
Sociology of Adult Education

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ABSTRACT

A growth interest started at early 1970's in the sociology of education, but that was mostly related with the initial education processes. However, one decade later a growing sociological interest on adult education just started in Europe then later in United States as well. By the time of progress adult education was set in a wide sociological context all around the world. Actually, the education of adults has existed for centuries in one form or another, yet generally embedded in psychology and in adult learning fields since the intelligence was traditionally declined in adulthood. On the other hand, when the education of adults was recognized as an instrument for social change, especially as stated in Gramsci's work that the worker education could cause for example destroying the cultural hegemony of the dominant social classes in Italy, the education of adults was accepted as one of the core issues in the field of socially too. Therefore, in this study, the significance and role of adult education both in society and in sociology will be discussed within a dialectic and critical perspective.

Key words: Adult education, society, praxis, social change, hegemony

INTRODUCTION

Sociology is a very core field among social sciences and related with many interdisciplinary studies, for instance; law, management, gender, politics, economy, art, etc., and in this regard, one of the significant areas of sociology is education, therefore many subjects and researches on sociology of education have been studied for many years all around the world as

well. Moreover, with the improvement of educational sociology, the expert field sociologists have been also raised and they have started to bring different sociological points of view and aspects academically during these years. By this effort, another significant sub-area called sociology of adult education has been raised since they recognized the variation between child and adult education although there are also some similarities too. After this notable recognition, studies and researches have been started to be done in sociology of adult education and for the necessity of adults' learning in social structures. Actually, McCullough (1980:158) stated on this issue and asked some core questions that extracting adult education from its surrounding social milieu or at least differentiating adult education from its social milieu is as difficult as a determining how many angels can dance on the head of pin. Is adult education a practice or a programme..., is adult education is, therefore, everywhere yet nowhere in particular?

On the one hand, as Jarvis (2012) declared that there is a dichotomy between structure and action and this may also be reflected in the origins of the word "education" itself derived from either one of the Latin words; "educare" and educere", the first means "to train" which implies to prepare a person to take their place within the structures of society while the second means "to draw out" which places more emphasis upon the person and the process. That something exists for the education of adults in a multitude of forms and organizations is undeniable and as such constitutes a "social fact" in Durkheim's sense, that may be studied by the social analyst. On the

other hand, as Giddens declared that the individual is regarded as an agent capable of making causal interventions, then the social system might be regarded the outcome of the human action. In this regard, any social change in a social system might be occurred by this human action as the agent individuals of the society. That may form an “*infinite action*” concept in a society and its structures through praxis. Besides, when it is thought that education is a social system and praxis in a society, then the members of this social system have an impact on social structures and constructions through their social actions and could easily cause social changes in any social context of life and transform the sociology of educational structures and constructions through the organized human action, then the individual in that society becomes a social actor. Hence, in general each education system in particular adult education are supposed to be transformative and liberating, democratic, humanist and egalitarian, not hegemonic and patronizing of the dominant culture in industrialized societies of the world and their structures. Gramsci, for example, recognized the significance of that dominant culture in these societies, Freire also highlighted a similar principle in colonized countries of the third world as well. Then, education is more likely to be affected by social forces than to be a force for change, but should be vice versa.

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ADULT EDUCATION

Within the education of adults, there may be variety of social concepts and phenomena; however the most important thing is here to look at the case through the sociological perspectives instead of the ideological ones to be able to provide objectivity. Thus, the steps should be set to understand adults and their way of learning in a social based contexts not only through

pedagogy but also through andragogy which is the art and science of guidance and assistance for the adults “learning action”. With the help of andragogical adult education works, the fact that adults learn differently than children was reached. Their self concept, life experiences, motivation, readiness and orientation for learning are quite different from children’s, because of these important conditions, a special teaching and learning models are needed for the adult learners. It is presumed that adults have specific learning requirements in Andragogy. The best learning environments for adults are the ones that are collaborative and utilize a problem-based approach, so the classical educational approaches and classroom atmosphere do not provide these learning environments. In this case, a *shareroom* atmosphere with sharemates which provides mutual share and collaboration among both the adult learners and educators (Kaya, 2014). Within this framework, adult educator and learner relationship should be regarded as a mutual one in which the educator is also a learner and the learner is also an educator through this core interaction.

In 1980, Knowles made four assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners that are different from the assumptions about child learners and in 1984, he added the fifth assumption:

- **Self-concept** as a person matures her/his self concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directed human being
- **Adult Learner Experience** as a person matures s/he accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning.
- **Readiness to Learn** as a person matures her/his readiness to learn

becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of his/her social roles.

- **Orientation to Learning** as a person matures her/his time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly his/her orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of problem centeredness.
- **Motivation to Learn** as a person matures the motivation to learn is internal (Knowles 1984:12).

In again 1984, Knowles suggested four principles that are applied to adult learning:

- Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.
- Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for the learning activities.
- Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance and impact to their job or personal life.
- Adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented (Kearsley, 2010).

Then after, Mezirow and his ideas on adult education came to the stage and transformative learning theory, which is about fundamental change in the way we see ourselves and the world, was articulated, further refined in his later publications whereas Knowles' model of andragogy focuses on the characteristics of the adult learner and her/his life situation (Knowles, Holton and Swanson, 2005). According to Mezirow, learning is about transformation, it's about change, it's about seeing yourself in relation to the world differently (Apte, 2003, pg. 168) as

a journey of a learner changing their frames of reference by interpreting experience and these interpretations would then guide their actions and empower the learner to give a rationale for those actions. The learner, as a part of the action process must acquire knowledge and skills sufficient for implementing the new action plan, provisionally try out the new roles that are associated with the new action plan (Mezirow, 2000) and reintegrate the action plan, the new ideas, the shifts of belief and other paradigm shift into their life in such a way that their transformed noetic structure and worldview is now dictated by a new perspective (Reuschle, 2009).

In this context, learners should understand the difference between informative learning and transformative learning. For Mezirow (2000), there is an implication that informative learning is merely and information exchange and will not have a lasting impact on the learner because an exchange of information may not lead to a dilemma that then promotes the learner towards self-reflection and action planning (Apte, 2009). However, the implications in transformative learning are that the learner must first learn to take control over her/his own learning which means empowering the learner through a framework that communicates, models, reinforces through feedback, and continuously helps to motivate the learner to continue to direct themselves to him/herself through the learning process (Woodard, 2007). For the successful learner there is a process of understanding the gaps in their knowledge and the applicability of what knowledge they possess to real world problem solving in situations that they are facing (McGrath, 2009).

On the other hand, Freire analyzed the system of education in terms of banking concept education such an instrument of social control and education for liberation, and discussed through the understanding of

human and the structures of the world, then clearly recognized that the social structure of human surrounding could oppress the individual. He argues that education should be liberating and enabling the individual and freeing intellectually to act both upon the structures of the world and, get conscious of her/his own and the society to change it (Freire, 1974). By this way of education, the individual is free to develop through the educational process so that s/he might act as a social actor in and on the structures of the society. Hence, the individual who is more enlightened on the social processes could become more aware of actual reality of her/his social and political situation and their real needs in that society.

However, unlike Freire, adult educators tend to ignore the constraints of the social structure and to assume that the educational process occurs in a relative isolation. In addition, while Gramsci recognized the significance of the dominant culture in the industrialized societies of the world, Freire highlighted a similar principle in the colonized countries of the third world. When individuals as social actors of the society understand that the apparently objective knowledge is ideological, liberation begins and at the hearts of Freire's thinking, this process of reflection is one of the characteristics of individuals themselves and problem solving is an element in the development of the humanity of the learner. It is through problem solving that individuals think critically and become conscious of the world in which they live and by which they can be freed from the process of conditioning, then, in the fact of learning, they become potential agents also freed to act upon the world. By this way, he locates education within the wider socio-political process and the individual within the context of a sociological framework (Freire, 1976; Jarvis, 2012).

CONCLUSION

In global structure of the world today, adult education is a very core and significant issue especially when the aging population of the countries are recognized. Within this context, the sociology of adult education comes into prominence and should be taken care of more than ever. In a fact that didactic teaching and learning process tends to be education from above while liberating and transformative teaching and learning process flashes the education of equals by making the individual free from the social pressures to be able to act as a social actor externalizing potentially revolutionary nature of human learning in a society. Thus, any teaching and learning process should result their becoming critically aware thinkers and create conscientization, which leads to the deepening awareness. This kind of awareness will let the learners achieve of the socio-cultural reality shaping their lives and then have the capacity to change it as well.

All these socio-cultural realities shaping lives in a society should be considered because they might also cause disadvantageous conditions for the people of that society in many social contexts, especially in educational system and might block them for not only accessing but also continuing of education. Therefore, within the framework of adult education, the disadvantaged learners such as women, unemployed, immigrants, disabled etc. should be paid attention more than the others without causing any type of socio cultural, economical and political exclusion. In order to succeed this in a society and its adult education system, first the policy makers should make egalitarian and comprehensive educational policies for all individuals of that society, then the adult educators as system implementers should apply these policies equally and properly. Otherwise, the system itself starts

to propagate inequitable social conditions and structures, then reproduce and reconstruct them relentlessly.

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