

Chapter 94

From Politicized Adult Education to Market Oriented Adult Higher Education: How Adult Education Practice in One Region is Different from Another

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the general instructional modes of adult educators in Southeast China and Northeast China. The study utilized Conti's (1983, 2004) Principles of Adult Learning Scale (PALS) to measure instructional modes of adult educators. Data were collected from 112 randomly selected participants engaged in teaching Chinese adult learners in Southeast China and Northeast China. The results of the study showed that adult educators in Southeast China were andragogical in their instruction while their counterparts in Northeast China were pedagogical although the difference ($p > 0.05$) between the means of adult educators in Southeast China and Northeast China was not statistically significant.

INTRODUCTION

It is a truism that a nation's politics and educational policies shape its adult education practice, and the People's Republic of China is no exception. China has relied upon adult education to promote desired

changes in political ideology, socio-economic relations, and human productive capabilities (Wang & Colletta, 1991). National leadership especially viewed the post-secondary sector as contributing directly to research and development because they believed that the training of specialized personnel would improve the forces of production (Xiao, 1998, p. 189). As formal higher education was

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incapable of satisfying the high demand for manpower needs in the society, the national leadership quickly turned to adult education viewed as an alternative or complementary track whose role it was to educate and train adult learners. Thus, the development of adult education was put on the national agenda as an imperative for human resource development (Xiao, 1998, p. 190). However, it must be pointed out that China has never deviated from political ideologies which have influenced all education sectors including adult education. A few individuals from Confucius, Marx to Mao, have shaped adult education practice in China. One of the noteworthy “walking on two legs” strategy (i.e., uniting theory with practice) was initiated by Mao and it has guided (or misguided) adult education practice from pre-Cultural Revolution, Cultural Revolution, to Post-Mao “Reform and Open Door” policy. This strategy was interpreted and applied differently during different periods of time in Chinese history between Pre-Cultural Revolution and Post-Mao “Reform and Open Door” policy. Because of its application of this national strategy, adult education like all other sectors in education became marginalized. As in many other countries, adult education became political education in China during the Pre-Cultural Revolution and Cultural Revolution (1949-1965). It was not until the “Reform and Open Door” policy that the Chinese leaders began to legitimize adult education and develop a dual system to address the issue of a rising demand for adult education and lifelong learning (Xiao, 1998, p. 192).

From its politicized adult education to its current market oriented adult higher education, adult education in China has positively contributed to the modernization of China in the past 20 to 30 years. Following decades of continual economic reform, the country’s foreign currency reserves reached a record \$1 trillion as of March, 2007, as factories churned out goods for markets around the world (Goodman, 2006). The Chinese govern-

ment announced the formation of a new agency to oversee investment of China’s \$1 trillion in foreign currency reserves, representing a potent new force in international finance (Yardley & Barboza, 2007). Although economic policies and institutions have fostered China’s economic growth at a considerable rate, the efficient utilization of adult education and human resources played a major role in accomplishing this economic growth. As Confucius illustrated in the 5th century BC, no nation goes bankrupt educating its people (as cited in Van Der Linde, 2007, p. 45); the same thing can be said about the importance of adult education, for its adult workforce is the backbone of any national economy.

Despite its importance and legitimacy of adult education in China, no empirical research has been conducted to determine the extent to which adult education practice in one less economically developed region is different from another more economically developed region in China. No empirical research has been conducted to determine the extent to which the notions of andragogy and pedagogy are practiced accordingly from one region to another in China. As the Chinese leaders put different priorities to develop different regions, it must have led to different adult education strategies and practice in different regions in China. For example, the Southeast China was opened to the outside world in the early 1980s; a few years later, the Northeast China was opened to Western industrialized nations and the rest of the world. The different economical development speed must have led to different adoption of adult education strategies and practice in order to meet the manpower needs of the Chinese society.

The significance of this research is far reaching in that Western educators and those concerned with adult education in China will become familiar with adult education strategies and practice in different regions in China. With the marginalization of adult education in history to its present legitimization of adult education in higher education, those

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