

Book review by Jenny Stacey

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Between PIAAC and the New Literacy Studies, edited by Anke Grotluschen and Lisanne Heilmann. Publisher Waxmann, 2021

This book aspires to show us 'what adult education can learn from large-scale assessments without adopting a neo-liberal paradigm' (Ref: front cover), and it is certainly interesting from several points of view.

Firstly, it is a mix of papers which have been printed elsewhere, such as in the Journal of Adult and Continuing Education, the International Journal of Lifelong Education and the European Journal on the Education and Learning of Adults, but some chapters are unique to this book.

The title refers to Literacy, but the texts also cover numeracy data, including mean numeracy scores by country, and numerical skills, such as problem solving and calculator usage, as these appear in the PIAAC surveys.

Although it is broadly written from the perspective of Germany, it contains many papers which reference and compare other countries, using mainly the PIAAC studies from both 2012 and 2016 data sets. Also it draws on a number of other surveys and sources of data.

The perspectives of the individual chapters vary from evaluating the skills of teaching staff, to describing the impact of low-level literacy on marginalised people, whether minority groups or migrant populations, as it affects individuals' ability to participate socially, economically and politically. One chapter provides evidence for how low literacy levels are in themselves marginalising and excluding, in terms of power and participation.

One paper is in German, but it has plenty of tables and graphs, so even that one is not impossible to follow!

Overall, this is a publication which could be of interest to researchers and practitioners involved in mathematics, teacher training and ESOL/EAL, especially those interested in European or global perspectives.

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