

Researching and Transforming Adult Learning and Communities

The Local/Global Context

Rob Evans, Ewa Kurantowicz and Emilio Lucio-Villegas (Eds.)



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ESREA

European Society for Research on the Education of Adults

**Researching and Transforming Adult Learning
and Communities**

RESEARCH ON THE EDUCATION AND LEARNING OF ADULTS

VOLUME 5

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(On behalf of the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults)

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Scope

'Research on the Education and Learning of Adults' aims at providing an in-depth insight on the diversity of current research on adult education in diverse teaching/learning contexts in both geographical and cultural terms in Europe. Research on adult education has been characterised by different intellectual traditions, theoretical and methodological approaches and which are still alive today in Europe from the north to the south and from the west to the east. This book series is edited by the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA). The content of the series reflects the wide range of research activities undertaken by ESREA's members and networks such as: access, learning careers and identities; active citizenship; the professional development of adult educators; working life; the history of adult education; gender; local development and adult learning; ethnicity; older learners; adult education policies and biographical research. This book series will appeal to an international audience as it engages with current and relevant empirical research, a range of theoretical perspectives and knowledge thus stimulating debate, discussion and knowledge dissemination in the field in a democratic and heterogeneous way.

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THE EUROPEAN SOCIETY FOR RESEARCH ON THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS (ESREA)

ESREA is a European scientific society. It was established in 1991 to provide a European-wide forum for all researchers engaged in research on adult education and learning and to promote and disseminate theoretical and empirical research in the field. Since 1991 the landscape of adult education and learning has changed to include more diverse learning contexts at formal and informal levels. At the same time there has been a policy push by the European Union, OECD, UNESCO and national governments to promote a policy of lifelong learning. ESREA provides an important space for these changes and (re)definition of adult education and learning in relation to research, theory, policy and practice to be reflected upon and discussed. This takes place at the triennial conference, network conferences and through the publication of books and a journal.

ESREA RESEARCH NETWORKS

The major priority of ESREA is the encouragement of co-operation between active researchers in the form of thematic research networks which encourage inter-disciplinary research drawing on a broad range of the social sciences. These research networks hold annual/biennial seminars and conferences for the exchange of research results and to encourage publications.

The current active ESREA networks are:

- Access, Learning Careers and Identities
- Active Democratic Citizenship and Adult Learning
- Adult Educators, Trainers and their Professional Development
- Between Global and Local: Adult Learning and Development
- Education and Learning of Older Adults
- Gender and Adult Learning
- History of Adult Education and Training in Europe
- Interrogating Transformative Processes in Learning: An International Exchange
- Life-history and Biographical Research
- Migration, Ethnicity, Racism and Xenophobia
- Policy Studies in Adult Education
- Working Life and Learning

ESREA TRIENNIAL EUROPEAN RESEARCH CONFERENCE

In order to encourage the widest possible forum for the exchange of ongoing research activities ESREA holds a triennial European Research Conference. The conferences

ESREA

have been held in Strobl (1995), Bruxelles (1998), Lisbon (2001), Wroclaw (2004), Seville (2007), Linköping (2010) and Berlin (2013).

ESREA JOURNAL

ESREA publishes a scientific open access journal entitled *The European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults* (RELA). All issues of the journal can be read at www.rela.ep.liu.se. You can also find more information about call for papers and submission procedures on this website.

ESREA BOOKS

ESREA's research networks and conferences have led to the publication of over forty books. A full list, giving details of the various publishers, and the books' availability, is on the ESREA website. ESREA's current book series is published in co-operation with Sense Publishers.

Further information on ESREA is available at www.esrea.org

Emilio Lucio-Villegas
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ROB EVANS, EWA KURANTOWICZ AND
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1. INTRODUCTION

Can adult education and learning be understood without reference to community and people's daily lives? Our response is no, it cannot. We think that adult education can be understood if we look at the social life of people in communities, and this book is an attempt to recover this view.

We are living in a society in fast and continuous transition where one of the focal points of research is on social change. But social change is a complex process full of different realities. Two examples will suffice to shed some light on social change in communities.

On the one hand, we can consider the work of Clifford Geertz on the funeral rituals in Java between 1952 and 1954. He proposes a form of analysis that discriminates between logical-meaningful integration and causal-functional integration, sustaining that cultural factors and social structure are not mere reflections of one another:

In most societies, where change is a characteristic rather than an abnormal occurrence, we shall expect to find more or less radical discontinuities between the two [social and cultural aspects]. I would argue that it is in these very discontinuities that we shall find some of the primary driving forces in change. (1973, p. 144)

The funeral rituals he analysed were incongruities between the cultural framework and the patterning of social interaction that can be explained in depth only by a dynamic theory which considers the divergences between the need to find significance and the need to maintain a functioning social organism. These incongruities are found, too, in the difficulties encountered in the transformation of a community. But they can also be looked upon as a guarantee that the community maintains its roots in the face of globalisation – understood here as a global system characterised by standardised processes.

On the other hand, it is very important to understand the factors that influence change, because situations are diverse. Joseph Stiglitz' (2002) analysis of modernisation processes in Asian countries and the role that the World Bank played in these processes leads us to consider the sequence and the rhythm of change. Stiglitz states that different situations generate different sequences and rhythms – each country, situation and development process is different. Sequence may be defined as the development of events in relationship with both general and particular

characteristics of the specific contexts. Rhythm would then be speed of change and the speed of modernisation processes. Therefore in different social and cultural settings sequence and rhythm must be different. Taking this as a starting point, it becomes important to recognize and encourage development processes that are compatible with the specific sequences and rhythms naturally present in communities. By the same token, some local development failures could be explained by the absence of such conditions.

So, it seems necessary to rethink the role of adult education and learning in community processes. We are not interested in adult education as a question of developing skills to read, write, make calculations and so on, or to simply acquire competences to become employable. Adult education and learning can in fact be understood as a real process to help people to read the world and change it, a more general skill that is so important in the life of individuals and communities. To be able to interpret social reality can make all the difference. So we will here briefly present three elements that we think are fundamental to making a difference, following Paulo Freire's work (1970, 1990): the collective/community, dialogue and transformation.

To propose any form of collective action today is to oppose the growing tide of individualism, both in our societies and in educational institutions. We know that individualism is directed toward competition and to the notions that individuals should have the ability to build up a pool of 'useful' knowledge and skills, which should be related directly to competition in the labour market, for instance. But turning from individual action, to social action in communities as a priority means opting for diversity and recognising *the Other* as an essential element in building a plural, multicultural society. It also means building collectively in communities, but starting from the second element, that is, starting from dialogue. These processes could be identified also as research projects. Participatory Research (PR) can be considered as a methodology to undertake this. Participation is a priority and is the distinctive element of this methodology.

Orlando Fals Borda, in 1997 – at a Conference in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia – advocated the use of PR as opposed to Action Research – or as he called it Participatory Action Research – emphasizing participation as the essence of this methodology (Fals, 1998). Participatory research provides a way to give people the power to take actions that further improvements in their lives and communities.

Next to the participatory element so distinctive of PR methodology is the concept of *Vivencia*, which Fals defines as “a complex of attitudes and values that can give meaning to our praxis in the field” (Fals, 2001, p. 31). *Vivencia* holds a double meaning. On the one hand, it allows people to give sense to the things that happen in their community: it is the symbolic universe drawn on by Geertz (1973) as a part of his semiotic concept of culture. On the other hand, *Vivencia* means that people who are living and are involved in the life of the community have the most intimate knowledge of it. Consequently, the creation of knowledge comes from people's daily life. As Tandon declares:

[the] essence of the participatory research tradition was understanding the political economy of knowledge; its practice-linked inquiry and investigation of social reality with learning and education, on the one hand, and organizing and action, on the other. (Tandon, 2008, p. 5)

And, it can be added, that this can be achieved through dialogue. The dialogue is opposed to any form of reciprocal denial and it is therefore fundamental to recognising the Other and finding ways of working together.

Last but not least is the ability to read social reality as an essential step to change it. To Freire, the possibility that each person can say his or her word is by itself an act of creation that helps them to better understand reality. Without this capacity to position ourselves within the world we live in and understand the motives that are shaping social reality today, we cannot change the world through the actions triggered by the awareness we have gained.

THE CHAPTERS AND THE AUTHORS

The single chapters of this volume reflect the research in the field of adult education and learning in and with communities and at the same time, in a more intimate fashion, the work of the authors presented here offers a very vital reflection of the work of the still young research network Between Global and Local – Adult Learning and Development which meets and discusses under the friendly roof of the European Society for the Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA). All of the authors have contributed to the work of the network since its formation at the University of the Algarve in Faro, Portugal in 2006. They represent with the chapters included in this book the important consensus of direction, purpose and conviction that characterises the activity of the network and its participants. At the same time, their individual work testifies to the broad range of professional practice, the variety in both methodology and theoretical background as well as to the impressive scope of field research experience they bring to bear in their chapters. This researcher experience out of which the book is made, is uncompromisingly grounded in knowledge of the field in a wide range of local contexts of adult learning as well as of the social movements that have arisen to pursue the aims of social justice and equality that have galvanised individuals and communities to access new forms of knowledge, acquire new types of social capital and change the life worlds of communities. From Scotland, Belgium, and Switzerland, in Anatolia, Poland, Spain and Portugal, to Mexico and Canada.

Section I: The Bigger Picture

In the opening chapter, Budd Hall (*Towards a knowledge democracy movement*) draws a broad picture of the development of international research and practice into community development and critical social knowledge creation through adult

education. Hall reviews research on the impacts of inequality (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009), discourses and trends in HE such as engaged scholarship (Boyer, 2006), community based research (Strand et al., 2009), civic engagement, knowledge mobilisation and knowledge impact (Levesque, 2008) and their resonances and contact with transformative pedagogies inspired by Freire. These pedagogies include: participatory research, action research, and participatory action research. He argues that recognizing alternative sites of knowledge construction such as social movements, community organizations, the excluded themselves, including also indigenous forms of knowing, can help to create a global knowledge movement.

Emilio Lucio-Villegas and António Fragoso (*A tramp shining*) discuss the role of the educator. They begin by defining community as common identity (Williams, 1989; Hoggart, 1966) and community as a place of conflict (Wildemeersch & Vandenabeele, 2007). The model of local development they propose involves the concept of deliberative democracy, and the role of the educator/expert/ organic intellectual (Gramsci) is founded on mediation and social change. The Freirian perspective the authors adopt sees educators as starting from people's real situations (e.g. the example of an amateur fishing club in Portugal). They see adult education taking place in non-formal processes of learning in grass-roots social networks and with the aid of the local anglers' experiences show how people are building collectively narratives of citizenship and participation that are rooted in their daily practices in the community.

The third chapter is from Rozalia Ligus (*Symbolic closing of local community and reflexivity*). Employing Lyn Tett's three main areas of meaning – place, interest and function – given to communities by their members (Tett, 2010), Ligus analyzes from a biographical and sociological perspective the process of the closing of symbolic spaces as observed in the case of certain local communities in Poland which have experienced what she terms a 'broken' historical continuity. In so doing, Ligus introduces a valuable review of selected Polish work on adult learning and communities. Her findings confirm that each community follows its own path of development and that the character of that development is dependent on numerous 'soft' factors, among which the competence of reflexivity seems to be a key concept. The people of the three local communities she studies, who are located in close proximity to one another, have nevertheless very different attitudes toward their local development and towards opening up new learning spaces. Their attitudes to the local space depend on locally constructed meanings given to the community which can be the result of different biographical experiences.

The chapter written by Anna Bilon and Ewa Kurantowicz (*The results of local community projects – political and research contexts*), which closes the first section of the book, further highlights contradictions in the development of community learning. In fact, Bilon & Kurantowicz argue that Polish local communities, in a similar way to communities in other countries, are directly subjected to the imperatives: "what is local?" and "what is global?" The result is that local communities find themselves situated 'between' global socio-cultural and economic processes and local social and

socio-economic circumstances. Consequently, local communities which constitute peripheries within their own country face particularly tough conditions in striving for an inclusive and balanced development in the face of national and international pressures. In this light, Bilon and Kurantowicz point out difficulties that accompany attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of various forms of support for individuals and local communities, especially those which focus on labour market re-entry action plans in general without considering local factors, such as local labour market specifics. Employing interviews with individuals involved in the implementation of such labour market re-entry plans and other support projects for the members of local communities, the authors indicate the need for participatory models of community learning, a recognition of community experience and knowledge and encouragement of civic participation and engagement.

Section II: Adult Learning and Communities

The second section of the book presents a range of chapters from Scotland, Switzerland, Poland, Portugal, Belgium and Turkey which all in related ways touch on educators/mediators who work in local and regional contexts in which the tensions of the wider policy and discourse environment impact on adult learners: migrants, regional populations, ethnic ‘minorities’ and the socially marginalised.

This section begins with Pyollim Hong and Jim Crowther’s chapter (*Learning citizenship in the community*). Hong and Crowther consider young adults’ experiences of learning citizenship in the community in Scotland. Their starting point is that democracy is contested and what is practised in its name needs to be engaged with critically. The authors focus on how community, participation and citizenship are constructed in ways which emphasise social and political capital and that, increasingly, learning citizenship is shaped very much by a neoliberal version of citizenship (and democracy) which serves to encourage a depoliticised and individualised version of citizenship rather than one that is concerned with the collective needs and interests of the wider community and society. Through their discussion of young adults’ experiences of the struggle for employment, they indicate the importance of spaces which encourage young adults’ participation in the community as an opportunity to explore issues and concerns that allow them to think and act individually and collectively (i.e., as political agents).

In Chris Parson’s contribution (*Adult literacy and empowerment – Learning for freedom*) participatory educator/learner experiences in a Swiss literacy NGO are discussed, raising critical questions about the increasing prevalence of deficit models of learning and social identity. The seeds of a Freirian approach were sown in the literacy project discussed by Parson with the inclusion in the project goals of the term “mutualisation”, and the proposition to use Reflect-Action as the first methodological approach to be shared. Reflect-Action proposes a methodology, or rather a process whose aim is to foster participation in democratic life, to encourage taking up and expressing one’s position, improving communication skills, analysing

and sharing power. Its principles are consistent with those of lifelong learning, or at least as expressed in discourse on LLL. It can be used with groups of adult learners or in any group setting where transformation is one of the goals. It allows the group to establish its own analytical and working framework by means of the participation and engagement of all the members of the group. Thus, a manifesto of adult learning could be developed that asked that voices of adult learners be heard when they speak of their experiences, hopes and plans for the future, frustrations and pain in the present.

Adrianna Nizińska: (*Social capital, adult learning and equality*) examines the discourses of social capital and equality (Arrow, 2000; Oyen, 2002) that shape our understandings of individual and group participation in learning processes. Pointing out that the value of social capital depends on its place in the social order, she argues that the poor and the marginalised rely on networks built upon survival strategies in which social bonding capital comes very much to the fore. Such bonding capital serves to reduce the effects of natural and macro-economic shocks, a phenomenon growing in significance in the post-financial crisis EU and beyond. Nizińska considers the potential of an increase in social capital – for example through access to education for the marginalised but equally, and perhaps more crucially, through education of those enjoying greater social capital and in possession of access to social networks promoting inclusion and citizen participation to raise understanding of the problems of marginalisation and exclusion generally. From this she seeks to draw conclusions about the forms of solidarity, mechanical or organic according to Durkheim's classical formulation, in local communities affected by exogenous shocks, that may be developed.

Isabel Gomes and Alcides Monteiro in their chapter (*Why choose one hand over the other when we can use the best of two?*) ask what the contribution of educators is in programmes ostensibly offering adult learners new learning opportunities? They highlight the dichotomies existing in research practice and pedagogy between normative, internalised forms of knowledge acquisition and the alternative of community-based, social and cultural learning. Employing Lima's notion (2007) of the 'multiform' nature of lifelong learning, the authors stress the importance of change and conflict in community learning processes and propose new functions for the educator as facilitator and mediator in this process. Embracing Lima's idea means developing a comprehensive understanding of adult learning which includes both sides of currently discussed education policies and proposals: the 'right hand' representing the most pragmatic, functional and purely adaptive education, and the 'left hand' expressing the critical, developmental and radical approaches. The authors conclude by asking out loud whether adult education can actually survive the scarcity of critical adult educators who are able to use the best of both 'hands of lifelong education'?

Paul de Roo (*Developing minority communities against the background of the 'necessary dream' of returning to the homeland*) describes a Bilingual and Bicultural Education Program in Brussels which aims to provide children of immigrants with