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Adult education, globalisation and inequality in South Africa. Searching for new analytical frameworks

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Abstract Researchers have reported recently that inequalities emerging under conditions of globalisation are creating barriers to participation in adult learning. According to some studies, South Africa has become the most unequal society in the world. Structural inequalities in South African present an opportunity to develop a socio-political perspective to explain how structural inequalities create structural institutional barriers which prohibit black people from participating in adult learning, and to analyse the extent to which these barriers have been addressed. The South African state faces the challenge of creating more fundamental change to address persisting inequalities and barriers to participation in adult learning.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore a new analytical framework referred to as a socio-political perspective to analyse institutional barriers to adult learning and inequality in South Africa. A discussion of apartheid inequalities which created institutional barriers in institutional arrangements such as policy, funding and provision that prohibited black people from participating in adult learning sets the stage. A description of some post-1994 government initiatives to address institutional barriers and the consequences show that many barriers remain. References to international literature contextualise the challenge for the South African state to address the apartheid inequalities which continue to underpin institutional barriers. Consideration of implications for the development of adult education theory and practice concludes this paper.

Barriers to participation in adult learning and inequality

Theoretical perspectives on barriers to participation include learning orientations (Houle, 1961); Theory of Patterned Participation (Knox and Videbeck, 1963); Need Press Theory (Darkenwald, 1975); Recruitment Paradigm, sometimes called Expectancy Valence Theory (Rubenson, 1977); Chain-of-Response Model (Cross, 1981); Psychosocial Interaction Model (Darkenwald and Merriam, 1982) (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2001); and Bounded Agency Model (Rubenson and Desjardins, 2009).

Attention to inequalities have appeared in the literature on participation in adult learning: inequality in adult education participation (Belanger, 2006); social exclusion of immigrants and women (Cohen, 2003); unequal chances to participate in adult learning (Desjardins, Rubenson and Milana, 2006); too many left behind (Myers and de Broucker, 2006); and inequality in access to work-based learning (Rainbird, 2000). In their OECD-commissioned research study Desjardins, Rubenson and Milana discovered structural inequalities in patterns of participation in

adult learning opportunities (2006). Rubenson and Desjardins also suggest that adult education can address structural inequalities in participation in adult learning opportunities and in my view, by implication, address inequalities in the broader society (2009). Desjardins et al, argue that addressing the inequalities in chances to participate implies 'public intervention in the planning of AET provision and government support for adult learners' (2006: 113). Following on this argument, Rubenson and Desjardins state that '........ public policy plays a role in attenuating both structurally and individually based barriers to participation' (2009: 196).   In theorising the role of the welfare state, as a vehicle for public policy, and overcoming barriers, they develop a theoretical perspective, which they conceptualise as a 'Bounded Agency Model' (2009, 194).

Socio-political perspective on institutional barriers to participation in adult learning and inequality in South Africa

Building on the theoretical perspectives discussed in the literature, I develop a socio-political perspective on barriers to participation in the context of inequality in South Africa. The elements of this perspective are captured in the following arguments: firstly, that structural socio-political inequalities have created structural institutional barriers to learning; secondly, that the state has embarked on political initiatives to address institutional barriers; and thirdly, that addressing inequality is a prerequisite for removing these institutional barriers.

Institutional barriers to adult basic education and the legacy of racial inequality.
As a component of apartheid inequality, racial inequality emanated from structural socio-political inequalities that were reproduced by the apartheid ideology, and manifested in contexts such as adult basic education. The apartheid state created racially-defined policies, institutional structures, funding, and provision as structural institutional barriers, which prohibited black adults from participation in adult basic education opportunities.

To contextualise the discussion about institutional barriers, I refer briefly to statistics which reveal the consequences of apartheid institutional barriers to participation in adult basic education. Over many decades prior to the 1994 non-racial, democratic elections, apartheid institutional barriers at the different levels of education had created a significantly large number of black adults who had not attended any school at all or completed grade 9. In their analysis of the 1996 General Population Census, Aitchison et al. show that in the age group 15 and over, of the 8.5 million who have had less than grade 7[1]; and the 4.2 million who have had no schooling at all, less than 1% are white (Aitchison et al, 2000: 16). This comparison between black and white adults reveals a phenomenal inequality. The following discussions explain how institutional barriers created such inequality.

The apartheid government instituted institutional barriers racially-defined policies. Although not specific to adult education, some policies were related. To illustrate the racial character of the policies, I refer to two policies that is, the amended Education and Training Act No. 90 of 1979 which governed the provision of adult education for Africans through the Department of Education and Training (DET) and the National Culture Promotion Act No.27 of

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[1] The adult population who have less than grade 7 is not homogeneous. Included are people who have not attended school at all to those who are merely one subject short of completing Grade 7.

1969, which was the policy that governed provision of adult education for Whites (National Education Policy Investigation, 1993:.13).

Premised on the racially-defined policies, apartheid institutional barriers were structured into the government's institutional structures. Similar to other sectors of education, the government's system of provision of adult basic education was fragmented across the racially-and-ethnically-defined departments of education, reflective of the political economic geography of apartheid. 21 racially-defined departments of education distributed across South African and the former homelands. The names of the various department changed over time, but to illustrate the racial definition, I mention the names of those departments which existed at the time of the 1994 elections, the Department of Education and Training (DET) for African people, the House of Representatives for Coloured people, the House of Delegates for Indian people and the Department of Education for White People. Governments of the homeland states in Transkei, Bophutatswana, Venda and Ciskei also provided adult basic education. Furthermore, the Department of Education (DET) serviced the provision of adult basic education by homeland governments in QwaQwa, Lebowa, Gazankulu, Kwazulu and Kangwane (National Education Policy Investigation, 1992: 11).

These racially-defined institutional structures shaped the racially-defined funding and provision of adult education. In 1992 researchers discovered that 'There are currently less than 100 000 adults learning literacy and adult basic education in South Africa. This is less than 1% of the number who are illiterate or semi-literate' (National Education Policy Investigation, 1992:9). This investigation also revealed that 'The current budget for AE within the DET system was less than half a per cent (0.49%) of the total DET budget' (National Education Policy Investigation, 1993: 23). The latter points to the inadequacy of funding for adult education.

Post-1994 state initiatives to address apartheid institutional barriers to participation in adult basic education

Since the elections in 1994, the post-1994 state made the following structural changes to address institutional barriers to participation in adult basic education: (1) policy changes; (2) institutional and systemic changes; and (3) increased funding and provision.

Racially-defined adult education policies were repealed and replaced by new policies. Adult education was constituted as a human right in the Bill of Rights of the South African constitution. Structural institutional changes saw 21 racially-defined departments of education merged into one national department of education and 9 provincial departments of education. Some provinces established directorates or sub-directorates for the provision of adult education. In some instances, systems of delivery remained the same as these new institutions carried out the same kind of 'adult night schooling' which the apartheid government and the homeland governments had provided prior to 1994. Provision is related closely to funding. Minimal structural changes in the expansion of provision could be attributed to minimal structural changes in respect of funding for adult basic education. For more than a decade after the democratic election, there was no significant redistribution of funding for adult basic education in the public education sector to enable government to address the scale of inequalities in adult basic education. Several writers corroborate the latter (Groener, 2000) (Aitchison et al. 2000) (Baatjes and Mathe, 2000). This is exemplified in the literacy campaigns which were initiated with little or no funding.

Post-1994 state initiatives: success and failure in addressing institutional barriers.

Have the post-1994 state initiatives addressed the institutional barriers to participation to the extent that larger numbers of black adults are participating in adult basic education? In 2006 Aitchison and Harley re-examined '..... South Africa's illiteracy statistics (based largely on Household surveys and the 1996 Census data) which formed the baseline starting point for various government adult education provision and campaign goals (such as Education for All and the South African National Literacy Initiative), and found that the actual number of illiterates has not been significantly reduced (if indeed they have been reduced) by such interventions' (p.89). The authors dispute in particular the 2001 census, which indicates '.... the case of the magically growing number of literacy and ABET learners' (Aitchison and Harley, 2006: 89). While I do not expound on their disputes, I point to their arguments showing that little has changed in respect of black African people, and women. They show that '... the vast majority of adults with little or no education in 2001 were black Africans (93.9%), as was the case in 1996. Since there are far more black Africans living in South Africa this is to be expected' (Aitchison and Harley, 2006: 96).

The statistical analyses indicating proportions across race reveal that little has changed '........... just over one in five (22.3%) adult black Africans in this country in 2001 had no schooling at all, compared to just over one hundred Whites (1.4%)' (Aitchison and Harley, 2006: 97). The statistics in respect of women shows a dramatic decline in the number of women who have no schooling, proportionately to men. Relying on a comparison between the 1996 and 2001 censuses, Aitchison and Harley argue that 'Whereas in 1996 there were 685,216 more adult women who had never been to school than men, by 2001 this had increased to 906,990' (2006, 98).

As mentioned earlier, in their analysis of the 1996 General Population Census, Aitchison et al. show that in the age group 15 and over, 8.5 million had less than grade 7; and the 4.2 million who have had no schooling at all (Aitchison et al, 2000: 16). According to the 2001 General Population Census, in the statistics for the 'highest level achieved' in the group aged 20 and older, there were 5.8 million who had grade 7 and less; and 4.6 million who had no schooling at all. Of those who had grade 7 and less, 4.2 million had some primary education and 1.6 million had completed primary education. If grade 9 is regarded as a crude indicator of literacy, then approximately 10.4 million people, defined here as 'grade 7 and less', require basic adult education. This amounts to roughly 40% of the total number of people in the cohort aged 20 and older (General Population Statistics, 2001: 46).

Premised on my own study of the censuses, I assert that although some categories and criteria differ between the 1996 and 2001 census, these are useful for comparison. The significant discrepancy between 8.5 and 5.8 million people who had less than grade 7 according to the 1996 census and the 2001 census respectively, could be attributed to the differences in the age cohorts between the two censuses. In 1996, the census category for people who had less than grade 7, included those aged between 15 and 65, whereas in 2001, it included those aged 20 and older, thereby excluding people aged between 15 and 19. This is one explanation, but there could be other factors. The rationale for this explanation is to show that the statistics show a decline in the inequalities due to a change in the age cohort under investigation, and not as a result of educational interventions. The evidence presented above reveals that despite the state's political initiatives to address institutional barriers to participation in adult basic education, the response from adult learners has been disappointing.

Government's announcement in 2006, of 6.1 billion rand budget allocation for a literacy campaign over five years, may create a turning-point in redressing inequalities in adult basic education (Segalwe, 2006). The first allocation of 560 million rand for the Kha Ri Gude campaign was announced in the 2007 national budget, intended to be conducted within the ASGI-SA policy framework (Manuel, 2007). The campaign is currently underway. If the state remains committed to spending the entire 6.1 billion rand on the literacy campaign, then it would have addressed to some extent, the structural barriers related to funding, only in respect of the campaign. However, a literacy campaign is usually a short term intervention, and longer-term sustainability of the effectiveness of the campaign should be secured. In addition, and of critical concern is that long-term funding is required for more sustainable provision as a lack of funding may re-surface as an institutional barrier after the conclusion of the campaign. In order to address structural inequalities which continue to prohibit black people from participation in adult basic education, longer-term and sustainable funding is required for incentives such as supplemental income grants for unemployed adults to attend day-time adult learning programmes, and making bursaries available to adult learners. To make this possible the state has to address further, structural inequalities related to structural institutional barriers which prevent building sustainable provision of adult basic education for black adults.

Adult education, inequality and the state.

The state plays a critical role in addressing inequality through adult education. The relationship between adult education and inequality is described by Desjardins, Rubenson and Milana as follows, 'Overall, access to learning is seen by many as a way to reduce inequalities with regard to opportunities and living conditions' (2006: 58). Referring to one of the main findings in their study of 'cross-national and patterns of adult learning, and in particular the unequal chances to participate in adult learning' across selected OECD countries, researchers point out that, 'Government support is the least common source of financing, and overall it does not tend to reach vulnerable groups such as adults who are women, older, less-educated, less-skilled, and/or are in low-skill occupations. Few countries have effective structures in place to support the hard-to-reach' (Desjardins, Rubenson and Milana, 2006: 113). From this I infer that the solution may lie in creating further structural change for such groups to participate in adult learning. In their recent analysis they point out that the welfare state can play a role in creating structural conditions to regulate the distribution of power resources to regulate an equitable distribution of adult learning opportunities (Rubenson and Desjardins, 2009). According to them, Nordic welfare state regimes can construct structural conditions that enable 'individuals to overcome both structurally and individually based barriers', (Rubenson and Desjardins (2009: 203). Framing their analysis in 'power resources theory' they argue that the welfare state can be responsive by creating structural conditions for participation through a distribution of power resources as a vehicle to regulate inequalities in the society.

Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) analysis of the state converges with Holst's treatise on the role of the state in social transformation through adult education (2007). Set in the context of globalisation, using two theoretical perspectives 'strong version of globalisation' and 'longer version of globalisation', he points out the differences in the way that the state has responded in advanced industrial societies and developing societies in Latin America. Holst points out that the proponents of a 'strong version of globalisation' purport the 'end of the nation-state' (2007:

4). Relying on Holst I alert to nation-states who have not fostered the interests of neo-liberal globalisation, exclusively. He cites Third World examples where nation-states which have formed an alliance under ALBA include Bolivia, Nicaragua, Antigua, Barbuda and Dominica to develop a fair trade agreement which opposes the FTAA and neo-liberal globalisation. Likewise in Brazil, the state has played a role in fostering social transformation through adult education – developed education policy and practice premised on a Freirian philosophy. Here the state is considered a central political actor in public education and an institution which plays a key role in fundamental transformation (O'Cadiz, Wong and Torres, 1998: 15) (Holst, 2007: 5).

In order to create the structural conditions for participation, suggested by Rubenson and Desjardins (2009), I pose the question, 'what are the possibilities that the South African state could create the structural conditions to address the structural inequalities which create institutional structural barriers, more fundamentally?' Social democracies or Nordic regime types have presented excellent policies, funding arrangements and systems of delivery to secure equal access for all adults to adult learning opportunities. Premised on the latter I infer the type of democracy and the character of the state may determine the extent to which the South African state could eradicate historical and contemporary inequalities. If the South African state was similar to the Nordic welfare state and located in a social democracy, would the chances for addressing apartheid inequalities in adult basic education be more promising?

Conclusions

Looking into the future I point to some implications for the further development of a socio-political perspective on adult education, globalisation and inequality. Holst (2007) argues that both the civil societarian perspective and the Marxist political economy perspective on adult education have limitations for analysing radical adult education at this historical juncture and that 'we need a new conceptualisation of the politics of radical adult education that goes beyond the two broad perspectives of civil societarian and Marxist orientations'........ (2007: 7). Mojab (2009: 14) however, proposes 'a more sophisticated analysis of the materiality of capitalist social relations, one in which these relations are gendered, racialised and sexualised'. Where to from here?

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