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Considerations Toward how Movements Learn from and Educate each Other: Global Histories from Below from a Pedagogical Standpoint

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Abstract

Using the concept of world histories from below, we present research on the global flow of ideas, protest repertoires, and pedagogies across three social movements in three countries.

Keywords: Social Movement Learning, World Histories from Below, Social Movement Theory

We have been researching (Atta et al., 2021) learning and education in the student movements of Chile, Egypt, and Puerto Rico. In this next stage of our research, we are trying to identify how these relatively co-contemporaneous movements influence and learn from one another. To do this, we draw on concepts from the fields of history and sociology that we believe can guide our research as we expand it to identify how ideas, concepts, movement practices, and movement pedagogies, are shared between the movements across national and regional boundaries. We believe our research can enrich social movement learning and education scholarship in adult education by drawing on these concepts from history and sociology. Moreover, we believe that our pedagogical approach to these concepts can help enrich their usage in history and sociology where the pedagogical nature of social movements is generally overlooked. In short, our research is an effort to build bridges between research on social movements in adult education and the wider social sciences.

As an umbrella concept we are drawing on the idea of world histories from below (Burton & Ballantyne, 2022). This concept has a long history and one not foreign to adult education as it draws inspiration from the pioneering historical studies of adult educators such as E. P. Thompson, Raymond Williams, and W. E. B. Du Bois. When focused on social change through social movements, world histories from below, as Maynes and Waltner (2022) argue, has two main steps or tasks. First, researchers must identify roughly simultaneous movements in different regions of the world that are responding to similar threats or opportunities. In our initial research, we identified and analyzed the student movements in each country within the context of neoliberal capitalism. The second task is to identify “specific global flows—of ideas, people, and political practices—that have connected grassroots movements” (p. 13), and this is the goal of our current research.

We find utility in Katsiaficas’ (1987) concept of the “eros effect” which he defines as “the massive awakening of the instinctual human need for justice and freedom” (p. 10). Katsiaficas argued that the global protest movement of 1968 was a process of mass praxis or “the consciousness-in-action of millions of people” (p. 9). He provides a case study of how global protest spread around the world. In a similar vein, Julius Scott’s (2018) details the global flows

of ideas, news, and resistance strategies by and between Africans and African Americans in the Caribbean basin between the period of the French and Haitian Revolutions. Scott uses the metaphor of the common wind to describe this flow across national, colonial, and maritime boundaries.

From the sociology of social movements literature, the work of Chase-Dunn and Almeida (2020) on transnational movements can also inform our research. They detail the concepts of transnational organizational infrastructure and strategic capacity as ways to understand how movements maintain themselves and communicate and coordinate across national borders. Finally, Appadurai's (1990) conceptualization of five "scapes" of global cultural flow can also help us understand the terrain upon which movements communicate across borders.

While we present these ideas for use in our own research and for consideration by the field of adult education, we are also considering the global flow of "ideas, people and political practices" as forms of social movement learning and education. When we read the historical and sociological literature, we find that the pedagogy necessary for the actualization of these flows is lacking. The common wind for us is an educational space and practice. Likewise, the eros effect or world histories are actually the manifestation of learning and educating across borders and movements. At least, this is the hypothesis we take with us as we explore examples of the flow of ideas, people, and practices across the movements we are studying, such as common grassroots discursive practices between the Egyptian and Chilean student movement, and the tactics and mobilization strategies between the Chilean and Puerto Rican student movement.

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