The Road Ahead: Multicultural Adult Education

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Abstract

Current trends in demographic changes in the world emerge that education, as a basic human right and a primary means of socializing individuals into mainstream culture, should be structured by the principles of understanding, responsibility, tolerance, impartiality and respect for people. One of the significant ways of achieving this aim is to be able to have multicultural adult education praxis since every aspect of adult life is shaped by culture and education is served to define the cultural values of the societies. However, people can be either empowered or marginalized when they learn about who matters and what priorities are important. Therefore, this paper focuses on multicultural adult education and its realization as an effective approach for social inclusion since understanding the culturally constructed nature of educational environments and developing an awareness of the effect of multiculturally defined sense of self and of adult education is crucial.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, adult education, adult educator, cultural identity, social inclusion

1. Introduction

The world today experiences cultural diversity more than yesterday. Within this situation, education is a primary means of the socializing people into mainstream culture and serves as a vehicle for defining the cultural values that are held or viewed as central to be approved in society. The learning stage of what/who matters to interact and how starts in childhood and goes on in adulthood. Freire underlines that one of the fundamental goals of adult education is to be "problem-posing," which ultimately enables learners to be "critical thinkers" (Friere, 1999, p. 64). However, affection by the cultural mismatch between the learning environment and their own cultural history sometimes occurs especially when they are marginalized or empowered depending on their socio-cultural capital. As derived from the Latin word *cultura,* culture comes up with multiple meanings. For the English meaning, it refers to activities related to agriculture, cultivating of tending whereas it also referred to the manners and social graces associated with the elite and the educated by the nineteenth century (Guy, 1999).

According to Herskovits (1955, 4), culture has come to be understood as the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon man's capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations. Besides, another concept of culture defined as 'contact with the best which has been thought and pronounced in the world has been popularized and accepted as crucial to a democratic society by Matthew Arnold (1994), nineteenth century British cultural critic. Nevertheless the Arnoldian conception of culture began to be replaced with another definition as based on the work of anthropologists, a new definition emerged that defined culture as the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of creativity. These cultural values are at the core of social life and identity as omnipresent powerful factors that shape or influence individual attitudes and beliefs (Guy, 1999). Besides all, there are many close related terms with culture such as popular culture, high culture, organizational culture, ethnic culture, subculture and uncultured.

Looking into the issue from the adult educators' point of view, Horace Kallen and Alain Locke propose more inclusive and broader definitions of culture, which means an attribute of the 'folk' not simply of the elite or the educated. For Locke, culture is baked into the "daily bread" of a people's life. Especially, Kallen states the term 'cultural pluralism' for a society in which different cultural groups would coexist democratically and peacefully.

Within this regard, the population of the world is getting more heterogonous and nobody could guarantee that one day s/he may be an immigrant or be in a multicultural context. As it is given in "The Harper Collins Dictionary of Sociology" (1991), multiculturalism–the acknowledgement and promotion of cultural pluralism as a feature of many societies (.........) multiculturalism celebrates and seeks to protect cultural variety, for example, minority languages. At the same time, it focuses on the often unequal relationship of minority to mainstream cultures (Wieviorka, 1998: 881). According to Goldberg (1994, 10), it is possible to propose a history of multiculturalism in which pluralism would correspond to a stage or a point in the challenging of hegemonic culture in the world. However, within contemporary multiculturalism, it may refer to a demographic and descriptive usage to an ideology and norms usage and to a programme and policy usage.

In this regard, difficulties arise for many adult learners when they attempt to negotiate educational environments that have been constructed within a cultural base of values, behaviors, beliefs, and ways of doing things which are different from their own. In order to create an inclusive educational setting, multicultural adult educational strategies should be developed to minimize the potential for further exclusion and marginalization of the adult learners. Then, the importance of multicultural adult education comes to the agenda since it is essential to combat cultural domination, oppression and exclusion for people in that society via providing a sharing atmosphere for social inclusion through the learning atmosphere.

2. Multicultural Adult Education

Focusing on a multicultural adult education as both the object and subject of individual and/or group learning serves not only as a way of breaking the destructive cycle of cultural oppression but also racial, class, gender, and ethnic oppressions. This understanding of multicultural adult education has implications for adult educators who work with persons coming from traditionally marginalized social groups. In the context of multicultural relevant education, then, educators have begun to question the relationship between the cultural origins of adult learners and the educational settings in which they participate (Martin, 2003). However, it is not enough simply to be culturally inclusive in a pluralistic environment (Cassara, 1990) and inclusion does not always guarantee equity. Rather, educational setting and praxis should be reevaluated for their potential to assist adult learners whose individual and group identities are most at risk in terms of the dominant culture's components (Guy, 1999).

Learners from marginalized cultural backgrounds too often resort to a rejection of dominant cultural norms and standards (Ogbu, 1992; Quigley, 1990). However, such a stance consigns those individuals to further marginalization and exclusion (Darder, 1991). The nature of the fit between learners' cultural backgrounds and their educational experiences is of a central concern because of culture's importance in establishing criteria for success or failure. Thus, a principal focus of the educational experience, from the perspective of cultural relevance, is the reconstruction of learners' group-based identity from one that is negative to one that is positive. By virtue of the discrimination they face, members of marginalized groups are forced to accommodate themselves to the dominant culture or be even further marginalized. One educational response to this situation is termed *biculturalism* (Guy, 1999).

Darder (1991) argues that biculturalism should frame educational environments and defines *biculturalism* as "a process wherein individuals learn to function in two distinct sociocultural environments: their primary culture, and that of the dominant mainstream culture of the society in which they live" (p. 48). Darder (1996) also states that *biculturalism* is based on a philosophy of cultural democracy, asserting that people of color who come from subordinate cultures have the right to maintain their home culture as well as to become competent in the mainstream culture. Cultural democracy, then, refers to the goal of living in a society in which a multiplicity of cultures not only coexists but thrives (Guy, 1999). This requires an examination of educational practices to make them culturally relevant to the needs and cultural backgrounds of learners. For example, Geertz (1973) argues that culture is essentially about shared meaning within a group.

Then, it is needed to start first not to use the term "classroom" as used in pedagogy, instead, the term "shareroom"[1] should be preferred for the educational atmosphere of adult education praxis in line with andragogy. Knowles (1989) states that adults bring the richness in experience that comes from their own life into the learning atmosphere.

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1 The term "shareroom"is more convenient to andragocical approach instead of using classroom preferred in pedagogical approach.

Through this richness, their cultural biographicity is an important resource for the shareroom learning atmosphere, so what they already live should never be ignored and biographical learning activities for a better understanding of each other should be also planned. By this way, the learning atmosphere could be enhaced through their cultural experience allowed to be voiced freely in that shareroom learning atmosphere.

Moreover, the curriculum should be examined whether it has any discriminative and stereotypical contents and materials or not since the curriculum may not be designed conveniently for the multicultural atmosphere of the learning environment. This kind of curriculum may cause injustice and be offensive for the learners whose daily lives are completely irrelevant. Thus, learners' cultural backgrounds should be cared for their inclusion because they may not be volunteer to participate in and share due to their cultural values and the fear of exclusion. To avoid these obstacles in front of learning, maximizing learner participation and power sharing through the well-chosen and applied instructional methods and processes are really crucial.

2.1. The Role of Adult Educator

Ladson-Billings (1994) emphasized that adult educators are well advised for knowing their students and cultural backgrounds; and use this information effectively and creatively during instruction. Hence, the adult educator should understand the culturally constructed nature of educational environments and develop an awareness of the effect her/his own point of view on adult learners' cultural backgrounds since cultural sense of self, of education and of learning can be defined by them as cultural beings not to cause more culturally construction in culturally diverse environment. However, the main problem is that cultural manifestations are generally applied unconsciously by the adult educator, so this causes difficulties for the adult learners because of their cultural background since the ways of doing things during the learning progress are different from their own values. If the adult educator behaves insensitively, s/he ignores their life experiences and creates an ineffective learning environment.

Within that condition, they feel themselves blocked and restricted and unmotivated to learn, so the adult educator should construct multicultural praxis, which lets all learners included and motivated and inclusive curricula, which lets multicultural ways of learning. In addition, s/he should form a potent learning community in which learners could become a unique member of it and share their multiculturality without feeling any restriction in it. Actually, an adult educator can motivate all learners by forming such a creative learning atmosphere that balances different cultural norms, by designing collaborative and individual tasks, encouraging reflective and discussion activities, and using visual, written, relational, and other types of learning styles (Gardner, 1997).

At this point, they do not have to experience learning environments grounded outside their own cultural background (norms, values, beliefs etc.). To be able to achieve this purpose, a curricula and activities should be designed consciously and visibly to include a variety of worldviews and bases of knowledge for a multicultural learning framework and to let them have multicultural and self-reflective skills via creating a positive multicultural learning environments through self-sharing ways in a kind of shareroom which encourages and offers nonjudgmental processing of multiple perspective and facilitating a sense of respectful community. By this way, a multicultural understanding and skill for future work and community learning environments could be developed to help learners understand the significance of that, and then the attention to these concerns could greatly enhance the learning experience for everyone and avoid cultural differences and learning inequalities.

Besides, adult educators should reorient educational practices to incorporate adult learners' culture into this multicultural educational process and should also question the relationship between the cultural origins of adult learners and the educational setting in which they participate. For adult educators interested in addressing the ways in which cultural domination affects learners in adult education settings, educational strategies must be developed to minimize the potential for further exclusion and marginalization of learners.

It is of course possible that there may be a significant difference in socialization between the learner and adult educator, but also they may have something in common with each other as female/male, young/old, single/married/divorced etc. On the other hand, the barriers of class, race, gender, and ethnicity can lead to important misinterpretations and misunderstandings about how the adult educator and learner view the learning environment. Then, the cultural meanings of life such as beliefs, assumptions, and values shared by the adult educator and the learner may be quite different from each other. In this situation, as Gramsci mentions, if the adult educator could suicide her/his cultural background first and then the learner will sure react in a same way.

He also underlines that for an organic intellectualism, there should be a dialectic relationship between the educator and learner, by this way, the roles could exchange mutually, then a better understanding is realized in context of education (Borg et al, 2002).

During the instructional practices, teaching in a culturally relevant way is required since the learning environment may be culturally incompatible with the culture of the learners and unexpected viewpoints can be heard but should be calmly analyzed. There is a useful model for the adult educator who wants to conceptualize the learning environment culturally relevant perspective. In this model, the four elements of the learning environment are addressed in order to be examined through the lens of culture. These are "the instructors' cultural identity", "the learners' cultural identity", "the curriculum" and "the instructional methods and processes" (Marchisani and Adams, 1992).

As Adams stated (1992), if the learners are from different cultural backgrounds the monocultural educators are generally vulnerable to misinterpretation of learners' attitudes and actions. Then, an engage in a process of self-examination is needed through examining her/his own cultural values, beliefs, bevaiours, attitudes, and assumptions. In this manner, instead of viewing the learners from an ethnocentric perspective, s/he could manage to understand the learners via finding the meaning that they attach to the learning materials, activities, and processes. By this way, the learners who generally share little in common will get accustomed to share more day by day in a shareroom learning atmosphere.

3. Conclusion

To broaden our understanding of multiculturalism in learning community of adult learners, maximizing the advantages of multicultural adult learners and minimizing their disadvantages while learning, then step by step eradicating all these obstacles in front of learning praxis are really crucial for today's multicultural world of people. However, to be able to achieve this, the efforts of the adult educator are not simply enough since the effect of that limited struggle for the inclusion of multicultural adult learners in learning atmospheres through curriculum activities, materials and positive attitudes will not be very effective and common. Thus, these kinds of attempts should be under the umbrella of comprehensive and policies critically combining the consideration for social, cultural and educational aspects of life and enable to break the link between poverty, race, ethnicity, gender, disability and under-education, and political measures associated with a critical multiculturalists perspective.

Herein, the correspondence to establish between political actions on the one hand and, on the other, the cultural and social realities that are at stake, and which are infranational or transnational is absolutely needed. Moreover, its capacity enables an increasing number of people to improve their ability to constitute themselves as autonomous subjects and to make their own choices. Besides, a wide point of critical multiculturalists view, which is necessary not to marginalize and exclude multicultural people in society in the name of hearing their voices and a mutual respect for reasonable intellectual, political and cultural differences are required. Then by that way, this will make of multiculturalism a possible response, rather than the problem to be resolved as a set of social policies which call for considerable efforts and close cooperation with people at grassroots level in the name of a democratic life.

In this regard, the influence of culture on learning should be kept in mind that but avoiding a traditional multicultural education stressing differences and thereby intensifying racisim, and also a new multicultural education stressing similarities and at the same time ignoring differences is really very significant issue to be noticed to create a trustable multicultural learning environments where adult learners feel themselves safe and happy. Consequently, no one can choose her/his race, ethnicity, etc., for that reason s/he should never be paid the price of all these discriminative facts formulated by the other who thinks her/himself the owner of everything in this multicultural world. Through the collaboration of the differences and similarities, everybody should know the value of each as the gift of this life.

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