PRIA

INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY

Initiative in Education & Lifelong Learning

Certificate Programme

International Dimensions of Adult Education and Lifelong Learning

Unit 6

Issue Case Studies

Units of Certificate in International Dimensions of Adult Education and Lifelong Learning

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Introduction

As has been observed in many cases before, adult education holds potential to transform societies and their approach to problems. It has not just helped problems that have existed since a long time, but also that have emerged due to newer economic and social structures. This Unit looks at how trying to enforce a western approach to education need not always be received positively by all populations. Adult education needs to modify itself to fit different social realities.

Adult education has been a catalyst in many feminist movements. By looking at some examples, the Unit attempts to address the heterogeneity within the movement, while also reflecting the diversity of women-related issues.

Learning Objectives

After reading this Unit, you should be familiar with:

- The link between adult education and social movements;
- How adult education fosters international solidarity; and
- The complex nature of movements.

6.1 Adult Education and Feminist Movements Worldwide

Women's empowerment and social emancipation have been issues of concern for a considerable time. The United Nations (UN) recognised the need to address women's exclusion by dedicating one of the Millennium Development Goals to promoting gender equality and empowering women. In UN agency documents, it is recognised that although women have an enormous impact on the well-being of their families and societies, their potential is not realised because of discriminatory social norms, incentives and legal institutions.

6.1.1 The Concept of Women's Empowerment

Long before empowerment became a mainstream term in the literature devoted to gender struggles, women were discussing their need to gain control over their lives and gain the right to participate in decisions that affected them in the home, the community and in society at national and international levels. The word "empowerment" captures this sense of gaining control and participating in decision making and has entered the vocabulary of international organisations and development agencies. Karl (1995, p. xx) has defined several aspects of women's empowerment:

- Having control or gaining further control
- Having a say and being listened to
- Being able to create from a woman's perspective
- Being able to influence social choices and decisions affecting society
- Being recognised and respected as equal citizens and human beings with a contribution to make

Socio-economic advancement should be added to this list, given that it is obvious that access to literacy or education, information and knowledge resources, natural or material resources, productive skills and capital facilitates the empowerment of women (Tiwaah

Frimpong Kwapong, 2005). Karl (1995) also identified five levels for an empowerment framework: welfare, access, conscientisation, participation and control. Education is so intertwined with the actions of the women's movement that it is not only difficult but also artificial to separate them. The very nature of transforming patriarchal mentalities, through conscientisation and awareness creation, is educational.

One particularly good example of women's empowerment at work is the Women's Studies Centre (Centro de Estudios de la Mujer or CEM), a feminist women-led NGO that has been contributing to socio-cultural change in Chile for more than a decade. The Chilean women's movement came into prominence during the military dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990) when, in the face of state-sponsored violence and brutal human rights' violations, Chilean women came together and formed powerful associations. These organisations, especially those with a feminist orientation, linked their demands for democracy with their quest for a realignment of gender roles and traditional power dynamics. CEM was founded in 1984 by women social scientists and economists, drawing its roots from the previous Women's Studies Circle that began in 1977. It comprised feminist researchers and activists who focused on generating not only knowledge but also consciousness in society at large about the authoritarian nature of gender relations in the personal and political spheres. They did so through research and publications and through offering formal, non-formal and informal educational experiences for women. Following the democratic transition that took place after Pinochet was forced to step down, CEM argued that democracy in Chile would remain superficial as long as women and other marginalised groups continued to be denied equal rights and opportunities and full citizenship. In the years since, members of CEM have acted as national and international policy advisers to the government. By educating women through personal empowerment and political agency, CEM has continued to challenge gender-based marginalisation, authoritarianism and discrimination (King, 2002).

Karl's (1995) five-level empowerment framework (noted above) was the basis of a survey of women of the Mo communities in the Brong-Ahafo region of Ghana. The survey was conducted to determine the level of empowerment attained by women who were engaged in education. Mo communities are rural farming communities that are confronted with the

pressures of high population, deforestation, poverty and gender inequalities; women do most of the farming. The issues raised by the survey were women's access to land and income-generating activities, their ability to share ideas with their spouse and to make decisions at the family and community level, and their educational attainment level. Among the results were:

- Respondents had a low level of formal education (34 per cent were illiterate);
- They were engaged in farming or petty trading;
- The majority enjoyed a high level of economic independence but only 7.5 per cent said they were able to express their views on family planning; and
- Almost all respondents (97 per cent) expressed a desire to participate in more training and education programmes (Tiwaah Frimpong Kwapong, 2005).

6.1.2 Women's Empowerment through Literacy

In large communities, adults who need to achieve basic literacy skills usually live in poverty. Poverty remains both a barrier to learning and a consequence of insufficient education. According to UNESCO, an estimated 1.2 billion people, or one person in five in the world, live in abject poverty, which means that they lack adequate food, clean water, sanitation, health care and education (UNESCO, 2003). One-third of all humanity survives on less than US $1 a day. Women account for 70 per cent of the world's poor; in the least-developed countries, fewer than 4 out of 10 women can read or write, compared with 6 out of 10 men. Although in poverty-stricken areas, women produce most of the food, they have only a limited voice in decision making, as the Ghanaian study demonstrated.

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What are the kinds of problems that women face in your country/area? Do you think adult literacy can play a role in addressing these issues? Has there been any move in this direction?

Nearly 70 per cent of the world's illiterate, almost two-thirds of whom are women, are in Asia (UNESCO, 2003). This is why Asia is the field of operation for a large number of regional, national and local educational mechanisms and structures, which are provided either by government agencies or NGOs, business groups, academic and professional organisations, or religious societies. Since the late 1980s, there has been an increase in civil society involvement in adult learning, especially at the local level (UNESCO, 2003).

In India, although the states and the central government have undertaken a number of initiatives to improve adult literacy through the total literacy programmes, these have rarely improved the situation of women. The development sector in India, however, has had a long history of interventions in the field of literacy, livelihoods, and savings and credit (PRIA, 2002). In the context of structural adjustments and decay in state intervention for public welfare – common not only in India but also globally – women's economic and educational empowerment takes on even more importance. The Women's Empowerment Through Literacy and Livelihood Development (WELLD) project developed from a partnership among World Education, Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), and organisations from the regions of Andhra Pradesh (RADS and PEACE) and Madhya Pradesh (Pradeepan and CEROWC) (PRIA, 2002). The goal was to increase the literacy skills of women in these provinces, with special emphasis on Dalit and tribal women, categories that are further discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity or caste.

The report on the project has noted, among other achievements:

- An increase in literacy levels – 50 per cent of women were able to read and write at the end of the project period;
- Some women internalised the need for literacy – cases of women withdrawing their children from paid work and sending them to school were reported;
- Women from both provinces tried to access government resources for the benefit of their community;
- Some women emerged as leaders of learner groups;
- Many women in both provinces raised issues of social justice by demanding equal and minimum wages.

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The University of the Third Age (U3A)

The University of the Third Age is a self-help organisation for learning, catering to people who are no longer in full time employment. It provides a space where the people come together to exchange skills and pursue interests that they could not when they were younger.

The U3A movement has been popular in France, UK & Commonwealth, Central & Eastern Europe and Australia. The movement offers courses that range from Classical Studies to belly-dancing.

The University does not require the learner to have any professional qualifications. It also does not provide any qualification to the learners. Anyone interested in a particular subject, art form, skill etc. can form a group that anybody else could join. Either one of them becomes the facilitator or they get external experts to facilitate the sessions. Learners meet up in church halls, community centers or even in one their homes for these sessions that, more or less, resemble the conventional idea of a class. But the facilitator herself might be a novice and the process is one of learning together.

The institution is not just a haven for engaging people who undergo a strong sense of loneliness and boredom post-retirement. It also questions the commonly held belief that only children are capable of picking new skills. By setting examples of members who have published books and becoming self-taught experts in many field, it is a phenomena that opens newer avenues in andragogy.

(U3A, 2014)

6.2 Adult Education and Indigenous Communities

Indigenous communities have often questioned the traditional, western-style educational provision in form as well as content. They share the view that western culture isolates education from daily life and transforms it into an “establishment”. Another of their critiques of school in the classical sense is that it seeks to integrate the learner into the dominant economic context, which only serves to perpetuate social and cultural discrimination. The system is considered inflexible, in the sense that it does not recognise or respect the right to be different – the ethnic traits that imply a cosmic vision, a scale of values, the concepts of social justice, or a different language. Thus, adult education movements worldwide envision an adult education space where the concepts of democracy, participation and equality as practised in indigenous communities can regain their vitality and be passed on.

Global characteristics specific to aboriginal education are:

- Much learning occurs in non-formal and informal settings and ways;
- Much learning occurs within the community: the competitive nature of “mainstream” education, emphasising grades and comparative performance, is alien to the spirit of aboriginal education, which favors co-operation rather than competition;
- The emphasis in aboriginal education is on life skills and on the love of learning, rather than on academic or vocational skills;
- The philosophy underlying aboriginal education is holistic and includes physical, mental and spiritual dimensions;
- It questions western epistemology, in the sense that it is more subjective and experiential, based on a world view that appreciates intuition, passion, and spirituality;
- The emphasis of learning is on the immediate, rather than on long-term goals;
- It is grounded in interaction, rather than presentation;
- It fosters self-esteem, being infused with pride in the aboriginal identity;

- Its histories present many painful similarities and similar lessons may be learned – there is an increased need for the promotion of language and culture;
- It needs to counteract cultural assimilation;
- It needs to deal with issues of racism and remnants of colonial mentalities
- Often, it takes place in contexts of socio-economic hardship and lacks material resources;
- It needs to address issues of reconciliation; and
- It has ties with the aboriginal self-determination social movements worldwide.

(Holt, Christie, & Fry, 1997)

An interesting example of the use of aboriginal epistemology comes from Botswana, where it has been used to deal with the spread of HIV/AIDS. By emphasising the community over the individual, adult education has employed aboriginal ways of knowing that offer people a sense that they share a common problem and, in so doing, reduce the stigmatising aspect of the disease. The individual experience of dealing with the disease becomes knowledge to be shared and, although not scientifically verifiable, it is validated in this context. The case of Botswana makes the argument that indigenous epistemology based on narratives, oral culture and music, as well as participatory methods and learner-centred approaches, could be more effective in HIV/AIDS prevention than written material (Ntseane, 2006). A growing body of literature in the field of aboriginal epistemology suggests that adult education has done a disservice to disadvantaged groups of people by placing knowledge deemed as scientific and objective above experiential knowledge and that this issue should be addressed in the future. It constitutes an important theoretical contribution of aboriginal education to the field of adult education.

In the context of aboriginal adult education, an interesting worldwide phenomenon is the view, held by many, that globalisation has had the unintended but welcoming effect of acting as a catalyst for the global aboriginal movement. An example is the sharing between aboriginal people in Canada, those in Northern European states, such as the Sami population in Norway, and those in Mexico. However, perhaps the most significant recent development is the way in which leaders of aboriginal movements have skilfully and wisely

turned the tide of globalisation, coupled with the rise in information technologies, to their advantage and used it as a tool for language and cultural revival and preservation. Aboriginal education in Mexico provides a good illustration of this.

In Mexico, the dominant system of education for aboriginals has been the national system, put in place and controlled by the state. Although in theory a bilingual programme has operated within it, in practice a formalised uniform education programme giving prevalence to Spanish has been in operation, a situation more easily understood upon knowing that Indian minorities in Mexico speak 50 major indigenous languages. Often, teachers were sent into remote rural locations where they did not speak the local indigenous language and faced a lack of material support (Reinke, 2005).

Stemming from their dissatisfaction with the system, the indigenous people of Mexico united to challenge the status quo, and their struggle brought a gradual recognition of the state's failure to address the inequality of indigenous education. Consequently, the Mexican government initiated indigenous education projects and reviews of indigenous education policy. Going one step further, the members of the Zapotecos, an indigenous group from the state of Oaxaca, concluded that they needed to develop their own schools in which collective concerns would take precedence over individual concerns and education would focus on their specific problems. The group believed it was possible to fuse the traditional with the modern, taking advantage of the new technologies of communication in order to resist assimilation.

Perhaps the better-known indigenous struggle in Mexico is the Zapatista movement in the state of Chiapas. In 1994, an army made up mostly of indigenous people staged an uprising, demanding an end to neo-liberalism and to the austerity programmes that the Mexican government had put in place to meet the requirements of the World Bank, the IMF (International Monetary Fund), and NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement). One of their specific demands was adequate bilingual indigenous education, devoid of state ideology, taught by teachers who spoke the local language. By building solidarity networks using the Internet, the Zapatistas gained international support in the form of funding and manual labour provided by international visitors for the construction of schools (Global

Exchange, a U.S.-based NGO, helped with school construction). Reinke (2005) in her analysis of the relationship between globalisation and indigenous education movements in Mexico concluded that the use of the Internet has opened up the indigenous communities of Chiapas to the world.

6.3 Literacy in the 21st Century

During the 1980s and 1990s, after the Declaration of Dar es Salam and Jomtien's Education for All (EFA) declaration, the general atmosphere in the world of adult education, especially in academic circles, was one of enthusiasm and optimism. The basic assumption was that the increase in international co-operation, the evolution in the conceptual understandings and the knowledge base, the accumulated practical experience, and last but not least the commitments expressed by major funding bodies such as the World Bank would eradicate illiteracy by the end of the millennium (Mwansa, 2004). Instead, adult basic literacy is still very much needed by a large portion of the world's population; in fact, illiteracy is even on the rise, both numerically and differentially. The factors are demographic – the increase in population and the fact that the notion of literacy now includes skills such as computer literacy in addition to reading, writing and numeracy.

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University Social Responsibility (USR)

In the current economic structure, with a steady move towards increased privatisation and expansion of markets, the role of the university has markedly altered. Universities are slowly becoming extensions of this market; they are now centers of producing the technical knowhow that fuels the system. In this process, Universities have lost the sense of responsibility they have towards their stakeholders like the communities they affect, NGOs etc. (Hok Ka Ma & Tandon, 2014; Vallaeys, 2014)

The notion of University Social Responsibility has evolved as a means to institutionalise this relationship between the University and the various groups of people it affects. The impacts of the university are organisational (on the university's community and environment); educational (academic impacts related to educating people); cognitive (academic impacts relating to building knowledge); and social (affecting society in general) (Vallaeys, 2014, pp. 91-92).

Looking at university structures from the past, one sees that they have always been closely relate3d to the working of the community. Cultural and religious traditions have also emphasised this point, like Confucianism from East Asia (Hok Ka Ma & Tandon, 2014).

In the situation of disconnect between the people and academia, Vallaeys suggests four steps for the establishment of USR (Vallaeys, 2014):

a) Good university governance (or good government): This mandates the existence of a code of ethics that adheres to international social, labour and environmental standards and an independent committee that sees to it that the code is adhered to.
b) Dialogue and accountability for stakeholders: 'The university must properly respond to its stakeholders' and 'establish a transparent and democratic relationship with them' (pp. 94)
c) Self –diagnosis of environmental and social impacts: The onus is on the university to understand what the social and environmental impacts of its various activities are. it needs to then take steps in order to any resolve any issues detected.
d) Local social and environmental alliances for sustainable development: Although universities have been teaming up with corporate companies off late, they should now look at alliances with people and communities in order to promote sustainable development.

Therefore, universities need to look beyond making money. They cannot just produce experts and intellectuals. They need to produce experts and knowledge who are socially responsible to the communities they inhabit.

Nonetheless, in the world of adult education there is as much commitment now as there was 20 years ago. Many literacy campaigns continue to occur at provincial, national and regional levels and many people volunteer their time and energy to help reduce illiteracy. What is changing is the fact that people are keeping pace with the times and employing new strategies and technologies.

One example is a modest literacy project that originated in 2000 within the Commonwealth and unfolded between 2000 and 2003 in India, Bangladesh, and Zambia. The project was sponsored by the Commonwealth and coordinated by the Canadian Commonwealth of Learning (CCL). The local level partners were local ministries of community development and social services. The project enhanced existing adult learning centres that met the following criteria:

- They were centres of multiple learning designs;
- They ensured multiple utilisation and a sense of community ownership, without being run by a committee; and
- They provided access to computers, Internet connections, printers, copiers and fax machines.

In Zambia, the centres were located in rural towns and were equipped with satellite Internet connections. There were three centres, each with four computers, a printer, a digital camera, a video camera, a cassette recorder, a fax machine, a copier, a scanner and an Internet connection.

THINK TANK

Literacy is negatively affected by war. How do you think literacy campaigns help post-war reconstruction? Are you aware of any such programmes in any war-torn area in the world?

Although the aim of the project was to increase literacy and ICT skill levels, the project took a holistic approach in the sense that the content choice was health and nutrition. The video cameras were used by playwrights to create dramas about malaria, diarrhea and HIV/AIDS. In Zambia, drama is a familiar and effective form of teaching that has been widely used in traditional society to teach the young who are coming of age. The next step involved disseminating these dramas into the community. Performers, who were primarily women, emerged as heroines in their communities because they had the courage to carry the messages. During the three years of the project, 13 young instructors were trained. The project illustrated that computer-based literacy courses were embraced with ease and that acquisition of basic computer skills was not beyond the abilities of participants in literacy programmes (Mwansa, 2004).

Such small initiatives, though modest, have proven successful. If they were to be expanded, they may have the potential to make a difference. Although the Commonwealth example outlines what can be deemed an international social movement for the eradication of illiteracy, we suggest that in the field of literacy, serious international commitment is irreplaceable.

Summary

In this Unit, we have augmented each of our arguments with a concrete example. The first example concerned a feminist organisation in Chile; the second, women's literacy in Ghana; the third, women's literacy in India; the fourth, HIV/AIDS in Botswana; the fifth, aboriginal movements in Mexico; and the sixth, a literacy project in Zambia, India and Bangladesh.

What do these have in common? None of them purely exemplify a single struggle. The women in Chile organised in response to human rights' abuses and dictatorship; the Mo women in Ghana struggled with poverty, environmental degradation and gender discrimination; and the women in India were exploited (no equal pay or minimum wage), struggled with poverty, and faced discrimination based on socio-economic status (caste), ethnicity and gender. The indigenous people in Botswana fought not only for cultural preservation but also against HIV/AIDS. Zapotecos and Zapatistas in Mexico struggled for self-determination and against the state's neo-liberal economic framework. In Zambia, India and Bangladesh, people made great efforts to eliminate poverty and achieve sustainable development.

Adult education does not take place in a mono-colour environment. Although one issue may become salient, even stringent, and take precedence over other issues, the context for adult learning is always complex and should not be oversimplified. Neat classification into various issues is just a theoretical exercise.

Today more than ever, adult education and lifelong learning constitute an indispensable instrument for unlocking the creative forces of people, social movements and nations. Peace, justice, self-reliance, economic development understood in a Freirean way, and social and international solidarity remain indispensable goals for the future.

Recommended Readings

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Appendix A

Internet Resources for Global Perspectives on the Theory & Practice of Adult & Lifelong Learning

UNESCO Database of Education Journals:

http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=49706&URL_DO=DO_PRINTPAGE&URL_SECTION=201.html

50 years for Education Milestones:
http://www.unesco.org/education/educprog/50y/brochure/mile.htm

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (former Institute for Education):
http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/index_uie.shtml

Encyclopedia of Canadian Adult Education:
http://www.ucfv.ca/aded/encyclopedia/

International Council for Adult Education (ICAE):
http://www.icae.org/

Asia and South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE):
http://www.aspbae.org/

Latin American Council for Adult Education (CEAAL):
http://www.ceaal.org/default.php

Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association (IIZ/DVV):
http://www.iiz-dvv.ge/

Encyclopedia of Informal Education and Lifelong Learning:
http://www.infed.org/

European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA):
http://www.eaea.org/

Reflect-NGO Global Literacy Network: http://217.206.205.24/enghome.html
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Appendix B

A Selected Bibliography of Global Perspectives on the Theory & Practice of Adult & Lifelong Learning

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