

Creativity, Social Justice and Human Rights within Adult Education

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the author describes philosophical concepts of adult learning and their application as integrated with creative problem solving within the context of social justice and human rights. The context is framed by the work of the United Nations (1992) which emphasizes importance of women's roles and creativity in the process of forming a global community. Foundational theories (Gardner, 1999; Greene, 1995; Knowles, 1975; Lawrence, 2005; & Vygotsky, 1978) are connected to support this philosophical approach to adult learning. Creative application examples are shared featuring changes in women's education and subsequently their lives such as, a project guided by artist, Vic Muniz (Walker, Jardim, Harley, & Muniz, 2010) and an arts-based education program that changed the lives of incarcerated women in one female correctional facility (Mullen, 1999). The goal of this paper is to provide examples of how creativity and arts-based learning can be integrated within adult education promoting social justice and human rights.

Keywords: Adult Education, Creativity, Education, Human Rights, Social Justice

1. INTRODUCTION

Folding and twisting selected potato chip wrappers, May, a female inmate creates a bouquet of flowers emerging from the trash bin. May's poetry expresses her artistic intent with the lines, "Then I took the trash turning it inside out and formed beautiful glowing flowers" (Mullen, 1999, p. 144). Creatively, she reaches inside out to express her personal experience in an arts-based prison workshop that intends to

give "form and expression to personal artistry within a social context" (Mullen, 1999, p. 144).

The experiences of May and other women in the arts-based prison workshop demonstrate the power of creativity to inspire personal changes and express new learning or understanding in their lives (Mullen, 1999). In this paper, the author describes an approach to adult education that explores the relationship of creativity and adult learning, while promoting social justice and human rights. The overall purpose of this

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paper is to further connect teaching and learning through the arts and adult education, which may continue and spark conversations among adult educators about the role and value of arts-based learning within this context (Lawrence, 2005).

Arts-based learning and creativity play a role in adult education as an outlet for personal expression, intuition and integrated ways of knowing (Lawrence, 2005). For the purpose of this paper, the arts include dance (creative movement), drama (theatrical performance), music (instrumental and vocal), and visual arts (all media, including but not limited to: drawing, painting, printing, sculpture, textiles). Arts-based learning or arts integrated learning integrates authentic arts experiences to knowledge in different areas such as, psychology, mathematics, language arts (written and oral expression in all genres), science, and cultural studies. Creative problem solving as part of arts-based learning allows for expression of innovative and imaginative understandings of the world and phenomena. Through arts-based learning, the arts become a part of life connecting the social, psychological, philosophical, and physical aspects of a person's understanding, inspiration, spirit, intellect, and emotion. All parts of the self can lead to expression in art as a part of life (Lawrence, 2005). Randee Lipson Lawrence (2005) aptly describes how the arts contribute to adult learning:

Artistic forms of expression extend the boundaries of how we come to know, by honoring multiple intelligences and indigenous knowledge. Artistic expression broadens cultural perspectives by allowing and honoring diverse ways of knowing and learning. Making space for creative expression in the adult education classroom and other learning communities helps learners uncover hidden knowledge that cannot easily be expressed in words. It opens up opportunities for adult learners to explore phenomena holistically, naturally, and creatively, thus deepening understanding of self and the world (p. 3).

Arts-based learning can be situated within the framework of adult education, which in turn is surrounded by the larger issue of social justice and human rights. This conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 1 and provides a visual of the approach discussed in this paper.

With this concept of adult education in mind, consider how learning occurs everywhere (work, home, and in communities), allowing for effective functioning in a changing world. Adult learners desire to understand concepts that matter in the world; these concepts may be related to the workplace, community, and global issues. Change is often a critical factor in adult learning. Consequently, when new concepts are introduced, a conflict resulting from change may cause an initial retreat to existing behavior/understanding before final acceptance or rejection of the new concept or method of behavior. Adult learners often wish to personalize or individualize learning, which can enrich their learning potential (Knowles, 1984). Self-directed learning is a process:

...in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes (Knowles, 1975, p. 18).

Malcolm Knowles (1984) explains the assumptions of adult learning that are necessary to guide self-directed learning:

- Self-concept moves from dependent to independent;
- Experience builds over time providing a foundation for learning;
- Readiness to learn is directed towards adult roles;
- Orientation to learning is focused on problem solving and application; and
- Learning motivation is internalized.

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