

Reviews / Comptes rendus

Learners in Midlife: Graduate Education and Workplaces in Canada

edited by J. H. Willment

(Calgary, AB: Detselig Enterprises, 2008, 208 pages)

We need not look far to discover colleagues, friends, and family members who in midlife have returned to school for a graduate degree. In some instances, one might argue that the boomer generation is the generation that wants it all—including a post-graduate education. In other cases, there are driving personal and professional reasons for this choice. Regardless of the reason, *Learners in Midlife: Graduate Education and Workplaces in Canada* offers valuable insights that will assist not only learners but also those who support and work with mid-career learners. The graduate experience holds transformative potential for all who are touched by it.

The book is divided into three principal sections and includes contributions from Canadian learning scholars, as well as those who are the true experts in midlife learning—those who have undertaken it. What finer way is there to understand an occurrence than to listen to those with expertise?

Part One, the Introduction, includes two chapters, one by Willment and the other by H. K. (Morris) Baskett, both of which provide valuable theory and context. In her chapter, Willment, a professor in the University of Calgary's Faculty of Education, Workplace and Adult Education Department, offers an accessible and commonsensical review of relevant literature. Following an overview of various descriptions of midlife, she introduces what have been called the four dimensions of midlife—personal, work, community, and education—noting that the introduction of graduate-level education during this life stage can create a situation of imbalance. At

the same time, she points out that those who can adapt to the various stressors of graduate education in midlife find “a wealth of opportunity” (p. 41).

Although Willment’s chapter navigates much of the theory associated with midlife learning at the graduate level, Baskett’s chapter offers a high-level, but personally experienced, overview that is equally important to the narratives that follow in Part Two. In particular, Baskett provides readers with the tools they need to make good sense of the many opportunities that exist in midlife learning in Canada. In addition to making clear distinctions among part-time, distance, and work-based graduate programs, Baskett describes a cross-section of valuable strategies for choosing an appropriate program and navigating the student experience. His 12-point reflection at the close of the chapter is well worth considering.

Part Two includes five different narratives by Canadians who have lived the graduate experience in midlife and have emerged successfully to tell the tale. Featuring reflections by Krista Francis-Poscente, Ruth Rodgers, Susanna Burns, Heather A. Mahoney-Slaughter, and Bryan Leach, this section of the book will resonate deeply with adult learners in general and more acutely if they have completed graduate degrees in midlife. The reflections are personal, yet they address bigger-picture issues and the rewards of pursuing a graduate degree as an adult learner.

Part Three examines the process of midlife adult learners re-entering and re-integrating into the workplace. There are profound differences between academe and the workplace, and those making the transition face many challenges. Specific attention is given to the experiences of persons who have already graduated from education programs, as they embrace various workplace innovations and assist others in the pursuit of life and professional goals. Readers will benefit from these contributions by Angie Wong, Kari Nicolas, Audrey Penner, Louise Sauve, and Alan Wright.

As Willment and Timothy Loblaw suggest in the book’s conclusion, graduate-level and workplace education are distinctive characteristics of our time. In turn, *Learners in Midlife* represents an insightful and practical contribution to Canada’s literature on adult and workplace learning.

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