Chapter 9
Social Justice and Adult Education

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ABSTRACT

It should be understood that the importance of adult education is to illuminate the current context in which the adult functions. This adult frames directly linked with the construct of social justice. Adult education is examined under two frames: (a) Merriam and Brockett (1997) who define adult education as "…activities intentionally designed for the purpose of bringing about learning among those whose age, social roles, or self-perception define them as adults" and, (b) Horton's philosophy developed under the Highlander Folk School. Understanding this correlation of adult education within a social-political phenomena, the nature of adult education may belong to a wide-ranging spectrum of teaching and learning in terms of: (a) media messaging and the rhetoric that may be inculcating adults, ultimately swaying public opinion; (b) adult messaging and totalitarian implications; (c) adult education and the state; (d) knowledge of history; (e) the history of adult education and how it has been instrumental in social justice; and (f) what adult education, inclusive of adult educators, must do to mitigate class hegemony.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, adult education has had a variety of names, purposes, and iterations including, but not limited to: university extension, popular education, home education, adult religious education, distance learning, continuing education, adult basic education, and lifelong learning (Merriam

& Brockett, 1997). Many times, adult education is also poised to be remedial in nature and may be supposed as an addition to K-12 public school (Apps, 1979). In addition, adult education may take on an institutionalized formal hue or more of an informal nature (Coombs, Prosser, & Ahmed, 1973).

But, it is within the framework of social justice that adult education can be expanded. According to Horton (as cited in Horton & Freire, 1990)

adult education can be stipulated as radical adult education, which embodies the love of one's fellow man, honoring the idea that people can learn and formulate their own life mission with their own set of experiences. Wang and Kania-Gosche (2010) offer a description of social justice in terms of the values of Confucius' "silent reflection" and "Mezirow's critical reflection to combat external ideologies such as communism, capitalism or fascism characterized by hegemony, alienation, bigotry, racism, inequality or corruption" (Wang & Kania-Gosche, 2010, p. 137). Talmadge and Brookfield (2009) illuminate Du Bois's *Basic American Negro Creed,* and express adult education through the lens of civil rights. It is through all of these philosophies that a connection between social justice and adult education can be venerated.

This article will examine: (1) two adult educational philosophies, one by Merriam and Brockett and the other by Horton; (2) concepts of adult education versus indoctrination; (3) mass media use as an educational messaging; and (4) examples of historic adult messaging used by government and corporate hegemonic factions. The article will continue with how knowledge of history, the history of adult education and its social justice past, play a role in a continuation of social justice for the adult, and will conclude with a recommendation section.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

…the oppressed lack critical consciousness of the forces that control their lives, and lacking that consciousness, they are powerless to redress the oppression that dominates their lives. The role of adult education is, through dialogue with learners, to facilitate acquisition of critical consciousness. Once learners become conscious of the forces that control their lives, they become empowered, and empowerment leads to action (Freire, 1970, p. 47).

Part of the definition of adult education is obviously self-evident because it simply constitutes the teaching of an adult and one who has maturity due to age (Paterson, 1979). However, in terms of adult education as a holistic ideology, Merriam and Brockett (1997) define adult education as "… activities intentionally designed for the purpose of bringing about learning among those whose age, social roles, or self-perception define them as adults" (p. 8). In essence, if we take the idea of an intentional format to bring about some type of learning that can inevitably affect an adult, this broad concept fits almost any type of exposure an adult has to a stimulus. Therefore, any action or transfer of information is conceivably adult learning. To take this concept further, adult messaging, including those messages that could be used for indoctrination purposes, i.e., the media, could also be considered adult education.

Horton alludes to adult education as teaching and learning in an effort to defeat oppression by helping people formulate their own life mission with their own set of experiences (Heaney, 1996). In this framework, adult education can create social change through political action that will inevitably drive social justice (Heaney, 1996). Horton's search for social justice, through the Highlander Folk School focused on the ideals of "education for social change" (Heaney, 1996, p. 14). Horton's resolve is that education "…must be grounded in the real and realizable struggles of people for democratic control over their lives" (Heaney, 1996, p. 54).

Media as Adult Education

It is the intellectuals in this sense who decide what views and opinions reach us, which facts are important enough to be told to us, and in what form and from what angle they are to be presented. The class does not consist of only journalists, teachers, ministers, lecturers, publicists, radio commentators, writers of fiction, cartoonists, and artists

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