of the implementation of an enterprise social network to create virtual communities. They presented a number of strategies and what they refer to as "tactical approaches" that could benefit organizations seeking to establish CoPs to enhance participation and knowledge sharing (KS). Ettore Bolisani's chapter, "Knowledge Management for Adult and Higher Education: Mapping the Recent Literature," is the last of Part II of the book. It is a comprehensive literature review of KM, connecting it with adult and higher education in a way that makes it an excellent place to get an overview of research trends and practices at the intersection of these two fields. Bolisani emphasized that the potential of KM for higher education and university management is more of a promise at present due to the lack of applicative research.

The final section of the book, Part III, proffered four case studies with the aim of demonstrating the application of higher education learning practices for KM and KS among staff, students and administrators. The first three cases centered on faculty development (changing over-learned teaching practices, sharing active learning practices and peer observation) and the last on KS assisted by technology. The lead chapter of Part III is "Sharing Active Learning Practices to Improve Teaching: Peer Observation of Active Teaching in a School of Engineering," by Stefano Ghidoni, Monica Fedeli and Massimiliano Barol. The authors described a particularly challenging case of implementing teaching practice change at a school of engineering where the focus had traditionally been on conveying content. Success was not based on retention, a deeply rooted conception according to the authors and one that extends to other curricula in this reviewer's experience. Under this model, content is transmitted by faculty and learning is largely self-guided by students outside the classroom. The development process involved motivated volunteers, and I would like to have learned more about how program administrators dealt with the resistance that is part of any change process. "Comparative Studies, the Experience of COMPALL Winter School," a chapter by Monika Staab and Regina Egetenmeyer,

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reported on the application over three years across seven European universities of a joint module of study on conducting comparative research in adult education. The module was designed to stimulate innovative learning and teaching strategies for improving knowledge, cultural understanding and knowledge creation. Administrators evaluated the short- and mid-term effects with both qualitative and quantitative measures. Interestingly for this reviewer, there was no mention in the chapter of faculty measures of effectiveness. In “Fostering Knowledge Sharing Via Technology: A Case Study of Collaborative Learning Using Padlet,” the chapter by Daniela Frison and Concetta Tino, the authors described a collaborative learning experience in higher education facilitated by the use of technology to support improved online interaction and collaboration. The authors detailed the design process of an online activity using Padlet, a virtual whiteboard tool that enabled participants to collaborate in real-time. A key feature of course design was the “flipped classroom” that moved information-transmission out of class to focus on more synergistic tasks during class time. Student feedback was generally positive, but that engagement with Padlet became unwieldy and chaotic with large numbers of participants, a common criticism of online discussion tools (Hambacher, Ginn, & Slater, 2018). Unhampered by constraints of space and time, student online discussions often grow without bound. The last chapter, “The Peer Observation: “Mentore” Project at University of Palermo,” by Marcella Cannarozzo, Pierluigi Gallo, Alida Lo Coco, Bartolomeo Megna, Pasquale Musso and Onofrio Scialdone, reported on a six-year mentoring project designed to improve participants’ teaching skills. The chapter focused on the activities of mentors’ activities during the peer observation process, a valuable resource for any organization seeking to improve faculty performance through mentoring.

### Conclusion

According to the editors, the book is a multidisciplinary effort to connect theory and practice in adult learning and KM. On that level, it is an excellent collection of theory and experience in applying them to higher education contexts. I recommend it for anyone new to the fields of adult learning and KM, as well as professionals, instructors and academic managers interested in adopting new teaching practices better oriented to the ways adults learn. It will be less useful for learners seeking to understand strategies for thriving in the newer practices described in the book, practices for which their prior educational experiences have likely not prepared them. Describing such strategies was not a focus of the book.

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### Reference

Hambacher, E., Ginn, K., & Slater, K. (2018). “Letting students lead: preservice teachers’ experiences of learning in online discussions”, *Journal of Digital Learning in Teacher Education*, 34(3), 151-165.