



**INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY**

Initiative in Education & Lifelong Learning

## **Appreciation Programme**

# **Adult Education and Social Change**

## **Module - I**

The development of Appreciation Programmes has been made possible through the technical and financial support of DVV International, Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Swiss Development Corporation, University of Victoria (UVic) and PRIA

## **Content Developers and Authors:**

*Ms. Priyanka Singh* holds a Masters in Conflict Analysis and Peace Building from the Nelson Mandela Peace and Conflict Resolution, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.

Priyanka is a social development professional and has worked intensively on issues related to conflict resolution specialist.

Priyanka has been part of the research team at PRIA working on “The Role of Governance in Resolution of Socioeconomic and Political Conflicts in India and Europe (CORE)”. She has also been a part of a team that conducted stakeholder dialogue on the theme of conflict and governance in Chhattisgarh with development professionals, academicians, and students. Having written about conflict and its impact on the lives of citizens, in research papers, her major areas of expertise are reflected in conflict transformation, exploratory dialogue, conflict and governance, peace building and participatory research methods.

*Dr. Rajesh Tandon* is president-founder of Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), a voluntary organisation providing support to grass roots initiatives in South Asia. Dr. Tandon is an internationally acclaimed leader and practitioner of participatory research and development. He has served on numerous government task forces and committees both nationally and internationally. He is also the UNESCO Co-Chair for community based research and social responsibility in higher education.

**Content Packaging:**

*Ms. Aparna*

*Ms. Nandini Sengupta*

*Ms. Sonia Preisler*

**Conceptualization and Technical Expertise by:**

*Ms. Apoorva Sharma*- Communication and visual branding

*Dr. Martha Farrell*- Adult education and online distance learning expert

*Mr. Prashant Dambhale*- Technological platforms for delivery

**Acknowledgements:**

*Ms. Anupma Gajwani*- Visualizing and setting up of MOODLE platform

*Mr. M D Joseph* - Coordination and secretarial support

*Mr. Ranjan Sinha*- IT support

*Mr. Sujit Kumar Sourav*- Backend technical support

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## INTRODUCTION

Adult education or adult learning is defined as an 'on-going learning process' (Goñi, 2006). The first step in understanding adult education is to understand that adult education or andragogy is very different from child education or pedagogy. The Greek roots of these two theories of education work well to explain the differences. Andragogy literally means "man-leading" and should be distinguished from the more commonly used term pedagogy meaning "child-leading" (Delahaye, 1994). Adults learn differently from children and therefore their need for learning and ability to learn is best understood in their local needs, contexts and other cultural underpinnings of their daily lives. From a practitioners' point of view, adult education is a particularly effective tool in bringing about social change.

## OBJECTIVES

At the end of this module the learner will have gained an understanding of the:

- Basics of adult education and learning and will recognize adult learning and education as a continuous process of learning.
- Wide variety of teaching methodologies used to teach adults and will develop an understanding and appreciation for the adult education process.
- Concepts of adult learning/education, its emergence in history, its establishment as the theory of andragogy, as well as other critical perspectives. .
- Commonly used terms in the adult education space such as adult learning, non-formal education, informal learning and lifelong learning.

## UNIT 1: THE THEORY AND PRAXIS OF ADULT EDUCATION

### 1.1 Defining Adult Education

Julius Nyerere saw education as a means to bring about human liberation and equality and for communities to advance collectively toward a good society (Elias, 2005). Michael Welton in 1998 argued that the role of adult education is to assist adults in constructing their own knowledge about their life and world, and this should be done through participatory research (Welton, 1998). *UNESCO* provides a comprehensive definition of adult education and denotes it as the entire body of organized educational processes, irrespective of the content, level, method, and whether it falls into the realm of formal or otherwise, including schools, colleges, universities or apprenticeships (Goñi, 2006). His perspective suggests that adult education considers such persons to be adults by the standards of the society where they belong and the process of learning must develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge and improve their professional qualifications. It is further intended that this will about a change in their attitudes and behaviour in their personal development and participation in social, economic and cultural matters.

This definition of adult education is broad and serves as a good indicator of the scope of adult education, as long as one is careful not to consider adult education as a separate learning experience, but as an integral part of lifelong learning.

However, in the discourse of adult education, it is essential to understand the meaning of commonly used terminology, some of which have been described below:

- **Adult Learning:** Adult learning includes all learning activities beyond basic education and is not necessarily related to the three R's of reading, writing and arithmetic. It is lifelong activity, qualifying an individual to assert herself in different contexts, according to skills required in that specific area including family life, work situation, various other communities of co-citizens, religious bodies, caste hierarchies, trade or social networks and other collaborations. Adult learning of an individual is also affected by other factors including the physical, intellectual, economic, social and cultural.

However, adult learning is also an integral part of any system of formal education that reaches out beyond the basic skills to be acquired in a specific area. In fact it considers all inputs as potentials for lifelong growth for each individual, to develop as a rational, analytical and social human being, whether during work or leisure

- **Adult Education:** Refers to a more formalized effort to promote adult learning, not only in terms of developing basic literacy skills, although both the terms are often used interchangeably in discourse.
- **Community Education:** The concept of community education dates back to Henry Morris's 1920s vision of a village college as the nucleus of a holistic adult education system for a local community. He proposed that the village college should be the focal point of community life, integrating educational, social, cultural and recreational activities; catering for all interests and all ages from early childhood to very old age. Community education has the capacity to be relatively free of restrictions and regulation; to be more informal and sometimes more innovative than other forms of adult education. It lays greater emphasis on responding to the needs of the learner and the community defined in terms of common residence, shared interest and social purpose. It aims to encourage and empower people to take charge of their own institutions, their own education and their own lives and to be a popular and democratic form of adult education which simultaneously respects diversity and promotes solidarity.
- **Continuing Education:** A term arising from a radical shift of emphasis for the post-school sector, it disintegrates the boundaries between education and training, or between vocational and general adult education in a comprehensive, integrated system of "continuing education". The term emphasizes a vocation as integrated within adult education, rather than as separate from it. This is the unique feature of the more contemporary "continuing professional development" which has moved beyond the narrow boundaries of the earlier "continuing education".

- **Education of Adult Persons:** Understood as an activity (as far as the process and results are concerned) whose basic objectives are to guarantee the acquisition, bettering and updating of basic training for adults, It involves the improvement of basic professional qualifications specific vocational training at intermediate or higher levels, and the development of the capacity to participate in social, cultural, political and economic spheres. The conceptual framework of EPA embraces the principles of continuing education.
- **Learning Process:** Refers to the subject and its evolutionary dynamics, as well as to the method of educational action.
- **Lifelong Learning:** Covers all forms of education including family education, community education, traditional adult education, as well as higher education and continuing professional development. It represents a shift away from the notion of provider-driven “education” towards individualised learning that occurs throughout life. This is also sometimes called life-wide learning.
- **Non-formal Adult Education:** Consists of deliberately organized activities to assist a process by which people manage to develop an individual identity, carve out a conscious place for themselves. It helps them to independently handle their own opportunities in social relations and other dealings. This can be achieved by a) increased knowledge and insights; b) testing their own opinions and feelings against those of others and; c) improvement of skills and powers of expression. The term is used in contrast to ‘formal education’ i.e. schooling or a degree system.
- **Self-Learning:** Means teaching oneself, autonomously without a teacher or provider of knowledge. . Autonomy, does not imply teaching oneself alone, rather it involves being open to others; it is averse to both solitude and fusion. In general, people teach themselves with others, although the latter do not act as teachers. Individual self-teaching is stimulated by collective self-teaching and the latter does not have a negative effect on the former (Federighi, 1999).

## 1.2 History of Adult Education

The term adult education (AE) was coined in the English language only in 1851. Adult education emerged as an important field of study, after World War I from the growing concern to provide education to adults keeping in mind regional variations and the diverse needs of adults. The onset of the industrial revolution in England saw an increase in specialised institutions that increasingly focused on the educational demands of the newly industrialised working class.

Adult education in America led to the establishment of Lyceums (localised discussion groups, usually consisting of lectures on one or more practical themes) in 1826 (Goñi, 2006). Chautauqua began in 1864 as a summer programme for Sunday School<sup>1</sup> teachers (Goñi, 2006). 'Folk Schools' established as institutions for rural farmers started in Denmark in 1844 and were a unique model of early adult education initiatives. In India, the central focus of adult education during the 19<sup>th</sup> century was on basic literacy. Lessons were largely taught through traditional 'night schools' (Tandon, 2009).

Historically, adult education practices are part of the human tradition everywhere. Adult education through the ages has included a vast variety of interactions and exchanges between cultures, some cultures educate 'community' through rich oral traditions while others have focused on skill and doing (Goñi, 2006).

The formalisation of adult education as an established field of practice was most intense during the industrial revolution. Literature points to a variety of possible causes (Tandon, 1993). Firstly, adult education was propelled by the industrial bourgeoisie's interest in creating and maintaining of a pool of semi-skilled labour capable of participating in productive activity and also undergoing constant educational development to stay 'skilled'. Secondly, adult education was increasingly being seen as the method by which

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<sup>1</sup> A Sunday school, also known as a Sabbath School, is an institution designed to teach people, usually children, about Christianity, named such because most Christian churches meet on Sunday. Some Seventh-day Adventist communities hold their Sabbath Schools on Saturdays. Sunday schools were first set up in the 1780s to provide education to working children on their one day off from the factory. Sunday schools initially aimed to teach the youngsters reading, writing and cyphering and a knowledge of the Bible. (Collins, 1996)

the emerging working class could control and direct new training skills and training opportunities brought about by the new and industrialised production processes. Finally, adult education was also interestingly a uniting force of sorts between the needs and interests of Europe's proletariat and bourgeoisie classes. With a uniformly engaged class of adults, both groups could work towards a now common ideal of the nation-state (Hudson, 1851).

The immediate period following the Second World War (50's and early 60's) focused on teaching adults what we now term 'basic literacy' such as reading and writing. Teaching adults was mostly undertaken through a largely non-formalised route, referred to as 'extension' or continuing education courses. These kinds of adult education programmes were taught at formal educational institutions such as schools, colleges, universities and at workplaces and even at established community or lifelong learning centres (Goñi, 2006). The focus on basic literacy was firmly rooted in the idea that adult education was intended to augment skills in adults for personal and professional development.

The last five decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw several key developments taking place worldwide in political, social, and economic spheres. Technologically, there were revolutionary developments in areas such particle physics, electronics and in information technology. Politically, victories against colonialism paved the way for the emergence of new nation states, while the formation of popular and socialist republics led to the Cold War. Coupled together, these social and political changes paved the way for developments in human rights in many parts of the world, which had their roots in adult education movements (Tandon R. , 2003).

### **Case Study1: Women Worker's Forum of Chennai**

This case study illustrates one of key principles of adult education – that adults learn when their circumstances necessitate the same and when the learning is self-directed.

In 1967, after the establishment of a *Batik*<sup>2</sup> centre and the formation of a co-operative of women, facilitators of the group opened a literacy and health education centre, to support these members. As part of the group discussions, facilitators raised the issue of whether legal action should be initiated against moneylenders of the community. This was avidly discussed and many members of the group shared their views stating that money-lenders were not wholly exploitative but they also served as social institutions, providing credit in an emergency, albeit at unreasonably high interest rates. Rather than initiate legal action and eliminate the possibility of losing a potential resource, the group decided to set-up a debt-releasing fund and initiated a variety of other insurance schemes fulfilling the same objective as the money-lenders in their community. A workers' co-operative and savings bank emerged and the members slowly began to take control over what they had saved and use the same to improve their individual and collective lives. In 1979, members of the group felt the need to be literate, to learn to 'read and write', which arose from the need to develop skills to maintain the accounts of their home-grown savings bank and their production centre (Tandon, R., 2002).

### **1.3 Understanding Motivation, Interest and Learning Principles in Adults**

Adults participate in learning programmes for a variety of reasons – some want to augment existing knowledge and others to acquire new qualifications. Adult women in Africa or in South Asia may want to learn because they wish to enhance their self-confidence and self-respect in communities where male dominance is a way of life. It is not uncommon to see women come together to form economic interest groups or Self-Help Groups (SHGs) for their own welfare and community development.

<sup>2</sup> A method (originally used in Java) of producing colored designs on textiles by dyeing them, having first applied wax to the parts to be left uncoloured and dyeing the remaining portion of cloth.

In several cases these groups or collectives are platforms to promote adult education. In many African communities where health promotion includes enhancing adult learning, training educators and unlocking the potential of distance health education These programmes geared towards pre-natal and post-natal care are of immense interest to adults, both for basic health reasons and for reasons related to gender and HIV/AIDS issues (Goñi, 2006; Singh & McKay, 2004).

The case study of the women's forum in Chennai illustrates one of the first principles of adult education – adults learn when it is necessary and when their circumstances demand it of them. Other principles include the importance of a facilitator of adult education in recognizing that adults come with inquiring minds, and that they are goal as well as, activity oriented. This is an indication that the process of adult education and learning must be problem centered. For example, in a disease plagued communities, the treatment of issues that are central to their problem are likely to be first priority for adult learners.

The next principle is that learning must be experience centered. Experiential learning involves drawing from the memory of the adult and the resultant learning must be meaningful to the adult learner.

A good way to understand this principle is to though the value of indigenous knowledge (IK) to a community of adults, illustrated in Case Study 2.

***Case Study 2: Adult Learners in Botswana***

Botswana has one of the highest recorded levels of HIV infection in Africa. The fifteen to twenty nine years age group is most affected by it, with an infection rate of 35 percent, the highest in the world (Goñi, 2006). The loss of adults to AIDS has also had a significant effect on children in Botswana; an estimated 93,000 children have lost at least one parent to the epidemic. The economic output of Botswana has been reduced by the loss of workers and skills; agriculture and mining are among the worst affected sectors. How could the principles of adult education through indigenous knowledge play a role in spreading awareness about HIV/AIDS?

In communities such as in Botswana, indigenous education is passed on from adults to children and shared with society at large. Therefore, locating the educational and behaviour change efforts targeted at HIV/AIDS in indigenous knowledge traditions, through adult education methodologies, in order to locate solutions and problems in a familiar social context.

Knowledge cannot be confined to formal education institutions; it resides in people, in their oral histories, songs, stories and folk tales (Hudson, 1851)

## 1.4 Adult Education Today

As mentioned before adult education is more than just basic literacy, it is a holistic endeavour to allow human beings to function effectively in their daily lives and in their social contexts. It strives to engender human values, gender justice and inter-cultural tolerance to serve a range of social, economic and developmental roles. The fundamental aim of such programmes is to the build dignity and self-esteem of the learner. Adult education is essential and critical because it teaches more than a simple skill; it teaches adults how to learn and therefore furthers the concept of lifelong learning (Goñi, 2006).

Just as participatory research goes by the basic assumption that ordinary people already possess the knowledge to conduct research; adult education also presumes that all adults have the capacity to learn new skills, new ways of doing things, as well as unlearning some of their previous concepts and attitudes. Unlike children, adults have already developed insights, understanding and information, as well as certain sets of skills (Tandon, R., 2002). Therefore, the desire to seek further knowledge amongst adults will emerge only if people feel motivated enough to use the knowledge they are being taught and perceive its relevance in their life. For an adult education intervention to be successful, it has to be contextualized for the target group, in order to receive their sustained attention.

## UNIT 2: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES IN ADULT EDUCATION

### 2.1 Andragogy and its Principles

The term 'andragogy' was coined in 1833 by Alexander Kapp, a German grammar school teacher, to describe the educational philosophy behind adult learning and to differentiate it from the art and science of teaching children, which is familiar to most people as 'pedagogy' (Nottingham Andragogy Group, 1983).

The philosophical principles of andragogy are as follows (Knowles, M., 1990):

- People have a natural inclination toward learning, which will flourish if nurturing and encouraging environments are provided
- The role of the teacher is of a facilitator
- The teacher herself is also a recipient of knowledge
- The content and result of learning is as valuable as is the process and journey of learning

The theory of andragogy was developed by Malcolm Shepard Knowles, often considered the central figure in American adult education in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Smith, 2002). Knowles wrote the first major accounts of informal adult education, as well as the history of adult education in America. However it is his theory of andragogy that is considered his most important contribution. He differentiated andragogy from other forms of learning by way of the methodology used in teaching adult learners – he established the idea that adults learn differently from children, because they are at different points of the life circle. As a result, Knowles noted that adults need programmes designed specifically for them, and teaching methods for adults must necessarily be different from established traditional teaching methods for children. Among his other principles, Knowles emphasised the fact that unlike children, adults are self –directed and therefore expect to take responsibility for decisions involved in the learning process.

Knowles' definition and principles for adult learning/education are derived from his definition of who an 'adult' is, as listed below:

- The biological definition: We become adults biologically after puberty.
- The legal definition: We become adults legally, when we reach the age at which the law says we can vote, get a driver's license and marry without consent of parents.
- The social definition: We become adults socially when we start performing adult roles, such as that of a full time worker or as a voting citizen and the like.
- The psychological definition: We become adult psychologically when we start being responsible for our lives.

Andragogy suggests that adult education initiatives be designed based on the following assumptions:

- Adults need to know understand the relevance of the learning
- Adults need to learn experientially
- Adults approach learning as a tool of problem solving
- Adults learn best when the subject is of immediate value or when learning provides a skill whose value is apparent in the near future
- The instructor must adopt the role of a facilitator, who elicits knowledge from the group rather 'giving' of knowledge
- The methodology should focus on case studies, role playing, simulations, and self-evaluation

(Knowles, M., 1984)

According to (Knowles, M., 1990) the importance of adult education cannot be overstated – for example in order to educate children well, a society needs educated adults. He further states “the adult learner had been a neglected species even though all great teachers of ancient times were all teachers of adults, not of children.

Knowles is referring to educational principles established by historical teachers, who by and large perceived learning to be a process of active inquiry and not passive reception of knowledge – this is one of the central principles of adult education. History tells us that the Greeks invented Socratic dialogue while the Chinese and Hebrews invented what we now call the case method – tools of adult learning, as we know of it today.

The adult learner is unique in many ways – just as adult learning needs to be problem-centered to be successful, so does it need to accommodate the fact that as a result of past experience adult learners might have biases and perceptions and maybe closed to new ideas. This is indicative that adult education should act as a liberating force for people and andragogy should therefore be conceived of as participative. Further, knowledge so created is on a shared understanding of each member’s knowledge and experiences, taking into account the principle of individual differences.

## **2.2 Criticisms of Andragogy**

In spite of its positive features, the theory of andragogy is not without criticism. One such criticism raised by Welton, suggests that Knowles’s theory does not take into account the context of learning. In fact it suggests that the location of learning e.g. a factory, an office, or a military setting has no bearing on the amount of control that an adult learner exercises of the learning process. (Sandlin, 2005) Yonge (1985) argue the claim that andragogy differs from pedagogy is not necessarily of value in adult education since inclusivity and participation are key ingredients of both (Clardy, 2005; Yonge, 1985 ). Yonge, also maintains that if adult education means more than basic literacy, then ‘life’ could easily be confused with adult education, for life is also education. Knowles himself, was privy, to many of these points of debate as a recipient of reports from many a teacher in elementary and secondary schools who were successfully experimenting with the andragogical model to educate children and the youth.

As a result of these inputs Knowles in his revised edition of ‘The Modern Practice of Adult Education (1980)’, changed the subtitle from ‘Andragogy Versus Pedagogy (1970)’ to “From Pedagogy to Andragogy” (1980).

### 2.3 Paulo Freire and the Pedagogy of the Oppressed

A radically different approach from the andragogical consensus is Paulo Freire's idea of adult education (Dheimann, 2003). Freire was a legendary figure in the field of adult education and one of its most influential thinkers in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the areas of non-formal and informal adult education. Freire established the tradition of popular education in Brazil and then throughout Latin America. His most important contribution to the field of adult education was the book 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed'. In this book his theory revolves around the idea that nobody liberates anybody else, and nobody liberates themselves all alone and that people liberate themselves in fellowship with each other (Freire, 1970).

Freire placed special emphasis on the dialogical character of informal education, rather than formal education based on curricula. His focus on cooperation and people working together laid the foundation for community-led-study in adult education. Among other pioneering contributions, he brought to the subject of adult education the idea of 'banking education', which he described as the accumulation of knowledge capital and education - a form of investment that a teacher makes in a learner (Freire, 1970).

Freire is well-known for his theory of conscientisation. Conscientisation is the process of education in recognizing injustice, developing the ability to transform reality and escape an oppressive situation. In Freire's view, adult education is cable of creating a critical consciousness as opposed to a naive conciseness. This understanding firmly locates adult education in the context of social reform (Freire, 1970).

Julius Kambarage Nyerere, the first President of Tanzania and a visionary educationist, also perceived the connections between literacy, adult education, and development. (Kassam, 1994) His philosophy of 'education for liberation and development' resonated with that of Paulo Freire. Nyerere saw education as the fundamental means to bring about human liberation and equality to advance collectively towards the good of society. In his view, the main role of education was to inspire people to work towards change.

Nyerere's contribution to the theory of adult education arose from his social philosophy called *Ujamaa*, meaning 'brotherhood' in Kiswahili.

## 2.4 Gandhi, Jack Mezirow and Others

Closer home, in India, Gandhian philosophy explains adult education by focusing on character building and its methods. Gandhi advocated learning through practical skills, rather than book based study. Interestingly, the basic literacy movement in India saw the comfortable co-existence of adults and children learning together. (Patel, 2009)

The transformative learning theory of Jack Mezirow also contributed to the idea of adult education. (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009) Mezirow developed a synergy between the developments in the theory of adult education rooted in psychology and those rooted in popular education. According to him, one particular distinction between adult education and other forms of education is the conscious purpose of social change for a more just society.

A particularly good example of a popular education movement is the feminist movement, which began to be recognized by the mid-1980s. One of the ostensible goals of the feminist movement has been the recognition of women's knowledge in the public sphere. Feminist education has rapidly incorporated principles of community learning, including working with men and women together, as a more holistic basis for transforming gender relations.

Of the many lessons learnt, it has been observed that in order to improve the condition of women in both private and public spaces, both sexes need to work together. Viewing the feminist movement as a regular educational efforts, has led to a tendency to impose uniformity on women's issues, forgetting that women's agendas differ with different regions, classes/ contexts (Hoare, 2009). Local issues, which are the basis of feminist popular education, are often de-contextualised while trying to develop a common, global issue but losing the concerns of women at the grassroots. Applying the principles of adult

education to the feminist movement helps educators locate the need for gender transformation in community social contestations.

## SUMMARY

In this module, we have learnt the genesis of adult education in the mid-nineteenth century. We have traced the movement of adult education after World War II during the 1950s and 1960s. We learnt about the theoretical underpinnings of adult education and examined the works of theorists such as Malcolm Shepard Knowles, Paul Freire and Jack Mezirow. We have also introduced the differences between andragogy and pedagogy, along with some common yet crucial terminology used in this field - lifelong learning, community education, and continuing education. The module also discussed challenges to the practice of adult education and criticisms of the adult education theory.

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