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Community as an Open Site of Adult Education

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Abstract: The author analyzed the functions of social units, how adult education serves community, and how non-adult education organizations in community can become adult education sites and provide adult educational services to community. The author argues that community is an open site for adult education; analyzing how adult education serves community and how non-adult education organizations interrelate to adult education will help us locate the adult education opportunities in community and fully integrate the learning resources in community into adult education activities.

The Purpose of the Study

Adult education is a broad term; it is not confined to the school setting. Every social unit in community can be an adult education site. Formal adult education and workplace-based adult education have been broadly discussed. Some scholars have also discussed how the organizations and institutions in community can serve as an avenue of adult education (for example, Ferro, 1990). Adult education should extend to community and lift the whole population to a higher intelligence level and bring the population happiness (Leipziger, 1916). It is meaningful to know how social units in community context serve as sites for adult education. In this paper, I will explore scholars' views on how community can serve as an open site for adult education and how we can integrate multiple local resources from a variety of social units in community into adult education activities.

Functions of Social Units in Community

The providers of adult education should be all the social units in community, such as companies, governmental institutes, families. Tobias's (2000) study of the provision of education and training opportunities for adults in the late 1980s and early 1990s in New Zealand indicates that most of the adult education programs for active citizenship "were organized by 'non-educational' groups i.e., groups that did not have education as a primary function. Sixty-six percent of all educational programmes for active citizenship were organized by 550 of these community groups and voluntary organizations" (p.422), which shows that non-educational organizations can play an important role in providing adult education to local people. Adult education programs and services provided in the community could be conducted together with other organizations, such as businesses, government agencies, service organizations (Zemlo, Clark, Lauff, & Nelson, 1990). Social service agencies, as well as public and private organizations could partner with schools to support academic and enrichment programs.

Understanding the functions of a community can help us to understand the basic structure of a community and how we can locate adult education opportunities provided by the social units in a community. Warren (1978) regarded that a community is a combination of social units and systems which perform five major social functions: Production-distribution-consumption, socialization, social control, social participation, and mutual support. Production-distribution-consumption is a process by which social units such as businesses and religious, educational, and governmental institutions produce, distribute, and consume goods/services in a community. Socialization is a process by which social units such as formal school systems and families transmit socially accepted knowledge, values, and behavior patterns to members in community.

Social control is a process by which social units such as governments, families, schools, churches and other social agencies influence the behaviors of the members in a community towards conformity through laws, norms, education, campaign activities, etc. Social participation — people interacting with their community, is generously provided by religious organization such as churches. Other social units also provide local access to social participation, such as businesses, government offices, family, friendship groups, public health and welfare agencies. Mutual support, in the form of taking care of the sick, helping families in difficulties, etc., was traditionally supported by family, relatives, friends, and neighborhood and religious groups. This traditional support network was gradually replaced by professional organizations such as public and welfare agencies, insurance companies (Warren, 1978). However, in some traditional communities such as Amish communities, the traditional mutual support system of family, friends and fellow parishioners is still very much in place, particularly since the Amish do not believe in commercial medical insurance or pension plans nor do they rely on outside agencies: "due to Amish beliefs in self-sufficiency, separation from the-world, and mutual aid, the Amish have generally rejected any kind of formal assistance that comes from outside the Amish community, including commercial health insurance"(Greksa & Korbin, 2004, p.559).

Deggs and Miller (2011) suggest that citizens' interacting with social units such as formal education bodies, civic agencies, informal associations, religious organizations, and home life impacts their individual identity development and life choices. A combination of influences from multiple resources in social units will affect "the formation of social capital and, thereby, the development of the individual citizens" (Deggs & Miller, 2011, p.27).

Adult Education in Community

Adult education serves community through the forms of formal education, non-formal education, and informal education. Formal education is intentional, planned, structured, systematic education provided from school through university to training institutions. For example, community schools provide some certificate-based training to adult learners. Non-formal education is organized, non-credit based education provided outside of the formal education system. For example, community groups, institutions and organizations organize some workshops to help immigrants to settle down in their host communities. Informal education is the spontaneous educational experience gained from interacting with family, work, neighborhood, workplace, media, etc. (Eshach, 2007; Smith, 2001). For example, cultural institutions such as libraries, museums, parks, and zoos can serve as sites of informal adult education. A cultural institution "is a repository that focuses on collecting, and/or preserving a body of knowledge. Manuscripts, documents, animals, plants, natural landmarks, and unique objects form the heart of the cultural institution and serve as the content for all educational activities" (Taylor, Parrish, & Banz, 2010, p.329). Cultural institutions are ideal sites for informal adult education. "Adults are creating learning spaces outside of formal educational boundaries. Learning is occurring in naturally forming communities around educational, environmental, social, and civic life situations" (Stein, & Imel, 2002, p.93).

Adult education serves community and influences community in three ways. The first way is to provide training and non-formal vocational education. The providers of the training activities can be educational and non-educational organizations. Non-educational organizations such as companies, religious and governmental institutions which engage in production-distribution-consumption can provide training and educational services to their employees. For

example, Ferro (1990) discussed the fact that some social and fraternal organizations provided leadership training and personal development opportunities for their members and to the public. The second way is to provide educational services such as survival education or leisure education. For example, community centers provide non-formal training for unemployed workers, train unemployed workers how to write a résumé, and how to prepare for a job interview; some libraries provide English language programs for new immigrants. Adult education institutions can collaborate with organizations such as churches, neighborhood associations, immigrant organizations, and career centers which engage in the functions of social participation and mutual support to provide adult education services to local people (Veen, 2003; Warren, 1978).

The third way that adult education can serve community is to raise people's consciousness through campaigns, social movements, etc. (Veen, 2003). Adult education institutions can collaborate with the social units such as governments, schools, and churches which engage in social control, socialization and social participation to provide consciousness-raising activities. The forms of the consciousness-raising activities could be various, for example, organizing campaigns and social movements, and providing educational activities. Some social and fraternal organizations have provided programs to influence public attitudes and policy, and have been involved in diverse or general educational efforts and services. The formats of adult education provided by these organizations are magazines, newsletters, conferences, manuals, workshops, seminars, etc. They also influence the public through grants, scholarships, awards, and other forms of assistance to support special projects (Ferro, 1990). Some big philanthropic organizations such as the Ford foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Spencer foundation influence government policies and public opinions by providing grants and scholarships which reflect the values of these organizations. For example, the Ford Foundation strengthens democratic values by providing grants to help people gain knowledge, promote collaboration and solve their problems locally (Ford Foundation, 2014).

Adult education institutions influence the local community through public educational forums. Democracy and civilization can be pursued through public instruction and the lecture system (Leipziger (1916). For example, the free lecture movement and free lectures for the public in New York City provided people not only with the opportunities to discuss important public affairs, community issues, and special local needs, but also to suggest solutions to the problems of community. Some free lectures were presented by city or state officials and related to government and neighborhood meetings. The public lectures and discussions increased community feeling and consciousness. Activities such as serving people from all walks of life, and involving people in public affairs and community issues lead to democracy. The public lecture system "reaches all classes of society for the audiences are truly democratic. It brings culture in touch with the uncultured, adds to the stock of information of the people and nourishes their ideals" (Leipziger, 1916, p.217).

Adult education influences community by assisting local people to work with local agents to deal with local issues. In Clough, Laird, and McLearn's (1997) study, citizens had regular meetings over extended periods of time in which they worked as partners with government and discussed the issues and strategies for addressing health issues. Besides regular citizens, professional adult educators and specialized experts in community play their unique roles in implementing and managing adult education in community context. Zemlo, Clark, Lauff, and Nelson (1990) stated that education in the community context should still keep the traditional advisory councils to "facilitate community involvement in needs assessment, program planning,

evaluation and promotion, and building organizational and political support" (Qualities of a leader, para. 9). They also recommended forming task-specific groups with specialized expertise to formulate and implement specific solutions to complex problems in community.

Adult Education Interrelating with Non-Educational Organizations

Non-educational institutions serve the public in various ways. One of these ways is to provide education-related services to the public. Understanding how these organizations serve the public will help adult educators to find a way to collaborate with these organizations and utilize the existing learning resources and opportunities provided by these organizations.

Non-educational institutions can combine their missions with adult education and transform them into adult education activities. These institutions use adult education as an avenue to achieve their own missions. For example, Chautauqua is an adult education organization which focused on self-improvement through education. It was originally created by two Methodist ministers: John Heyl Vincent and Lewis Miller. By the early 1870s, Vincent felt that "the spiritual awakenings experienced at the 'holiness' revivals were too emotional, too superficial. A revitalized and more effective Sunday school, Vincent reasoned, would root evangelical Protestantism in the more solid foundation of biblical learning, secular study, and middle-class prosperity" (Kutler, 2003, p.113). In 1873, Vincent and Miller developed a program for adults by combining "various nonreligious educational subjects with typical Sunday school topics" (Pendergast, & Pendergast, 2002, p.118). They adopted the word Chautauqua to cover its evangelical roots. Chautauqua, an adult education organization, was founded through bundling education with religious faith. The Christian mission was embedded in its adult education activities:

> By the 1880s, Chautauqua had evolved into the foremost advocate for adult education, sacred and secular. Its eight-week summer program combined Bible study with courses in science, history, literature, and the arts, while giving visibility to social gospel–minded academics, politicians, preachers, prohibitionists, and reformers… (Kutler, 2003, p.113)

Non-educational organizations can serve as adult education sites. Community-based organizations such as churches, community centers, beauty salons, barbershops are regarded as culturally appropriate and trustworthy contexts for disseminating health information to local people. For example, the Barbershop Health Outreach Program (BBHOP) is a health promotion program to disseminate health information and health care to African-Americans through the existing community infrastructure, such as barbershops. Barbershops provide a trusted environment for African American men to receive health information from lay health educators, barbers. " Based in New York, the Prostate Net Barbershop Initiative currently provides culturally appropriate information to African American men in barbershops through interactive, computerized kiosks in more than 20 locations across 6 states" (Releford, Frencher, Stanley, Yancey, & Norris, 2010, p.337.). Social units such as barbershops are the places which people regularly visit and feel much more convenient and comfortable to interact with. Adult education institutions can bundle with these sites to disseminate information to local adults.

Conclusions

Adult education is not just about providing training and services to individuals and changing their lives. It also influences the public and community and helps to create a democratic society. Adult education should not be confined to the formal school setting;

community is a natural and open site for adult education. Every social unit in community can be the provider of adult education. Social units such as government, family, churches, schools, are the ideal sites for transmitting socially recognized ideas, behaviors, customs, beliefs, etc., to people. They play significant roles in social control and influence people's minds and behaviors through education, norms, laws, etc. Social units such as churches, businesses, and volunteer organizations provide people opportunities for social participation. Professional organizations such as welfare departments, health agencies, insurance companies, churches, and neighborhood groups provide support for people in need of help (Warren, 1978). Providing opportunities for adults to interact with multiple social units and utilizing the educational resources from these social units can affect learners' social capital (Deggs & Miller, 2011).

Adult education serves community through formal, non-formal and informal educational education. Adult education institutions provide local people formal education, and non-formal vocational education/training. Non-adult education organizations in the production-distribution-consumption fields can also provide this type of training and services to their employees.

Besides formal and non-formal education, adult education also influences community through consciousness-raising activities (Veen, 2003). Adult education institutions, governments, schools, and churches are organizations which are capable of providing consciousness-raising activities through various means, such as campaigns, social movements, magazines, newsletters, conferences, manuals, seminars, and grants (Ferro, 1990). Adult education can collaborate with public universities to influence the public through public lectures and forums (Leipziger, 1916). Adult education can also influence community by helping local people to actively interact with governments and community organizations and to fully use community resources to handle community issues. Adult education institutions can work with professional organizations such as advisory councils and task-specific groups to facilitate the activities of community participation and involvement (Clough, Laird, & McLearn, 1997; Zemlo, Clark, Lauff, & Nelson, 1990).

Non-educational institutions either have no connections with adult education or they view education as their secondary purpose, and they use adult education as an avenue to achieve their own missions. For example, Chautauqua is an adult education institution which originally was rooted in a religious institution; religious missions were embedded in adult education activities. Non-educational organizations which do not have much connection with adult education can serve as adult education sites. For example, community-based organizations such as barbershops are regarded as ideal contexts for disseminating health information to local people.

Adult education in community should fully take advantage of community resources and integrate the physical and human resources of community into adult education activities (Brookfield, 1983). Community is an "open classroom" for adult education; community resources such as public forums, cultural performances, festivals, can be integrated into adult education activities. Social units, such as churches, families, barbershops, and business centers can become providers of adult education, or the sites of adult education. Community is an open site of adult education, and adult education institutions should take advantage of the learning resources embedded in the social units in community. Understanding the social functions of social units, how they provide educational services to community, and how they can become adult education sites will help us locate the adult education opportunities in community.

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