



ADULT EDUCATION AS SOCIALLY ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP

LESSONS FROM THE COMMUNITY LITERACY AND NUMERACY GROUP AND THE COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN SOUTH AFRICA



KEY QUESTION

How do we build and sustain a vital adult education movement [in Africa] for social justice and equality capable of contesting power and remodeling of our communities, places of work, and our societies into the humane and just world to which we aspire?

Enver Motala



BACKGROUND ON ADULT EDUCATION IN AFRICA

Dominant tradition...

Governments on the continent tend to narrow ACE as functional literacy programmes -- focusing on the 3R's (FAL)

Yet...

ACE in Africa is characterized by its 'pluriverse' of educational responses to local, regional and national issues



KEY ISSUES

- Inequality, poverty and unemployment;
- Low economic growth and development;
- Ecological crisis (climate change);
- The Fourth Industrial Revolution;
- Migration;
- Conflict, violence and war;
- Food and hunger; health; shelter;
- Local issues (GBV, etc.); and
- Need for innovation and alternatives



ADULTS INVOLVED IN A 'PLURIVERSE' OF LEARNINGS

- ICOLEW (Uganda) – integrated ACE
- REFLECT (West Africa)
- WIEGO (Africa)
- Peace education (Burkina Faso)
- Food production and livelihoods (Tunisia)
- Diploma in AED (CUNIMA, Malawi)
- Food sovereignty and security (many countries)
- And many more...

(See MOJA Journal of Adult Education)





(RE-) INVENTING/IGNITING ACE

Social purpose adult education has historic knowledge and experience in Africa

Adult education remains a vehicle of socio-economic and political development

Adult education has a reputation of being socially engaged

The need for greater socially engaged scholarship is imperative; and

Adult education could be the vital bridge between communities, adult learning centres and universities



A FEW QUOTES...

SOCIALLY ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP

“we are not empty pitchers; we have minds of our own, we can reason out things...” (‘Illiterate’ woman)

“the ability to do research on one’s social surround should be considered a basic human right – the right to research; or the right to the tools through which any citizen can systematically increase that stock of knowledge which they consider most vital to their survival as human beings and to their claims as citizens.”
(Arjun Appadurai)

“a university that is beyond and above the social and political system of the society where it exists, is unfeasible...”
(Paulo Freire)

“genuinely reflexive ‘critical scholarship’ involves recognizing that becoming aware of a systematic or structural injustice, nailing it in a hard-hitting piece of writing or publishing high-quality research on it, does not in itself change things.” (Lawrence Cox)

ADULT LEARNERS AS SOCIALLY ENGAGED SCHOLARS

We are not empty pitchers; we have minds of our own ...

- Adult learners have the capacity to act as ‘intellectuals’ and to foster and realise this capacity;
- it is in dialogue within the collective that transformative knowledge can emerge (informal and non-formal spaces);
- Adult learners are actively (co)-constructing knowledge from shared lived experiences and realities;
- *Really useful* knowledge produced is often a result of daily actions and practices linked to the immediate social, economic and political life;
- Knowledge produced is *socially useful* and emerge through ongoing and reflective engagement



SCHOLAR- ACTIVISM AND SOCIALY ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP

... universities [**and community learning centres**] need to respond to societal demands; effectively engage within their immediate habitat; and reconfigure their curricula, research, internal organisation and ways of processing “the intermediations of knowledge and the social” (Swartz). A fundamental and crucial idea that can be derived from his arguments is the need for **universities to recognise that they are deeply implicated in crises** that communities face and that it is imperative to acknowledge that “**universities [do] not stand ‘outside’ of the social**, and like any social institution, reflect the characteristics of their environment”.

... the university [**the community learning centre**] is an integral *part* of the local, social, political, cultural and economic life of the communities in which it is located. Socially engaged scholarship, from this perspective, should compel us to engage with important social problems and political issues and to communicate with a larger public, upholding public values, while engaging in scholarship that is available to the communities of the university.



as a public institution a university/CLC needs to be accountable to communities and ensure that its responds to the needs of communities.



to consider alternative conceptions of itself and locates itself as an integral part of community rather than an outside agent “working in” or “working with” community.



to embrace and adopt the principles of social justice and social change as fundamental to a transformative agenda (in the context of a polycrisis and climate change)



reconfigure its internal organisation by placing community engagement at the **core of its** mission.



reorient its curricula, teaching and learning in support of the pressing community needs, interests and demands



Encourage greater emphasis on alternative research and service-learning approaches drawn from community-based and participatory research (CBR)



DEFINING COMMUNITY PAR (C/PAR)

“Participatory research attempts to break down the distinction between the researchers and the researched, the subjects and objects of knowledge production by the participation of the people-for-themselves in the process of gaining and creating knowledge. In the process, research is education and development of consciousness, and the mobilization for action”. (Gaventa, 1988)



C/PAR AND HUMAN RIGHTS

“The ability to do research on one’s social surround should be considered a basic human right (Arjun Appadurai, 2006) – the right to research; or the right to the tools through which any citizen can systematically increase that stock of knowledge which they consider most vital to their survival as human beings and to their claims as citizens.”

- I. Full citizenship demands the ability to make “strategic” and “continuous” inquiries on a range of issues;
- II. The tools of research should be made more universal, elementary and improvable – PAR creates space for a critical, multigenerational dialogue about research beyond the rarified university walls;
- III. PAR treats communities as agents in ongoing, critical struggles – bearers of knowledge and creators of social meaning;
- IV. PAR is about pedagogy, research and politics. It is about struggle in spaces – sites of intense possibility and uncertainty – linking collective problems and issues to broader sets of social, political and economic forces and pressures – and to work to transform them.



PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

PAR is:

- PAR is **political** and sides with the oppressed, subjugated and marginalised;
 - Research that views the oppressed as **creators of knowledge** (not recipients);
 - Creates spaces for **praxes** (analysis, action, reflection);
 - Questions the traditional research framework (it is **not extractive**);
 - a tool for learning (as a human right);
 - a pedagogy of **transformative learning** and resistance;
 - a form of **popular education** that offers 'real' education
- Epistemological challenge to conventional traditions on where knowledge resides
 - Knowledge is produced through participation and collaboration **in action**
 - Establishing and developing relationships of trust and mutual respect
 - Draws on multiple methods-surveys, logistic regressions, ethnography, polls, life stories, testimonies, performance, focus groups etc. (qualitative and quantitative).



C/PAR VS EXTRACTIVE RESEARCH

C/PAR:

- Participants involved in research from outset (design) to the end
- Stakeholder groups own research and use it to solve problems
- Collaborate in collecting info, analysis and action
- Principal outcome: aimed at producing change via actions by stakeholder groups based on their research

Extractive Research:

- Collect data and extract info individually or with fieldworkers
- Return to 'fieldsite' to present only selections of findings
- Often no guidelines for implementation
- Principal outcome: written report relying perhaps on implementation by experts or functionaries



C/PAR AS COLLECTIVE ENGAGEMENT

- Research is transparent (all matters related to);
- Research questions are co-constructed;
- Project design and research methods are collaboratively negotiated and co-constructed;
- Analysis is collective and co-constructed;
- The products of the research are dynamic, interactive and are collectively prepared and disseminated

How are our thoughts connected?

What are our observations?

How are we observing?

What is the theory we are applying?

Is our reasoning inductive?

Is our reasoning deductive?

On what evidence are we basing our conclusions?

PAR AS A PEDAGOGY OF HE/CLC TRANSFORMATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Practices which provide “the epistemic conditions for the collective knowledge of which proposals are most likely to promote results that are wise and just”. (Iris Young, 2000)

- resistance to normalization of systematic oppression through engaged **praxis** – (critical and collective inquiry, reflection and action focused on “reading” and speaking back to reality of the world);
- **providing people with opportunities to investigate social problems affecting their lives and then determine actions to rectify these problems;**
- enabling people to see reality of experiences while understanding capacities to and for resistance;
- **learning through research (praxis) about complex power relations, histories of struggles and the consequences of oppression;**
- re-visioning the realities of the social world and then undertaking forms of collective challenge based on knowledge gained through critical inquiry;
- **contesting and transforming systems and institutions to produce greater justice – distributive justice, procedural justice, justice for recognition, justice for respect, etc.**
- strengthening resistance that leads to transformation – systematic and institutional change to promote social justice;
- **highlighting the fact that conditions of injustice are produced and are not natural; designed to privilege and oppress; challengeable and changeable;**
- pointing out multigenerational collective analysis of power – that critical enquiry and resistance provoke ripples of social change



... higher education has failed on behalf of the majority of people. When the most damage is being done by those with the highest levels of education, we should be concerned. Those who have advanced degrees are often the only ones with access to formal research channels, funding and publications. Yet this group seems to side with power time and again... It should be clear by now that the existing system of research cannot be changed from within... We have to begin to confront the monolith of research in service of the empire and face the uncomfortable fact that we are all part of the system. We can either continue to participate willingly or attempt to resist where we can ... Our complicity has to be examined without excuses.

(Agostinone-Wilson, 2013)



THANK YOU!

Questions for discussion?

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