

Book Review

Non-western Perspectives on Learning and Knowing

Sharan Merriam & Associates (Krieger Publishing Company, 2007)

Review by

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Education, as we know it in America, is steeped in Western values and culture. However, other cultural and value systems influence ways of learning and knowing differently across the globe. *Non-western Perspectives on Learning and Knowing* is a collection of insights into the varied ways learning and knowing are conceptualized in many communities around the world. The book was borne of a symposium at the Adult Education Research Conference in 2005. The symposium's theme, "Challenging the Hegemony of Western Views of Learning," included international emerging and advanced scholars who presented their insider perspectives. An expansion on this theme structured the book to include chapters from authors representing Islamic, Native American, Hindu, Maori, Buddhist, Indigenous African, Confucian, and Liberation Theology communities. Sharan Merriam, among the foremost scholars in the field of adult education, wrote the introductory and concluding chapters and edited this rich text.

As somewhat of a departure from the traditional format, it is within the context of a graduate course on international perspectives on adult learning and teaching that the instructor and a group of students have provided the book's review. We used this text to support our collective study into the range of cultural frameworks that underpin ways of knowing and learning outside of the western perspective.

The book provides opportunities to extend one's concepts of lifelong learning, wisdom, the facilitation of learning and knowledge construction, and the varying roles of teacher, learner, and society within the educational context. Some of the comments students offered about *Non-western Perspectives on Learning and Knowing* are provided here:

- It helped us learn about a variety of cultures within the framework of formal, informal, and nonformal educational practices.

- Although having specific principles, methods and societal institutions, the different cultures discussed in the book are engaged in a process of continuous knowledge acquisition and meaning-seeking through observation, reflection, application, and enlightenment.
- The ability of the individual authors to condense a vast amount of contextual information into one informative chapter was very helpful in exposing readers to cultural and religious influences on learning and knowing.
- The information in this book could help immensely when planning future classes and expanding one's own outlook on education.

Through the collection of chapters of the authors' authentic insider perspectives, the book is readable and packed with rich, personal insight. Moreover, since English is a foreign language for many of the authors, their use of the language led to important discussions about cultural differences in educational dialogue and research.

Ultimately, the book can help readers recognize that western conceptualizations of learning and knowing do not prevail world-wide. Indeed, as students and instructor, we suggest this text is an important step in broadening our understandings of education, issues of access and opportunity, and societal versus individual change in our own nation, as well as other regions and countries. Certainly, it is not an exhaustive study of the non-western perspectives it offers.

The learning goal of this course was to collectively construct new understandings of how individuals of different cultures, spiritual paths, and influences conceptualize knowledge – *Non-western Perspectives on Learning and Knowing* offered a good starting point to begin bridging the gap in the body of literature on global education.