

Chapter 66

Adult Education and Globalization

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ABSTRACT

The chapter discusses how globalization has affected institutional changes in adult education. In the background it introduces first the necessary definitions and presuppositions for the analysis of both adult education and globalization, and second, it highlights the underpinnings of the changes in adult education and learning in the last decades. The main thrust of the chapter deals with three main issues that relate adult education and globalization: first, the importance of contexts, systems and trends in changing adult education under the age of globalization; second, the relation between globalization and adult education and lifelong learning policies; and thirdly, the case of lifelong learning policies in the European Union is presented as an example of supra-national continental economic and political integration on national policies. Finally, after pointing to several future research directions, some concluding remarks are offered.

INTRODUCTION

Modern globalization can be generally understood as an intensification of world-wide interdependencies and relations between societies and individuals. This intensified world-wide interdependency has been stimulated and facilitated by the rise of the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Simultaneously, the ongoing shift

from industrial economies towards knowledge-based economies in the most developed part of the world has coincided with a rapid process of industrialization in many developing countries, and with the emergence of new forms of social structuration, stratification and inequalities. At societal level, life-age stages have become more blurred under volatile and longer life-projects, and professional and personal evolutions have acquired a more permanent feature in complex labor careers. Adulthood is thus redefined and perceived

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as a period of maturity with continuing change. All these changes call for a new re-conceptualization of the role of education, training and learning in societies in the 21st century.

Current debates on modern globalization do not exhaust interpretations and conclusions. Globalization is a highly complex phenomenon and process that social sciences are only beginning to understand. However, and inspired mainly by some empirical evidence, two main general aspects can be suggested to frame how to understand modern globalization: a) the crucial discussion on the winners and losers of globalization, while socio-economic inequalities have increased in the last decades; b) that modern globalization is better characterized by its cultural nature in the actual expansion and intensification of world-wide interdependencies (Dodri, Meyer, & Hwang, 2006). This modern world-wide transformation process is argued to have two main dynamics or trends. First, a “diffusion process” of similar practices and patterns world-wide, which contribute to the rise of a world-wide polity, society and culture. Second, an “increased international inter-dependency” between and among societies beyond the boundaries of the increasingly weakened nation-states, thus, opening for a higher influence of global factors on the realities of local societies and communities, and groups and individuals.

Adult education, after the general industrial era of the second half of the 20th century, has now become part of the discussions and analyses about the role of information, knowledge and learning in the emerging society, and analysis has evolved towards a adult learning perspective. In a growing number of societies and economies (industrializing, advanced industrialized, and service and knowledge-intensive) adults are increasingly expected to develop and manage on-going life projects combining work and education, in order to acquire the necessary skills to carry out their professional and personal careers (Brown, Green, & Lauder, 2001, Crouch, Finegold, & Sako, 1999). The development of general and specific skills in

the current business and labor markets has tended to be a difficult task for states, as Culpepper (2003) argues after analyzing the different ways by which states aimed to upgrade workforce’s skills in industrial Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in two localities in Germany and France. Traditionally, adult learning has been characterized as having a double dimension: a) the organized formal teaching and instruction programs; and b) the incorporation of practice and experience as a source of learning. The integration of the two dimensions has always been a tension and a potential, an integration which has been somehow especially forced by the globalization process. These two dimensions of adult learning have been institutionalized in the two main traditions of adult learning: adult education and lifelong learning.

Adult education refers to the theoretical and school-based education aimed at different directions and objectives. In this regard, a growing number of educational institutions and organizations have increased their efforts and strategies to develop programs specifically designed to adult population. In the current age of growing world-wide globalization, several adult education programs can be identified: (a) in developing third world countries adult education tends to prioritize social education in combination with provision of basic technical and skills for community development projects; (b) in second-world countries and newly industrialized countries adult education prioritizes general training development, aimed at upgrading the general skill-base of the society; (c) and in advanced industrialized countries adult education tends to take two forms: the humanistic and civic development, and the further training through personalized skill development where personal development, both professional and personal, has become a common and multiple goal. In a nutshell, all these adult training programs can be summarized as “organized learning in adjusted school-based programs”.

Lifelong learning is based very much on the social and practical dimension of learning. This

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