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Researching the Shifting Landscape of Adult Education in the Third World: New Perspectives on the Relationship between Adult Education and Democracy

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Abstract: *Recent democratisation in Chile and South Africa has impacted the relationship between adult education and democracy. At the same time however, adult education practices in the 50 year old Mexican democracy raises new questions. Four researchers from Chile, South Africa and Mexico share their perspectives on the relationship between adult education and democracy.*

Recent democratisation in third world countries prompts new perspectives on the relationship between adult education and democracy. At the same time however, adult education practices in the 50 year old Mexican democracy also generates new perspectives. Chile, South Africa and Mexico are the focus of this symposium. Chilean researcher, Javier Corvalan, Mexican researcher, Juan Madrigal Goerne and South African researchers, Irene Chadibe and Zelda Groener are investigating various dimensions of the relationship between adult education and democracy. In this symposium, they will report their findings and critically discuss how their research is prompting new perspectives on adult education and democracy.

Throughout the 1980s, popular adult educators in social movements and nongovernmental organisations (ngos) in several Latin American countries, played a major role in driving the struggle for democracy. The element of participation dominated the many protests, campaigns and lobbies for democracy. The notion of participation was almost synonymous with the notion of democracy. The philosophy of democratic participation had its roots in the oppositional mode of political mobilisation. Chile was no exception. The Chilean democratic government which was elected in 1990 has opted for free market economy. New education policies have been formulated and new education systems have been developed to facilitate the processes of reform. As in many other democratising societies around the world, the educational system has been transformed from a centralised to a decentralised system. Arguing that com-

munities should play a leading role in educational governance, the government has instituted processes of community participation to facilitate the role of these communities. Community participation however, was a dominant feature of the mobilisation activities of the Chilean masses in the struggles for democracy which culminated in the election of the democratic government in 1990. The official discourse of the democratic government, shaped by a free market ideology has penetrated and permeated the Education Ministry's vision of community participation. While the ideological underpinnings of community participation have changed, the Education Ministry has adopted the same strategies and methodologies of community participation which popular educators employed in the oppositional programmes. Hence, the paradigm of community participation reflects different, opposing and contradictory discourses. For the past two years, Javier Corvalan has been investigating community members' understanding of the processes of community participation. His investigation focussed on three programmes of education (1) 900 Schools Program (2) Exception Lyceum Programme at Montegrande and (3) the MECE-Rural Programme. In reporting his findings, Javier will share his perspectives on the relationship between adult education and democracy. In particular, he will share his intellectual reflections on the ways in which the official discourse of community participation has impacted the democratisation of the Chilean society.

South Africa's election of a democratic government in 1994 has also prompted new perspectives on

the relationship between adult education and democracy. The values of equity, equality and redressing political and economic inequalities feature prominently in the country's democratic political philosophy. These are reflected in the democratic government's new national education and training policies for adults. Every educational institution in South Africa has been challenged to integrate these values into their policies and practices. The University of South Africa (UNISA), a distance education institution, attracts large numbers of adult learners to their undergraduate and graduate programmes. The majority are black adults who have been politically and economically disadvantaged by the apartheid system. Many live in rural and semi-rural areas. In the past, the throughput rate of these adult learners has been very low. Providing disadvantaged adults with access to higher education institutions has been hailed as an achievement in redressing historical political and economic inequalities. More recently, however, successful throughput has become a criterion for successful access. In response, UNISA's senate in 1994, resolved to extend its student support services by creating a network of learning centres and community satellite study centres in decentralised urban and semi-rural learning centres. The purposes of these centres are to provide support for adult learners on an individual basis and through face-to-face tutorials. Several learning centres were established throughout the country as pilot projects. Researcher Irene Chadibe is investigating the impact of the face-to-face tutorial support programme aimed at securing throughput for disadvantaged adult learners via a network of learning centres in urban and semi-rural communities. The investigation has focussed mainly on examining the extent to which adult learners make use of the tutorial support services and the level at which the learners' expectations are met by the tutorial programme. The study was conducted in two of the five UNISA urban-based learning centres and in two of the three rural-based satellite centres, situated in three provinces, Gauteng, North West Province and Northern Province. In sharing her findings, she will reflect on the relationship between adult education and democracy. She will share her perspectives on the impact of democracy on the lives of adult learners in higher education. She will extend the analysis of her findings to a critique of the successes and failures of democracy in redressing South Africa's political and economic inequalities.

The democratic transformation in South Africa has been narrowly linked to the transformation of its economy. In fact, the relationship between political and economic transformation has been conceptually linked. The government's new education and training policies for adults reflect an explicit political and economic agenda which reflects a strong commitment to democratic values and macro-economic policies. While it is clear that the national government has shaped the education and training policies, it is also evident that these policies have been influenced by international agencies. This is not unusual as it conforms with a trend which has emerged throughout the world since the 1980s. It is this trend which has essentially internationalised the education policy arena. The influences of international agencies on South Africa's education and training policies illustrate an interplay between the South African government and bilateral agencies (and the foreign governments which they represent); multi-lateral agencies; and international financial institutions. Critical questions are prompted, "How have international agencies shaped the paradigm of social transformation in which the new education and training policies have been framed in South Africa?" "What political and economic philosophies, ideologies and values have they promoted?" "Have these complemented the political and economic agenda evident in South Africa's education and training policies for adults?" or "Have these created tensions and contradictions?" It is generally known that international agencies seek to influence national education policies through an array of development policies. These policies range from general to being country-specific. Researcher Zelda Groener is analysing the influences which international agencies have had on the transformational framework of the South African government's education and training policies. She is attempting to develop a more in-depth understanding of these influences by investigating of the political and economic rationale underlying these agencies' development policies. But what has prompted the rise to prominence of these international agencies in the education policy arena raises interest. Some critics argue that the emergence of neo-liberal forces has prompted the rise to prominence of international political and economic forces, including those of international agencies. They further claim that the internationalisation of markets, promoted by neo-liberal economics, has necessitated the internationalisation of political, economic and education policies. Has neo-liberal development

prompted a shift towards an emphasis, in the adult educational arena, on training. Is the shift toward neo-liberalism, forging a closer relationship between education and training, a phenomenon reflected in the education policies of this country. Reflecting on the findings, Groener will critically analyse whether the shift towards neo-liberalism, has compromised the attainment of democracy. Advancing the analyses, she will share perspectives on the relationship between adult education, neo-liberalism and democracy.

While South Africa and Chile, among many others, proceed apace as newly-democratising societies, Mexican researcher, Juan Madrigal Goerne argues that Mexico's democracy has not benefitted that country's indigenous peoples and marginalised groups. Under the democratic government in Mexico, professionalism in adult education has secured certain rights for adult educators, accompanied by required codes of conduct; professional standards, registration procedures and legislated policies. This is very similar to the professional procedures in the medical and law fields. In fact the origins of the notion of professionalism can be traced to those fields and Goerne argues that the concept of professionalism has therefore been shaped by the very nature of the medical and law fields. Professionalism, through its legislative frameworks also facilitates the operation of executive, legislative and judicial powers of the democratic government. But does professionalism in the field of adult education facilitate democratisation which

benefits indigenous peoples? Asserting that there is a dynamic relationship between teaching practices, the professionalisation of adult educators and the parameters which define the profession, Goerne investigated the relevance of professionalism in providing adult education, as a right, to indigenous peoples and women who live in the margins of the society. A common response of many governments to illiteracy has been to provide literacy and basic education which have little relevance to the lives of the adult learners. In this mould, professional adult educators are singularly directed at teaching adults to read and write. The interrelationships between the social, political and economic roles which characterise the lives of adult learners, seem to demand a different kind of adult educator. Can a narrowly-defined professional adult educator serve much of a purpose? The multifaceted nature of the learners' lives prompts a multi-pronged approach to adult education, which in turn challenges the professional parameters of the straight-jacketed professional adult educator. Fascinated by these challenges, Goerne has investigated the lives of adult educators in Latin America and the Caribbean, probing their backgrounds, educational contexts, teaching practices, their notions of profession and their perceptions of themselves as professionals. Prompted by his findings, he has developed new perspectives on the relationship between professionalisation of adult educators, democratisation and the needs of marginalised adult learners.