

Adult Learning in Times of Urgency: Moving Beyond Rhetoric

Different concepts and different perspectives across different cultures: Re-creating Indigenous Australians' storybooks in a

Confronting Nativist Discourse: Drawing Upon a Critical Theory of Adult Education for Humanizing Antagonisms Along The Mexico-U.S. Borderlands

Co-creating and Advancing Knowledge on Professional Activism Engagement and Education

University Education in Prison: the ethnographic story of a (participatory) research journey

Educational Third Places as Sites of Inquiry and Social Emancipation: Lessons from Community-Based Adult Education in Northern Italy

Convivialidad y omnicracia en Iván Illich y Aldo Capitini. Dos caminos para una sociedad liberada

In Memoriam: Dip Kapoor, Michael Newman, Rita Süßsmuth

Book Reviews

Published by the UNESCO Chair in Global Adult Education, Faculty of Education, University of Malta, in cooperation with the International Council for Adult Education

Editorial Committee

Editor

Peter Mayo, *Malta*

Members

Shermaine Barrett, *Jamaica*

Maria Brown, *Malta, Book Reviews Editor*

Alicia Cabezudo, *Argentina*

Prasenjit Deb, *India*

Heribert Hinzen, *Germany*

Timothy Ireland, *Brazil*

Tonic Maruatona, *Botswana*

Katarina Popovic, *Serbia*

Patricia Rodney, *Guyana*

Contents

Convergence Volume 47 Number 1 2026

An International Adult Education Journal

Editorial	1
by Peter Mayo	

Articles

Adult Learning in Times of Urgency: Moving Beyond Rhetoric	3
by Roberta Piazza	
Different concepts and different perspectives across different cultures: Re-creating Indigenous Australians' storybooks in a Melanesian community	19
By Yasuko Nagai	
Confronting Nativist Discourse: Drawing Upon a Critical Theory of Adult Education for Humanizing Antagonisms Along The Mexico-U.S. Borderlands	31
by Jesus Jaime-Diaz	
Co-creating and Advancing Knowledge on Professional Activism Engagement and Education	44
by Ana Luísa Costa, Henrique Vaz and Isabel Menezes	
University Education in Prison: the ethnographic story of a (participatory) research journey	72
by Sandra Vatrella & Maria Chiara Calo'	
Educational Third Places as Sites of Inquiry and Social Emancipation: Lessons from Community-Based Adult Education in Northern Italy	104
by Sabina Barbato	
Convivialidad y omnicracia en Iván Illich y Aldo Capitini. Dos caminos para una sociedad liberada	111
by Carlo Orefice and Antonio Vigilante	

In Memoriam

- Dip Kapoor (2025)* 122
by Ali A. Abdi
- Michael Newman (1939-2025)* 126
by Rick Flowers
- Rita Süssmuth (1937 - 2026)* 132
by Heribert Hinzen

Book Reviews

- Satopathy, S., Suchismita, R., Vásquez Vargas, A & Mishra, M.,**
Occupational Health Safety Factors and Their Impact on the
Mental Health of Workers (1st edition), Singapore, Springer
Nature 2023, 128pp., ISBN-13-978-981-99-7618-8 (pbk) 144
by Kevin Caruana Montaldo
- Slade, B., Mayo, P & Bogossian, T (Eds.)** *Adult Education and*
Difference, Leiden, Brill, 2024, 276, pp., ISBN 978-900-469-2626
(ebk) 148
by Justine Lubnow
- Clancy, S, Sir George Trevelyan, Residential Adult Education and**
the New Age: 'To Open the Immortal Eye', Switzerland, Springer,
2023, 275 pp., ISBN 978-3031-359-545 (hbk) 152
by Analise Muscat Pulis
- Convergence Submission Guidelines** 157

Editorial

Peter Mayo

This issue has been produced against the background of a terrible world scenario, especially in the 'Middle East', characterised by an ongoing genocide of a particular ethnic group and a war that can escalate towards WWII which may well be the war to end all wars and the planet on which it is waged. This situation indeed furnished the global adult education community, and the entire education community for that matter, with a series of pressing challenges.

One is reviving the idea of an Educated Public engaging in well informed debate, predicated on reason and feeling, to address questions from all sides and not simply ethnocentrically.

The debate would be informed by robust research and respect for those agencies that provide it which must be supported and not be made the object of repudiation as had unfortunately been the case with Covid-19. In an age when it is becoming increasingly difficult to separate fact from fiction, often through abuse of the intellect, human or otherwise, this becomes more urgent than ever. The quest for and pursuit of 'truth' remains a key imperative for critical adult education and all education.

Education, and Adult Education, would necessitate communication under democratic conditions at all levels, as Jurgen Habermas, who departed this world while this journal issue went to press, is famous for having written, though recently arousing controversy, among many who revered him, for his jaundiced view of the 'Middle East' situation. Respect for the institution, the UN, created to sustain this global 'public sphere', in the aftermath of two catastrophic World Wars, is necessary. The UN is a key institution which has served, through UNESCO, as an enabler of adult continuing and popular education over the years. The mega rich who currently dominate the world in an era of techno-feudalism, as Yannis Varoufakis calls it, treat this institution with contempt.

Critical education, including critical adult education, would continue to be an antidote for a world when might is portrayed as right and which decrees that the strong flex their muscles and the weak suffer what they must. Under these situations, which have characterised hegemonic powers and their foreign expansionist policies for years, talk of 'democracy' comes cheap and farcical. When any government, which is popularly elected and acts in the interest of the sovereign nation that chose it, is toppled by

colonial covert and overt actions, to gain access to precious resources such as oil, talk of democracy sounds hollow. The post WWII history of 'exporting democracy' through military offensives renders the concept a sham. It is, in many cases, such as Iraq, Venezuela and Iran, a ruse to simply accommodate the demands and geopolitical interests of some, notably the so called 'seven sisters' multinational oil companies.

And yet educators continue to resist and stimulate dreams. They offer a semblance of genuine critical democracy in the pockets in which they operate as has always been the case with popular education, often blurring the boundaries between different age groups in contrast to formalised 'Western' inflected education. Many such examples were presented at the 2025 Critical Adult Learning and Education (CALE 2025) conference in Malta last November. This particular issue of *Convergence. An International Adult Education Journal* comprises some papers originally presented at the conference, namely Roberta Piazza's Keynote and others by Jesus Jaime-Diaz, Sandra Vatrella and Maria Chiara Caló, Ana Luisa Costa, Henrique Vaz and Isabel Menezes and Sabina Barbato. Others from the conference and perhaps also from the annual November UNESCO Chair 'small' seminar will appear in forthcoming issues. This issue also provides us with other material. These include Yasuko Nagai's work on Indigenous people in Australia and Carlo Orefice and Antonio Vigilante's article on Ivan Illich, on this intellectual's Birth Centenary(1926-2026), and Aldo Capitini. The latter's concept of 'Omicrazia' should resonate in light of the concerns regarding grassroots democracy expressed earlier.

The articles on Indigenous populations, in this issue, bring to mind the superb work of Dip Kapoor from the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada. A contributor to *Convergence* in the past, he is well known for his work among 'Southern' Subaltern Social Movements, notably the Adivasi in India. Alas, Dip was taken from this world too soon last year. Ali Abdi, his long time friend and collaborator, pens a tribute to him. In addition, Heribert Hinzen provides a tribute to leading German figure in politics and Adult education, Rita Süßmuth.

Adult Learning in Times of Urgency: Moving Beyond Rhetoric

Roberta Piazza
University of Catania

Introduction: why “beyond rhetoric” still names the problem

In 2003, the OECD’s *Beyond Rhetoric* offered one of the first systematic diagnoses of adult learning across countries. In increasingly knowledge-based and ageing societies, adult learning was framed not as a policy option but as a structural necessity. Yet the diagnosis was already paradoxical: participation remained low, governance fragmented, and coordination weak, with strong inequalities in access and provision. The report called for coherent systems capable of turning policy vision into implementation (OECD, 2003).

Twenty years later, the same challenges persist. Despite expanded strategies and renewed policy agendas, adult learning remains constrained by project-based logic, uneven funding, and an enduring economic bias. The continuing relevance of “moving beyond rhetoric” suggests that the problem lies less in defining goals than in creating the institutional and political capacity to realise them. Stated differently, the enduring gap between ambition and practice is not merely a delivery failure: it is a governance condition.

This paper positions that condition within a longer genealogy. Since the early 1970s, two traditions have shaped the very idea of lifelong learning. A first, humanistic tradition, articulated through UNESCO’s Faure Report (1972) and reaffirmed in the Delors Report (1996), conceived education as a universal right and a foundation for human dignity, democracy, and peace. This humanistic line is often theorised as a citizenship and welfare-oriented model (Regmi 2015). A second tradition, consolidated during the 1980s and 1990s through the influence of the OECD and the World Bank, reframed learning as investment, and adult education as an instrument for productivity, employability, and growth. These genealogies coexist but only partially converge, reflecting

enduring tensions between humanistic aspirations and human-capital imperatives (Lee & Jan 2018).

The paper advances two claims. First, the shift from the right to learn to the obligation to upskill is not merely semantic; it marks a profound ideological reconfiguration of adult learning's purposes and publics. Second, the governance of adult learning has become increasingly dependent on measurement infrastructures that define what counts as learning and who counts as a learner (Piazza, 2009) and on a policy discourse that constructs the 'worthy' adult learner as adaptable and economically productive (Walker 2009). Participation, often treated as a neutral performance indicator, has gradually become a technology of governance (Karger, Kalenda, & Vaculíková, 2025), with significant consequences for inclusion, agency, and the democratic meaning of lifelong learning.

Methodologically, the paper is a conceptual and critical policy analysis grounded in international reports and secondary scholarship: OECD analyses (2003–2025), European policy trajectories and benchmarking logics, CEDEFOP monitoring frameworks and methodological shifts (CEDEFOP, 2024), and UNESCO's GRALE series and related frameworks (2009–2022). The goal is not to add another descriptive overview, but to clarify how global and European governance rationalities shape the problem-definition of adult learning, particularly through participation metrics, and what "moving beyond rhetoric" may entail as a political and institutional agenda.

Two genealogies and a shifting ideology of lifelong learning

The humanistic tradition is anchored in UNESCO's post-war internationalism. The Faure Report (1972) envisaged education as a lifelong process through which individuals fulfil themselves and learn to live together, positioning adult learning at the centre of personal and collective emancipation and the construction of democratic societies. The Delors Report (1996) reaffirmed this view, linking lifelong learning to dignity, democracy, and peace.

The economic tradition consolidated later through OECD and World Bank agendas, reframing learning as investment and adult learning as an instrument for labour-market efficiency and economic competitiveness. This repositioning is not only programmatic but discursive: the OECD progressively framed adult learning within a labour-market efficiency rationale (Rubenson 2015). Yet this apparent complementarity masks an asymmetrical relationship, in which the economic agenda has come to dominate the evaluative framework of adult learning, marginalising humanistic rationales.

This shift can be interpreted through Bourdieu's reminder that no scientific or educational field exists in isolation from the broader social space in predominantly economic, political, and cultural forces (Bourdieu, 2005). Adult education's meaning and legitimacy are continuously redefined within these struggles (Piazza, 2009). The transition from the civic humanism of the 1970s to the learning economies of the 1990s reflects precisely this reconfiguration: from education as a permanent foundation of citizenship to education oriented toward adaptability and competitiveness.

A critical point follows. UNESCO's humanistic discourse, once grounded in universality and peace, has itself undergone a turn toward technocratic frames, adapting to policy environments where evidence, accountability and results-based management increasingly mediate educational purpose and practice (Elfert 2017). UNESCO has not been immune to the technocratic turn that pervades global education governance. The OECD, by contrast, has institutionalised the language of evidence, transforming indicators into instruments of persuasion and governance. Here, the issue is not "data versus values," but the political effects of particular modes of producing evidence: indicators do not simply describe realities; they structure how problems are defined, compared, and governed, becoming instruments of policy coordination and persuasion (Grek 2009).

From diagnosis to inertia: OECD analyses and the reproduction of inequality

The OECD report *Beyond Rhetoric* (2003) identified fragmentation, inconsistent data, and persistent inequalities. Participation was stratified by education, income, age, and employment status. The disparities were striking: during a four-week reference period, participation rates in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden approached one in four adults, while Portugal, Hungary, and Spain remained below five percent. Education emerged as the strongest predictor, with participation declining sharply after midlife (notably after age forty-five). Two years later, *Promoting Adult Learning* (OECD, 2005) reiterated barriers such as lack of time, cost, motivation especially among low-skilled and older workers. Proposed solutions focused on incentives, recognition of prior learning, and quality assurance, yet the underlying rationale remained stable: adult learning as labour-market instrument, valued for productivity rather than civic or humanistic purposes. This framing proved politically persuasive, but its effects were paradoxical: rather than reducing inequality, it deepened it. Participation among higher-educated adults remained four to five times higher than among lower-qualified adults; under-represented groups remained stable—low-income earners, older adults, and workers in small enterprises.

The Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC, 2013) reinforced the cumulative dynamic. By introducing skills proficiency, especially literacy and numeracy, as central indicators of employability, PIAAC showed that adults with higher proficiency are significantly more likely to learn throughout life, while those with lower skills, older age, or disadvantaged backgrounds face persistent exclusion. Across OECD countries, adults scoring at literacy Levels 4 or 5 were around three times more likely to participate than those at or below Level 1; in several countries (including Italy, Korea, Slovakia, Poland, and Spain) the difference rose to four or five times (OECD, 2013, p. 34). Since proficiency is itself unequally distributed across educational attainment, socio-economic status, migration background, and occupational positioning, participation becomes structurally cumulative. This is the social mechanism that sustains the Matthew effect in lifelong learning: those with fewer opportunities are those least likely to access further education, perpetuating disadvantage rather than breaking it. More recent OECD analyses – *Increasing Adult Learning Participation* (2020), *Skills Outlook: Learning for Life* (2021), and *Trends in Adult Learning* (2025) – confirm that inertia endures, even as the rhetorical frame shifts toward resilience, inclusion, and digital adaptation. As Römo (2024) argues, progressive vocabularies may conceal a neoliberal logic: resilience and adaptability are framed as individual obligations, translating structural inequality into personal upskilling.

By 2025, the OECD acknowledges stalled progress. Using PIAAC Cycle 2 (2023) data, participation has stagnated or declined across the past decade, with a parallel decline in literacy proficiency, suggesting a mutually reinforcing cycle of reduced opportunities and deteriorating skills. Adult learning is also changing in form. Formal education represents only a small share: around 8% of adults are enrolled in formal programmes (a decline from the previous PIAAC cycle), while job-related courses dominate and often last only a few days (42%). These short, compliance-based and employer-driven formats may broaden access but limit cumulative learning, prompting OECD advocacy for modular and stackable pathways. Informal learning remains widespread through workplace learning, reinforcing the centrality of environments that sustain learning as social and contextual, not purely individual.

However, participation remains uneven in motivation as well as opportunity. Half of adults across the OECD neither participated nor wanted to participate in learning in the preceding 12 months. Among those who wished to learn, one in four encountered barriers (most often time or cost) while employer support emerges as decisive.

A key conceptual problem is now explicitly foregrounded. Boeren and Kalenda (2025) argue that large-scale surveys such as AES and PIAAC rely on categories – formal, non-formal, informal – that no longer reflect hybrid or digitally mediated learning, obscure duration, agency, and collaboration, and erase territorial diversity through national averages. What appears as neutral evidence is itself a form of policy production: it defines what counts as learning, who counts as a learner, and which outcomes become visible to decision-makers.

OECD's call for a "paradigm shift" thus remains ambiguous. While advocating more coordinated strategies, it coincides with an expanding market of micro-modules and autonomous online learning (Knight et al., 2024), often hosted by global platforms (LinkedIn Learning; Coursera). These micro-credentials promise measurable returns but often have low engagement and completion, turning learning into self-service consumption rather than collective or transformative education. This trajectory resonates with the broader utilitarian turn in adult education policy, where lifelong learning is aligned with market mandates (Panisides 2015). The semantic evolution from lifelong education to lifelong learning and to lifelong development signals a deeper policy drift from public good to private endeavour, carries purposive and ideological consequences (Milana 2012; Milana 2019), transforming learning into what Knight et al. (2023) calls "edu-tainment": individualised, commodified, episodic activity detached from democratic purposes. Notably, UNESCO's GRALE III had already warned against "vocational overemphasis," suggesting that even distinct institutional languages can converge around a shared diagnosis of fragmentation and instrumentalisation.

Europe: hybrid ideology, benchmarks, and the governance of participation

European lifelong learning policy reflects a complex negotiation between UNESCO's humanistic heritage and the European Union's economic rationality. The Faure Report's vision of lifelong education as citizenship right and democratic project was progressively reframed. The European Commission's *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (2000) echoed the "learning society" ethos while explicitly linking lifelong learning to employability, adaptability, and competitiveness, with learning defined as "all purposeful learning activity" aimed at improving knowledge, skills, and competence. A substantial body of scholarship has shown how EU coordination mechanisms institutionalised adult learning within employment-oriented strategies (Milana & Holford 2014; Milana & Klatt 2019).

Subsequent strategies consolidated this shift, including *It Is Never Too Late to Learn* (2006), the *Action Plan on Adult Learning* (2007), and the *Renewed European Agenda* (2011), which introduced the symbolic 15% participation benchmark by 2020 never achieved. Alongside this economic trajectory, EU discourse also retained a social dimension. The Council Recommendation on Key Competences (2018) linked lifelong learning to inclusion, intercultural dialogue, and sustainable lifestyles, aligning with the UN 2030 Agenda, while maintaining a competence-oriented and measurable-outcomes orientation (PISA; PIAAC) and accountability.

This coexistence has been described as a European hybrid ideology of lifelong learning (Antikainen, 2006; Knight et al., 2024): progressive and neoliberal rationalities intersect, and participation is valued more for economic returns than emancipatory potential. Scholars have framed this trajectory as part of broader neoliberal reconfigurations of lifelong learning (Biesta, 2006, 2009; Romö, 2024). Kinnari and Silvennoinen's (2023) typology, humanistic, economic, soft-economic, captures the production of learner identities: *homo humanus* within UNESCO's humanistic discourse, *homo politicus* within the Council of Europe's democratic framework, *homo economicus* within the OECD's economic rationality. What began as collective humanist project increasingly functions as technology of self-management.

Empirically, the Eurydice Report (EC, 2021) provides a structural picture of deficits and stratification: in 2019, one in five adults in the EU had not completed upper secondary education, with deficits concentrated in southern Europe and among adults born outside their country of residence; substantial shares also lack essential literacy, numeracy, and digital competences, with 40% at risk of digital exclusion. Participation data reproduce inequality: fewer than one third of Member States achieved the 15% benchmark within the previous four weeks. Learning forms also matter: most adults engage in short non-formal courses rather than programmes leading to recognised qualifications, reinforcing an education-to-skills drift, and a learning-as-adaptation framing.

Within this hybrid landscape, CEDEFOP's monitoring framework becomes central: it translates political ambition into targets and indicators and exposes both progress and limits.

Measuring Participation: from attendance to engagement (and why it matters)

Participation research has evolved from individual explanations to multi-level approaches recognising the interplay of social, institutional, and motivational factors (Boeren, 2023). CEDEFOP's monitoring has become a principal instrument for assessing Europe's progress. Using Labour Force Survey (LFS) four-week measures, participation increased only marginally - from 9.5% in 2007 to 11.9 percent in 2022 - while Nordic countries remain above 25% and Southern/Eastern countries lag significantly (e.g., Italy 8.3; Romania 5.1; Greece 4.5). CEDEFOP (2024) attributes disparities to structural inequalities and to measurement limitations: the four-week LFS reference period underestimated participation compared with annual surveys such as AES, often missing short, episodic, or workplace learning.

Methodological reforms followed. The *European Skills Agenda* (2020) and the *European Education Area 2021-2030* extended the reference period to 12 months and introduced new benchmarks: 47% by 2025 and 60% by 2030. Adult Education Survey (2022) reported 43% participation in formal or non-formal learning over 12 months, rising to nearly 60% when informal learning is included. Yet low-qualified adults remain below 20%.

CEDEFOP's 2024 *Analytical Note* marks a conceptual shift: participation cannot be reduced to attendance; it includes engagement, intensity, and perceived usefulness. This move implies a transition from measurement for efficiency to measurement for meaning. Yet critical scholarship cautions that large-scale surveys can reproduce economic bias, rely on outdated categories (formal/non-formal/informal), reduce participation to binary variables, introduce recall bias, and erase local contexts (Kalenda & Boeren, 2025). Field et al. (2016) describes the resulting "league tables logic," which privileges comparability over understanding.

In this perspective, CEDEFOP's introduction of qualitative indicators (engagement intensity, learning purpose, and outcome relevance) appears not merely technical but epistemic and political. It acknowledges multiple aims of adult learning (economic, personal, civic) and repositions monitoring closer to UNESCO's discourse, distancing it from narrow productivity logic. The remaining issue is why participation is measured, and whose purposes such measurement serves, a question about the politics of knowledge underlying adult learning governance. Participation, therefore, cannot be treated as an unquestioned good: it may conceal mechanisms of active exclusion and subtle forms of andragogical control (Federighi et al. 2025).

UNESCO: a humanistic continuum and its limits

In contrast to OECD pragmatism and EU target-driven logics, UNESCO has remained the moral custodian of adult education. Through GRALE I-V (2009-2022), UNESCO consistently reaffirms learning as human right and public good, anchored in the Belém Framework (2010), Incheon Declaration (2015), and Marrakech Framework (2022), linking adult learning to social justice, sustainability, and peace, aligned with SDG 4 (Grotlüschen et al., 2023). This rights-based framing, however, also raises questions about what such a commitment means in practice for adult learning systems and governance (Elfert 2019).

Recent interpretations of CONFINTEA VII describe the Marrakech Framework as an attempt to restore coherence and normative direction to adult education governance in a fragmented global landscape (Rhodes & Ó Tuama 2025). Its emphasis on active citizenship and collective responsibility has been widely noted (Avoseh 2024), particularly in light of intersecting crises that demand civic engagement beyond employability. At the same time, climate action agendas highlight the need for clearer institutional roles for adult learning and education providers (Griswold 2024), suggesting that normative aspiration must translate into operational clarity.

Across the series, the normative continuity is visible, alongside increasing self-critique. GRALE IV (2019) and the follow-up *Adult Education and the Challenge of Exclusion* (2020) denounce “inclusion from above,” narrow definitions of participation as course attendance, and epistemic inequalities reinforced by Eurocentric data standards, arguing that those excluded from education are excluded from knowledge about exclusion. The call is for plural knowledges and community-based forms of learning.

GRALE V (2022) produced amid overlapping crises, recentres adult learning on citizenship and democratic participation, recognising community learning centres as key infrastructures for local resilience and inclusive participation, and explicitly linking lifelong learning to Learning Cities as territorial agents of democratic sustainability. Yet governance remains fragmented: only one third of countries have dedicated coordination bodies, and inter-sectoral cooperation remains weak. GRALE (2015) recognises citizenship, employability, and personal development as core functions, but policy priorities continue to gravitate toward employability.

UNESCO’s normative strength is also its limitation: persuasion without enforcement, lacking the financial leverage of the World Bank or the

benchmarking authority of the OECD. The shift from UNESCO to OECD paradigms has moved education “from learning to be to learning to earn” (Elfert & Ydesen, 2023). Still, UNESCO’s recognition of community learning centres and learning cities keeps open an alternative grammar centred on justice, diversity, and human flourishing.

Discussion: structural persistence, governance gaps and the narrowing of purpose

Urgency is politically ambivalent: it can mobilise transformative energy, but it can also compress deliberation into reaction, depoliticising adult learning into adaptive compliance (English & Mayo 2019). In policy terms, urgency often legitimises simplification: complex structural inequalities are translated into measurable targets, accelerated reforms, and short-term performance indicators. Across OECD, CEDEFOP, and UNESCO frameworks, one message is consistent: participation remains socially stratified. OECD analyses show older, less educated, and low-income adults remain systematically excluded; apparent narrowing of gaps can reflect decline among highly educated groups rather than inclusion. “Equality achieved through decline” is not progress.

The persistence of fragmentation is equally robust. Adult education remains marginalised in policy architectures, neither fully part of education nor labour policy. Validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning remain weak, limiting visibility and value. Only a minority of countries have dedicated coordination bodies and integrated governance across ministries (UNESCO, 2019; CEDEFOP, 2024).

A central argument emerges: policy fragmentation is mirrored by epistemic fragmentation (Boeren & Kalenda, 2025). Participation data infrastructures often reproduce the biases they seek to measure, prioritising employability over civic/humanistic dimensions. The limits of governance are thus institutional and conceptual: how participation is defined and counted shapes what becomes visible to policymakers. In this sense, measurement does not merely accompany governance; it structures the horizon within which adult learning problems are recognised and addressed.

This is also an ideological issue. Adult learning remains framed largely in terms of employability and competitiveness. OECD vocabulary evolves from human capital (2003) to skills ecosystems (2025), while logic persists: training as investment for productivity. UNESCO re-centres education on agency and citizenship, but risks moralising crises rather than confronting political causes (Mufic, 2025).

The governance-by-numbers paradigm becomes hegemonic (Grek, 2009): indicators produce reality by defining progress and narrowing participation to what can be counted. Even the basic categories formal/non-formal/informal, originally introduced to widen recognition (Faure et al., 1972; Coombs, 1974), are now conceptually obsolete (Boeren & Kalenda, 2025), failing to capture hybrid trajectories across institutional, digital, and community spaces. This conceptual lag undermines evidence-based policy because what is measured no longer reflects how adults learn. What appears as technical lag is therefore political lag: a misalignment between lived learning practices and the administrative categories that govern them. The paper therefore supports a conceptual renewal: a redefinition of adult learning as a continuum of lived, relational, and territorially embedded practice rather than as an administrative construct reducible to measurable episodes.

Conclusion: beyond rhetoric, again-toward a politics of implementation

Twenty years after *Beyond Rhetoric*, the call remains painfully relevant. Participation remains unequal, systems fragmented, and learning narrowly instrumental. The failure is not primarily technical; it is political and imaginative. Lifelong learning continues to be managed through urgency and scarcity, as if learning were a race against time rather than a space for meaning. Moving beyond rhetoric requires shifting from project logic to system logic and from attendance-based participation to meaningful engagement. It entails three interrelated commitments:

- Re-grounding adult learning in social rights and democratic agency, recognising learning not as a privilege of the adaptable but as a collective condition of citizenship.
- Building systems that sustain participation, prioritising engagement, continuity, and relevance over attendance-participation understood as interplay of opportunity, motivation, and agency (CEDEFOP, 2024; Karger et al., 2025).
- Re-embedding learning in everyday trusted spaces-community learning centres, neighbourhood schools, libraries, cultural associations, and universities-understood as infrastructures of reflection, cooperation, and the capacity to act upon experience (Broek et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2022).

Learning is territorial. Learning cities, local skills ecosystems, and place-based agendas converge on the same insight: participation grows where learning infrastructures are rooted in trust, proximity, and care. Supporting adult educators, counsellors, and community facilitators is therefore not ancillary but

structural: they are connective agents who bridge individuals, institutions, and policies, forming the living infrastructure of adult learning systems.

If the OECD counts, CEDEFOP connects, and UNESCO inspires, the challenge is to make these logics converge around a democratic conception of lifelong learning, less as marketplace of skills and more as a commons of knowledge, dignity, and participation. Only then can adult learning genuinely move beyond rhetoric.

Bibliography

- Antikainen, A 2006. Participation in Adult Education in a Nordic Context. In *From the Margins: Adult Education, Work and Civil Society*, A, Antikainen, P. Harinen, and C.A. Torres (Eds), 131–145. Rotterdam and Taipei: Sense Publishers.
- Avoseh, M. B. M. 2024. CONFINTEA VII Marrakech Framework and the Challenge of and Urgency for Active Citizenship Education. *Adult Learning*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10451595231207373>.
- Biesta, G. 2006. *Beyond Learning: Democratic Education for a Human Future*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.
- Biesta, G.. 2009. Good Education in an Age of Measurement. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability* 21: 33–46.
- Boeren, E. 2023. Conceptualizing Lifelong Learning Participation: Theoretical Perspectives and Integrated Approaches. In *Researching Participation in Adult Education*, M. Schemmann (Ed.), 17–31. Bielefeld: wbv Media. <https://doi.org/10.3278/I73910W002>.
- Boeren, E, and J Kalenda. 2025. Adult Participation and Large-Scale Survey Data: Conceptual and Methodological Debates. *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 44 (3): 249–256. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2025.2491194>.
- Broek, S, M. A. C. T. Kuijpers, J. H. Semeijn, and J van der Linden. 2024. Conditions for Successful Adult Learning Systems at Local Level: Creating a Conducive Socio Spatial. Environment for Adults to Engage in Learning. *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 43 (2–3): 200–223. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2024.2338366>.
- Bourdieu, P. 2005. The Political Field, the Social Science Field, and the Journalistic Field. In *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field*, R Benson and E Neveu(Eds), 29–47. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Coombs, P. H. 1974. *Attacking Rural Poverty: How Nonformal Education Can Help*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Cedefop. 2024. *Measuring Participation in Adult Learning: New Targets, Methods and Data*. Data Insight, September 2024.
- Elfert, M. 2017. The Struggle of Ideologies: UNESCO’s Utopia of Lifelong Learning. In *The Palgrave International Handbook on Adult and Lifelong Education and Learning*, M, Milana, S. Webb, J. Holford, R. Waller and P. Jarvis .(Eds) London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Elfert, Maren. 2019. Lifelong Learning in Sustainable Development Goal 4: What Does It Mean for UNESCO’s Rights-Based Approach to Adult Learning and

- Education? *International Review of Education* 65: 537–556.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-019-09788-z>.
- Elfert, M, and C Ydesen. 2023. *Global Governance of Education: The Historical and Contemporary Entanglements of UNESCO, the OECD and the World Bank*. Cham: Springer.
- English, L. M., and P. Mayo. 2019. Lifelong Learning Challenges: Responding to Migration and the Sustainable Development Goals. *International Review of Education* 65 (2): 213–231. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-018-9757-3>.
- European Commission, EACEA, and Eurydice. 2021. *Adult Education and Training in Europe: Building Inclusive Pathways to Skills and Qualifications*. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- Faure, E, .Herrera, F. Kaddoura, A.R,Lopez, H, Petrovski, A, Rahnama and Champion Ward, F, 1972. *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Federighi, P, F. Torlone, and F De Maria. 2025. Beyond the Paradigm of Uninterrupted Expansion of Participation: Backing the Policy of Emancipation from Andragogical Powers. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education* 31 (2): 503–522.
- Field, J, K. Künzel, and M. Schemmann. 2016. International Comparative Adult Education Research: Reflections on Theory, Methodology and Future Developments. *Internationales Jahrbuch der Erwachsenenbildung* 39 (1). <https://doi.org/10.7788/ijbe-2016-0108>.
- Grek, S. 2009. Governing by Numbers: The PISA Effect in Europe. *Journal of Education Policy* 24 (1): 23–37.
- Griswold, W. 2024. CONFINTEA VII and the Call to Climate Action: Clarifying Roles for Adult Learning and Education. *Adult Learning*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10451595231207352>.
- Incheon Declaration. 2015. *Education 2030: Towards Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All*. Paris: UNESCO.M and Champion Ward, F
- Kalenda, J, and E Boeren. 2025. Revisiting the Triadic Classification of Learning Activities: Rethinking Their Measurement. *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 44 (3): 257–272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2025.2489506>.
- Karger, T, J Kalenda, and J Vaculíková. 2025. Participation Reimagined: Beyond the One-Dimensional Approach to Participation in Adult Learning and Education. *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 44 (3): 291–305.
- Kinnari, H, and H Silvennoinen. 2023. Subjectivities of the Lifelong Learner in ‘Humanistic Generation’: Critical Policy Analysis of Lifelong Learning Policies among Discourses of UNESCO, the Council of Europe and the OECD. *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 42 (4): 424–440.
- Knight, E, U Brandi, SHodge, T Hoggan-Kloubert, and M Milana. 2023. What’s in a Name – Lifelong Education or Development? *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 42 (6): 527–531. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2023.2289284>.
- Lee, M-H, and S.K. Jan. 2018. Lifelong Learning Policy Discourses of International Organisations Since 2000: A Kaleidoscope or Merely Fragments? In *The Palgrave International Handbook on Adult and Lifelong Education and Learning*, M Milana, S. Webb, J. Furlong, R. Waller and P. Jarvis (Eds) London: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Milana, M. 2012. Political Globalization and the Shift from Adult Education to Lifelong Learning. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults* 3 (2): 103–117. <https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.rela0070>.
- Milana, M, and J. Holford,(Eds.) 2014. *Adult Education Policy and the European Union: Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Milana, M, and G Klatt. 2019. "Governing Adult Education Policy Development in Europe." In *Handbook of Vocational Education and Training*, S McGrath et al. Cham: Springer.
- Mufic, J. 2025. Scrutinising 'Crises' and 'Emergencies' in UNESCO's Global Reports on Adult Learning and Education. *International Review of Education* 71: 281–299. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-024-10124-3>.
- OECD. 2003. *Beyond Rhetoric: Adult Learning Policies and Practices*. Paris: OECD.
- OECD. 2005. *Promoting Adult Learning*. Paris: OECD.
- OECD. 2013. *OECD Skills Outlook 2013: First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills*. Paris: OECD.
- OECD. 2020. *Increasing Adult Learning Participation*. Paris: OECD.
- OECD. 2021. *OECD Skills Outlook 2021: Learning for Life*. Paris: OECD.
- OECD. 2025. *Trends in Adult Learning*. Paris: OECD.
- Panisides, E.A. 2015. Towards 'Utilitarian' Adult Education Perspectives In *Global Perspectives on Adult Education and Learning Policy*, M. Milana and T. Nesbit(Eds). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Piazza, R. 2009. *Lifelong Learning ed Educazione Democratica in Europa*. Milano: Guerini.
- Regmi, K.D 2015. Lifelong Learning: Foundational Models, Underlying Assumptions Critiques. *International Review of Education* 61: 133–151. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-015-9480-2>.
- Rhodes, C M., and S,Ó Tuama. 2025. A Global Framework for Adult Education: The Framework for Action. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.20552>.
- Romö, M B. 2024. Untangling Ideologies in Lifelong Learning Discourse. *Journal of and Work* 37 (5–6): 309–324. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2024.2407764>.
- Rubenson, K. 2015. Framing the Adult Learning and Education Policy Discourse: The Role of OECD. In *Global Perspectives on Adult Education and Learning Policy*, M. Milana and T. Nesbit(Eds). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- UNESCO. 2010. *Belém Framework for Action: Harnessing the Power and Potential of Adult Learning and Education for a Viable Future*. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.
- UNESCO. 2017. *Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO. 2022. *Marrakech Framework for Action*. Paris: UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000382306>.
- UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL). 2009. *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*. Hamburg: UIL.
- UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL). 2013. *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education II: Rethinking Literacy*. Hamburg: UIL.
- UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL). 2016. *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education III*. Hamburg: UIL.
- UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL). 2019. *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education IV: Leave No One Behind*. Hamburg: UIL.

- UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL). 2022. *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education V: Citizenship Education*. Hamburg: UIL.
- Volles, Nina. 2016. Lifelong Learning in the EU: Changing Conceptualisations, Actors, and Policies. *Studies in Higher Education* 41 (2): 343–363.
- Walker, J. 2009. The Inclusion and Construction of the Worthy Citizen through Lifelong Learning - a focus on the OECD. *Journal Of Educational Policy*, 24(3)335-351.
-

Adult Learning in Times of Urgency: Moving Beyond Rhetoric

Roberta Piazza

Abstract

More than twenty years after the OECD's *Beyond Rhetoric* report (2003), adult learning continues to be characterised by persistent inequalities in participation, fragmented governance, and an enduring economic bias. This paper argues that the limits of lifelong learning are not primarily technical, linked to insufficient targets, inadequate monitoring, or weak incentives, but conceptual and political: adult learning is still governed through a nagerial scripts of efficiency and urgency that translate structural problems into individual obligations. Building on the long-standing tension between UNESCO's humanistic tradition and the economistic orientation consolidated through OECD and World Bank agendas, the paper examines how international organisations construct adult learning through indicators, participation measures, and benchmark logics. Drawing on OECD analyses (2003–2025), European policy trajectories, CEDEFOP's evolving monitoring frameworks, and UNESCO's GRALE series (2009–2022) and its rights-based reframing under SDG 4, it shows how participation has increasingly become a quantifiable object of governance, often reducing learning to attendance and obscuring agency, duration, collaboration, and territorial diversity. Moving beyond rhetoric requires a politics of implementation grounded in social rights, systemic governance, and learning infrastructures rooted in trusted local spaces, capable of sustaining meaningful participation beyond compliance-based training.

Key words

adult learning; lifelong learning; participation; governance; UNESCO; OECD; CEDEFOP; measurement; inequality.

L'éducation des adultes en temps d'urgence : dépasser la rhétorique

Roberta Piazza

Résumé

Plus de vingt ans après le rapport *Beyond Rhetoric* de l'OCDE (2003), l'éducation des adultes demeure caractérisée par des inégalités persistantes de participation, une gouvernance fragmentée et un biais économique durable. Cet article soutient que les limites de l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie ne sont pas principalement d'ordre technique – liées à des objectifs insuffisants, à un suivi inadéquat ou à des incitations faibles – mais plutôt conceptuelles et politiques : l'éducation des adultes continue d'être gouvernée par des scripts managériaux d'efficacité et d'urgence qui traduisent des problèmes structurels en obligations individuelles.

En s'appuyant sur la tension de longue date entre la tradition humaniste de l'UNESCO et l'orientation économiciste consolidée par les agendas de l'OCDE et de la Banque mondiale, l'article examine comment les organisations internationales construisent l'éducation des adultes à travers des indicateurs, des mesures de participation et des logiques de benchmarking. En mobilisant les analyses de l'OCDE (2003–2025), les trajectoires des politiques européennes, les cadres de suivi en évolution du CEDEFOP ainsi que la série GRALE de l'UNESCO (2009–2022) et sa reformulation fondée sur les droits dans le cadre de l'ODD 4, il montre comment la participation est devenue progressivement un objet quantifiable de gouvernance. Cette évolution tend à réduire l'apprentissage à la seule fréquentation et à invisibiliser l'agency des apprenants, la durée des parcours, la collaboration et la diversité territoriale.

Dépasser la rhétorique suppose une politique de mise en œuvre fondée sur les droits sociaux, une gouvernance systémique et des infrastructures d'apprentissage ancrées dans des espaces locaux de confiance, capables de soutenir une participation significative au-delà des formations centrées sur la conformité.

Mots clés

éducation des adultes ; apprentissage tout au long de la vie ; participation ; gouvernance ; UNESCO ; OCDE ; CEDEFOP ; mesure ; inégalités.

Educación de personas adultas en tiempos de urgencia: más allá de la retórica

Roberta Piazza

Resumen

Más de veinte años después del informe *Beyond Rhetoric* de la OCDE (2003), la educación de personas adultas continúa caracterizándose por desigualdades persistentes en la participación, una gobernanza fragmentada y un sesgo económico duradero. Este artículo sostiene que los límites del aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida no son principalmente técnicos – relacionados con objetivos insuficientes, un seguimiento

inadecuado o incentivos débiles— sino conceptuales y políticos: la educación de personas adultas sigue gobernada mediante guiones gerenciales de eficiencia y urgencia que traducen problemas estructurales en obligaciones individuales.

Partiendo de la tensión histórica entre la tradición humanista de la UNESCO y la orientación economicista consolidada a través de las agendas de la OCDE y el Banco Mundial, el artículo examina cómo las organizaciones internacionales construyen la educación de personas adultas mediante indicadores, medidas de participación y lógicas de benchmarking. Basándose en los análisis de la OCDE (2003–2025), las trayectorias de las políticas europeas, los marcos de seguimiento en evolución del CEDEFOP y la serie GRALE de la UNESCO (2009–2022), junto con su reformulación basada en derechos bajo el ODS 4, se muestra cómo la participación se ha convertido progresivamente en un objeto cuantificable de gobernanza. Este proceso tiende a reducir el aprendizaje a la mera asistencia y a invisibilizar la agencia de las personas participantes, la duración de los procesos formativos, la colaboración y la diversidad territorial.

Superar la retórica requiere una política de implementación basada en derechos sociales, una gobernanza sistémica y unas infraestructuras de aprendizaje arraigadas en espacios locales de confianza, capaces de sostener una participación significativa más allá de la formación basada en el cumplimiento.

Palabras clave

educación de personas adultas; aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida; participación; gobernanza; UNESCO; OCDE; CEDEFOP; medición; desigualdad.

**Different concepts and different perspectives across
different cultures: Re-creating Indigenous Australians'
storybooks in a Melanesian community**

Yasuko Nagai

Summer Institute of Linguistics Australia

In my previous paper (Nagai, 2008), I presented a process of incorporating local knowledge when introducing educational theories and practices of critical awareness in a Melanesian community of Maiwala. In the same community, local teachers and I continued to work together to create more storybooks for their elementary school children. While doing this Participatory Action Research process, we also re-created the storybooks of Indigenous Australians.

In this paper I will briefly explain elements of Indigenous Australians' culture and how children's storybooks can be created from within the world around them. Then, I will present how these storybooks may be re-created in a Melanesian community. This re-creation process helps the local teachers to develop not only wider perspectives concerning the natural world, but also to enhance awareness of the vital role of such perspectives in sustaining the ecosystem around them.

Indigenous Australians Culture

Indigenous Australians are intimately connected to the natural world, which they refer to 'Country' (or homeland) (Weir, 2012). 'Country' is not just physical, such as the lands, air, waters, trees, plants, rocks, skies, animals and weather. In their view these are all interconnected and essential to their well-being and sense of "self." This interrelation of all people and all things are expressed in the Indigenous Australians' knowledge called 'Dreaming.' "The Dreaming is a combination of meaning (about life and all reality), and an action guide for living" (Graham, 2008: 181). In Dreaming their beliefs and rules are connected to their ancestral beings from the time of creation (Glynn-McDonald,

2022). Based on this concept the following storybooks were created for their children.

Storybooks created by Indigenous Australians

Yorr Gu-rakaja (It's raining) written and illustrated by Laurie Guraylayla and illustrated by Peter Danaja in their Burarra (Gu-jarlabiya/Gu-jingarliya) language of North Central Arnhem Land, Northern Territory of Australia. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).

English translation of *Yorr Gu-rakaja*

Title: It's raining.

1. It's raining on the grass.
2. It's raining on the log.
3. It's raining on the road.
4. It's raining on the cycad.
5. It's raining...
6. but it isn't raining on me.

When the above text is accompanied by the illustrations, it becomes clearer that everything in the natural world is living and interconnected. On every page the rain cloud has a smiling face and rain drops are falling on the things that have human-like figures and faces. In particular on page 3, the picture of the road has a big smiling face. So in this storybook the accompanied pictures are closely representing the text and revealing the Indigenous Australians' connection to the natural world. As noted by Bergli (2023), accompanied pictures are an important essence of a children's storybook.



When Burarra children read this storybook, they are naturally reminded of their intimate connection to their Country. This background knowledge plays a major role in comprehension of the text (Gutt, 2006; Bergli: 2023).

Ny-yinga ny-yelangga? written and illustrated by the same author and the same illustrator in the Burarra (Gu-jarlabiya/Gu-jingarliya) language of North Central Arnhem Land, Northern Territory of Australia. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).

English translation of *Ny-yinga ny-yelangga?*

Title: What's your name?

1. "What's your name?" "I am Frog."
1. "What's your name?" "I am Snake."
2. "What's your name?" "I am Spider."
3. "What's your name?" "I am Turtle."
4. "What's your name?" "I am Fish."
5. "What's your name?" "I'm Butterfly."
6. "What's your name?" "I am Ngularri. Do you want to play?"
7. "Yes!"

In this storybook the illustrations also have an important role to show the people's intimate connection to the living creatures in their Country. For example on page 2, a girl relates to a snake in a friendly manner without fear.



As part of Country and the complex natural world, Indigenous Australians respect and value animals. They have a unique and spiritual relationship with

animals on their Country, and value storylines that ensure they live sustainably with the environment (Glynn-McDonald, 2022).

Indigenous Australians have deep knowledge of how to sustain and manage animals. This knowledge is passed on from one generation to the next. For example, those who culturally possess a goanna Dreaming wouldn't hunt it, but they would protect it. In the same way, those who have a Dreaming for a particular plant would ensure the survival of the plant (Glynn-McDonald, 2022).

Re-creating the storybooks in a Melanesian community of Maiwala

The Maiwala Community is one of the small communities scattered along the coast of Milne Bay on the eastern tip of Papua New Guinea. According to legend (Nagai and Lister, 2003; Nagai, 1997), people from the island north-east of Papuan Peninsula first came to the mouth of the current Maiwala River. Later other people from another island and those from upstream also migrated to the regions around the river, and each group of people occupied their own area as their 'mother land' to collectively form a Maiwala community. Although it's a matrilineal society connecting with each mother land, they have no intimate relationship to the natural world around them like Indigenous Australians. However, over the years, they have learned to protect the land and river - because fish and shellfish live in the water and plants grow around the community. This is expressed in the Big Book stories, such as *Bada Galasi* (Old man Galasi) and *Duduna ma Datudatu* (Whelks and Snakes).

In the Maiwala community local elementary school teachers and I have created many children's storybooks (Nagai, 2008). During this creating process, I also introduced Indigenous Australians' storybooks to see if they could be re-created in the Maiwala language. As we were dealing with the stories that were already translated into English, it seemed to be a simple task of transferring the words and sentences from English to Maiwala. However, because the original Indigenous Australians' worldview was not conveyed in the English translation, the translated Maiwala story did not sound like natural Maiwala language.

Process of translation involves the interaction between two languages and communication between two cultures (Yu, 2013). So in order to connect Indigenous Australians' culture and Maiwala culture, I explained to the Maiwala teachers the Indigenous Australians' worldview. This helped the Maiwala teachers develop different perspectives concerning land, river, fish, weather, etc, around them. From then on, the process of re-creating Indigenous

Australians' stories in the Maiwala language became an element of everyday life for the Maiwala community.

Maiwala storybook *Gadiweve e atuatuna* (It's raining)

One day I showed Ronah the English translation of the Burarra storybook: *Yorr Gu-rakaja* (It's raining) and waited for her reaction. She read it and said, "It's simple and good for the prep (i.e, kindergarten) level. But what is cycad?" "It's like pandanus here in PNG." "OK, we can change it to pandanus," said Ronah. So the above "It's raining" story was translated into Maiwala by replacing 'cycad' with 'pandanus'. But is it a normal everyday speech? Ronah said, "It's OK... but we don't usually say that..." She didn't say any more, but was thinking.

As we were standing at the edge of the oval near the Maiwala church, we could see the mountains covered by rainy cloud and thick mist. It was obviously raining up in the mountains and the mist was coming down very quickly towards the Maiwala community on the coast of Milne Bay. Ronah said, "Hurry, let's go under the house, as rain is coming down towards us!" While sheltering under the house¹, the rain was pouring down on the oval and around the house, not just on the grass and rocks at the edge of the road along the oval. It was raining everywhere in the village!

When observing the heavy rain falling around us, Ronah said that they wouldn't normally say: "It's raining on the grass, rocks or road." Now it was appropriate for me to explain what Indigenous Australians believe. I said: "The land, air, water, trees, plants, rocks, animals and weather are all interconnected and essential to their well-being. That's why in this *It's raining* storybook, they are responding to the rain like they would to people."

Raining in and around Milne Bay was often local. When I walked along the beach with Ronah, we sometimes saw the rain falling on the small islands in the bay or in town across the bay. By observing how localised raining can be in various locations, Ronah rewrote a Maiwala version of 'It's raining' (*Gadiweve e atuatuna*). Its English translation is:

Title: It's raining.

1. It's raining up in the mountains.
2. It's raining in town across the bay.
3. It's raining on the islands.

¹Houses in this area are elevated except the kitchen.

4. It's raining on the beach.
5. It's raining everywhere!



Now the whole story was natural and meaningful to the Maiwala children. Especially the last page which connected to the frequent flooding of the Maiwala River. In order to deal with this environmental issue, we had already created a Big Book story *Maiwala Hoowana* (Maiwala River) (Nagai, 2008).

While conducting a Participatory Action Research (Nagai, 2008) in the Maiwala community, I stayed with different families. I noticed that Maiwala people were sun-drying various items. When the rain was coming down from the mountains, they shouted to each other, “Gadiwewe e atuatuna! (It’s raining!)” Whoever was nearby quickly put them away on the verandah or under the house. While Aiva and I were talking about it, it began to rain! So Aiva quickly went down to take the clothes off the line. After hanging them on the verandah, she wrote another story: *Gadiwewe e atuatuna*. Its English translation is:

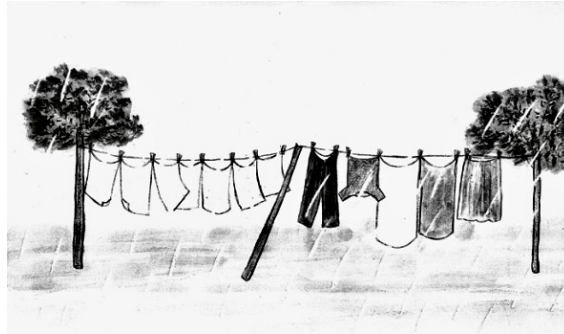
Title: It’s raining.

1. It’s raining on the pandanus strips²!
2. It’s raining on the clothes on the line!
3. It’s raining on the firewood!
4. It’s raining on the watermelon seeds!
5. It’s raining!
6. It’s OK now, as they are all in/under the house.

In this recreated Maiwala story, a sudden rain is not welcomed, while the steady rain in the Burarra story is welcomed by the people and everything in their ‘Country.’ In the original Burarra story, the author and the illustrator

²Dried pandanus strips are used for weaving mats and baskets.

expressed their intimate feelings towards rain from their cultural perspective. By contrast, Maiwala authors and illustrators viewed weather patterns as a separate entity that affected their lives.



At the Maiwala Elementary School, children not only learned to read the story *Gadiwewe e atuatuna*, but also enjoyed playing a drama of this story. As a result, they became helpful members of the community.

Maiwala storybook *Wavam aiwai?* (What's your name?)

As Maiwala people teach children in the actual context (Nagai, 2008, 2001, 1997), I waited for an opportunity to introduce another storybook: "*Ny-yinga ny-yelangga?* (What's your name?). As there are many legends in which various animals and humans are talking and interacting, it's not a problem to create a story between humans and animals. However, in order to re-create the Indigenous Australians' storybook "*Ny-yinga ny-yelangga?* (What's your name?), I waited for a perfect opportunity to make the story more appropriate and enjoyable for the Maiwala children.

While staying with Nuku and her family, I often spent my time with their 4-year old daughter, Bonu. One day after her parents had gone to their garden, Bonu and I walked to the beach, where we could see the wharf of the Alotau Harbour across the bay. When we sat down on a log, Bonu told me about her exciting experience of seeing a 'wam ghaeghaena' (big boat), when she went to town with her parents recently. She proudly said, "Wavana ba-ji (Its name was barge)." So I asked her, "Ma, wavam aiwai?³ (And, what's your name?)" She looked at me with a smile and said: "Tau Bonu (I am Bonu)."

³ "*Ma, wavam aiwai?*" literally means: "And, name-your what?"

When we returned home, I quickly drew a picture of a little girl and a dog, and wrote: “Wavam aiwai?” above the girl and wrote: “Tau Kedewa (I am Dog)” above the dog. As I pointed to the text above the picture of a girl and read: “Wavam aiwai?” and pointed to the text above the picture of a dog. Bunu immediately said, “Tau Kedewa!” “Oh, you can already read it!” Bonu was very pleased and excited. In this familiar context the picture certainly spoke more directly to the viewer than the text (Gilbert, 2022).



Next day I told Ronah and Aiva about the re-creation of “*Ny-yinga ny-yelangga?* (What’s your name?) in Maiwala. They were also very pleased and chose a selection of familiar animals in the community to re-create the storybook: “*Wavam Aiwai?*” in Maiwala. Its English translation is:

Title: What’s your name?

1. “What’s your name?” “I am Dog.”
8. “What’s your name?” “I am Bird.”
9. “What’s your name?” “I am Pig.”
10. “What’s your name?” “I am Cat.”
11. “What’s your name?” “I am Frog.”
12. “What’s your name?” “I am Fish.”
13. “What’s your name?” “I am Bonu. Do you want to play?”
14. “Yes, let’s play!”

In this re-created Maiwala storybook animals and humans interact each other in a friendly manner, although they are not interconnected to each other as would be the case within the ‘Country’ of the Indigenous Australians.

Conclusion

In this paper I presented a process for re-creating Indigenous Australians' storybooks in a Melanesian community through Participatory Action Research. It was not a process of re-writing and re-shaping of the original work, but a process of re-contextualising in another culture in another language. It involved a process of developing an understanding of different concepts in both the original and the target cultures. As a result, the original Indigenous Australians' storybooks were re-presented from within a Melanesian community in a culturally meaningful way. Furthermore, the re-creating process helped the Maiwala teachers gain wider perspectives towards the natural world around them and heightened sensitivity towards sustaining its ecosystem, with both the children and other members of the community.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Maiwala people, especially the two Maiwala Elementary School teachers, Mrs Ronah Lister and Mrs Aiva Dileina, and Nuku Igome's daughter, Bonu, for their cooperation in this research project.

Author Information

Dr Yasuko Nagai is a retired member of the Summer Institute of Linguistics Australia. She has worked as an educational consultant among Indigenous Australians in Northern Australia and then among Melanesians in Papua New Guinea. Any correspondence should be directed to Yasuko Nagai at yasukonagai3@gmail.com; Phone: 61435930609; Address: PO Box 7087 West Lakes, SA 5021 Australia.

A Data Availability Statement

The author confirms that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article and its endnotes.

References

- Bergli, Å. (2023) Text analysis with an eye to artistic patterning. *SIL e-Books* 83. <https://www.sil.org/resources/publications/entry/96718>
- Guraylayla, L. (1988) *Yorr Gu-rakaja* (It's raining) <https://territorystories.nt.gov.au/10070/870556> (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).
- Guraylayla, L. (1988) *Ny-yinga ny-yelangga?* (What's your name?) <https://territorystories.nt.gov.au/10070/870636> (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).
- Glynn-McDonald, R. (2020) *Common Ground: Connection to Animals and Country*. <https://www.commonground.org.au/article/connection-to-animals-and-country>
- Graham, M. (2008) Some thoughts about the Philosophical Underpinnings of Aboriginal Worldviews. *Australian Humanities Review* 45, 181-194.
- Gilbert, F. (2022) Diagrarting: theorising and practising new ways of writing and drawing. *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*, 19 (2), 153-182.
- Gutt, E-A. (2006) Aspects of "Cultural Literacy" Relevant to Bible Translation. *Journal of Translation* 2 (1), 1-16.
- Matthews, T. G., C. Rountree, S. Nicolle. (2011) Implicit Aspects of Culture in source and target language contexts. *Journal of Translation* 7 (1), 21-48.
- Nagai, Y. (1997) [Educational change from within: Developing a vernacular elementary school in Papua New Guinea](https://www.sil.org/resources/archives/9581). PhD thesis. <https://www.sil.org/resources/archives/9581>
- Nagai, Y. (2001) Developing assessment and evaluation strategies for vernacular elementary school classrooms: a collaborative study in Papua New Guinea. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 32 (1), 80-103.
- Nagai, Y. (2008) From Enjoyment to Critical Thinking: A Journey of Developing Creativity and Critical Awareness in Story Writing in a Melanesian Community. *New Writing: International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* 5 (2), 150-162.
- Nagai, Y. and Lister, R. (2003) What is our culture? What is our language? Dialogue towards the maintenance of indigenous culture and language in Papua New Guinea. *Language and Education* 17 (2), 87-104.
- Weir, J. K. (2012) Country, native title and ecology. *ANU Press Aboriginal History Monographs* 1-20. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt24h353.7>
- Yu, J. (2013) Cultural Awareness in Chinese-English Translation. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 3 (12), 2322-2326.

**Different concepts and different perspectives across different cultures:
Re-creating Indigenous Australians' storybooks in a Melanesian community**

Yasuko Nagai

Abstract

In this paper culture is not static like a museum artefact, but a total way of life of people, including the patterns of people's beliefs, knowledge, practices, values, worldview and image schema (Yu, 2013; Matthews et al, 2011). In order to understand each others' cultures, it is necessary to become aware about how each others' cultures can connect or differ. When introducing children's storybooks across different cultures, concepts derived from both the original author's culture and the target culture need to be understood clearly because of their implicit differing perspectives. This paper presents a process for discovering different concepts behind these stories and development of different perspectives in order to re-create Indigenous Australians' storybooks which are more meaningful to a Melanesian community.

Keywords

traditional culture, traditional concepts, re-creating stories, differing perspectives, translation

**Different concepts and different perspectives across different cultures:
Re-creating Indigenous Australians' storybooks in a Melanesian community**

Yasuko Nagai

Résumé

Dans cet article, la culture n'est pas appréhendée comme une pièce de musée, mais comme un mode de vie global, englobant les croyances, les connaissances, les pratiques, les valeurs, la vision du monde et les schémas d'image d'un peuple (Yu, 2013 ; Matthews et al., 2011). Pour comprendre les cultures d'autrui, il est essentiel de prendre conscience de leurs points communs et de leurs différences. Lors de la diffusion de contes pour enfants dans différentes cultures, il est crucial de bien saisir les concepts issus à la fois de la culture de l'auteur original et de la culture cible, en raison des perspectives implicitement différentes qui les sous-tendent. Cet article présente une démarche permettant de découvrir les différents concepts présents dans ces récits et de développer des perspectives variées afin de réinterpréter les contes des Aborigènes d'Australie et de les rendre plus pertinents pour une communauté mélanésienne.

Mots clés

culture traditionnelle, concepts traditionnels, réinterprétation des récits, perspectives différentes, traduction

**Different concepts and different perspectives across different cultures:
Re-creating Indigenous Australians' storybooks in a Melanesian community**

Yasuko Nagai

Resumen

En este artículo, la cultura no se entiende como algo estático, como un objeto de museo, sino como un modo de vida integral de las personas, que incluye sus creencias, conocimientos, prácticas, valores, cosmovisión y esquema mental (Yu, 2013; Matthews et al., 2011). Para comprender las culturas de los demás, es necesario tomar conciencia de cómo estas pueden conectarse o diferir entre sí. Al presentar cuentos infantiles de diferentes culturas, es necesario comprender claramente los conceptos derivados tanto de la cultura del autor original como de la cultura de destino, debido a sus perspectivas implícitas diferentes. Este artículo presenta un proceso para descubrir los diferentes conceptos que hay detrás de estas historias y el desarrollo de diferentes perspectivas con el fin de recrear los cuentos infantiles de los indígenas australianos que son más significativos para una comunidad melanesia.

Palabras Clave

cultura tradicional, conceptos tradicionales, recreación de historias, perspectivas diferentes, traducción

Confronting Nativist Discourse: Drawing Upon a Critical Theory of Adult Education for Humanizing Antagonisms Along the Mexico-U.S. Borderlands

Jesus Jaime-Diaz Ph.D.
Colorado State University Pueblo, USA

Introduction

On January 20, 2025, the second Trump administration began, following a farewell address by President Joe Biden warning "Today an oligarchy is taking shape in America of extreme wealth, power, and influence that really threatens our entire democracy, our basic rights and freedom" (Davies, 2025). Trump initiated tax cuts for the ultra-wealthy, known as Trump's Big Beautiful Bill Policy, which redistributed wealth upwards (Neuman, 2025), and aligned with efforts to deregulate federal agencies to strengthen corporate power. His populist messages are framed as common-sense actions (Kurtzleben, 2025), to protect capitalism from criticism by embedding wealthy individuals in key economic positions (Charalambous et al, 2025). Additionally, a nativist diversion tactic has been employed to deflect attention from their profit-driven agenda by scapegoating vulnerable populations.

Contemporary Nativism in the U.S. Nation-State

Nativism often reinforces racist ideologies by framing differences as threats and promoting intolerance. It characterizes immigrants as invaders who may disrupt U.S. values and culture, creating a racialized "other" based on physical traits, language, and religion (Newth, 2023). The contemporary rise of radical right-wing nativism has led to heightened hostility towards marginalized immigrant groups, who are blamed for social and economic issues such as resource depletion and burdens on educational and correctional systems (Betz, 2017).

Trump's allies and affiliated right-wing anti-immigrant groups have labeled immigrants as criminal others by perpetuating harmful stereotypes. This

derives from ideology that equates criminality with poverty and men of color. Such rhetoric socially perpetuates racialized social class marginalization while overlooking the normalized, harmful behaviors of the bourgeoisie (Bloch & Myers, 2017). Understanding the history of the Mexico-U.S. borderlands is crucial for resisting marginalization, but more importantly, for reducing the harm of internalizing such insidious rhetoric.

La Frontera/Mexico-U.S. Borderlands: A History

It is essential to comprehend the history of the Mexico-U.S. borderlands, including resistance to marginalization and the damaging impact of anti-immigrant rhetoric, to effectively counter nativism. This historical understanding acts as a tool for resistance and promotes clarity. The border extends 1,954 miles across seven Mexican states and four U.S. states (Acuna, 2007). It is also important to recognize this region as the ancestral land of indigenous peoples, who faced genocidal warfare that forced them into these borderlands (Leza, 2019). After gaining independence from Spain in 1821, Mexico had no defined borders with the U. S. and encouraged Anglo settlers to move to Coahuila y Tejas (Texas) (Navarro, 2005). Euro-American immigrants, bringing African slaves, were required to adopt Catholicism, respect laws, and learn Spanish for citizenship and land grants (Gonzalez, 2022).

In 1829, Mexico banned slavery, causing conflict with European descendant citizens. The Texas Insurrection in 1835 led to Texas declaring independence. Mexico viewed it as a breakaway province. In 1845, the U. S. annexed Texas, causing border tensions over the Nueces River versus the *Rio Bravo* being the border. The disagreement led to the U.S. provoking a war, resulting in Mexico ceding over half its territory with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, and later more territory in the 1854 Gadsden Purchase. This area became significant during the height of the Chicano Movement in the 1960's, as it served as a mythical homeland for Chicanas/os; many would refer to it as occupied Aztlán (the homeland of the Aztec people) (Acuña, 2021; González, 2022; Navarro, 2005).

The Mexico-U.S. Borderlands were carved out in bloodshed, and since their inception, have been viewed as a no-man's land by apparatuses of the U.S. Government and rogue elements alike (Chavez, 2013). It is projected as a war zone where the enemy resides. A historical sphere where a disdain has been intergenerationally reproduced against the Republic of Mexico as the gates to the masses of Latina/o America (Garcia, 1985), and their indignant people, by way of racialized social class ideologies trumped through nativism (Navarro, 2008). And with a fear of the continued browning of U.S. America, and the

eventual historical demographic demise of the settler-colonial project initiated during the 1500s.

The Mexican Enemy Phantom South of The Border

An initial assault by Trump, his loyalists, and their authoritarian regime began as an attempt to invalidate birthright citizenship for babies born to undocumented immigrants (Pinto & Khan, 2025), which is undoubtedly a nativist, racialized social class ideology saturates and normalizes racism within the confines of the U.S. nation-state. This also problematically defines citizenship as racialized. Further nativist anti-immigrant sentiments ramped up under the second Trump oligarchy in the U.S. nation-state, saw undocumented immigrants from various parts of Latina/o America deported to their home countries, in some instances by way of C-130 U.S. military cargo planes (Corpi, 2025).

This coincided with the Trump oligarchy labeling Mexican drug cartels as foreign terrorist organizations and threatening military action against them, and stated he authorized the military to “kill them” (Knickenmyer, 2025). The Trump oligarchy further saber-rattled by stating naval air attacks would be followed by strikes on land. The Trump oligarchy justified such actions as self-defense against an armed attack on the U.S. and the flooding of drugs into U.S. communities. Simultaneously, the Trump oligarchy invoked the Alien Enemies Act of 1798 (Ferreirra Santos, 2025), a wartime federal law that authorizes the U.S. president to apprehend, restrain, secure, and deport foreign nationals in ‘time of war’. (It had not been enacted since World War II).

But the administration made no mention of humanistic measures to reduce or treat drug demand. Scholars of geography studies have critiqued how the so-called drug war in Mexico is framed, seeing the violence as occurring close to limited natural resources. In terms of the production of lead, zinc, silver, and gold, the Mexican state of Chihuahua ranks as the second most significant in the nation (Paley, 2015). According to Green (2010), the border industrial complex—which includes Blackhawk helicopters, unmanned spy drones, ground-based sensors, physical and virtual fencing, border patrol agents, and military personnel—is fueled by border rhetoric tied to immigration.

Further hostilities were aggravated by the imposition of trade tariffs against Mexico, which sent a message of confronting a phantom enemy south of the border (Telesur, 2025a). Such border hysteria resurfaces in the U.S. nation-state within the politics of fluctuation, where, when the economy is strong, undocumented Mexican immigrants are championed. In contrast, on the flip

side of the coin, when the economy is weak, they are scapegoated for social ills (Healey & O'Brien, 2022). Regardless of the perspective, cheap Mexican immigrant labor is welcomed, while the dignity of the human being is not, with the root of such ideology being chattel slavery in the early foundations of the United States and the normalized state-sanctioned violence associated with such epoch in human history (Reichel, 1988).

Immigrants & Intelligentsia: A Simultaneous Siege

Higher education was the target of hostile aggression within the U.S. nation-state. The federal government reduced funding in an effort to restrict the free expression of the intelligentsia. Due to political disagreements about campus culture, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, and how to handle student protests on campus, the government halted billions of dollars in federal subsidies to hundreds of universities (American Council on Education, 2025). Immigration Custom Enforcement (ICE) besieged and deported undocumented immigrants at this turbulent time, targeting democratic sanctuary cities. Since the paper was written, two fatalities have been reported: ICE agents fatally shot Renee Nicole Good on January 7, 2026, and Alex Pretti on January 24, 2026, in Minneapolis, USA. Widespread opposition existed from the start against ICE raids in U.S. cities (Epstein, 2026).

Reemergence of the (Don)Monroe Doctrine

The Monroe Doctrine of 1823 declared that there would be no new European colonization in the Americas; in theory, Latin America would be the U.S. nation-state's backyard. Any foreign intrusion would be viewed as a threat to national security (Gonzalez, 2022). As of September 2025, U.S. naval forces have been operating off the coast of Venezuela and Colombia. They began to systematically target presumably drug-smuggling boats in the Caribbean, with the killings of many (Rios, 2026). Trump also confirmed that he would explore options for conducting strikes on land targets in Venezuela, labeling the nation as a narco-terrorist threat. Trump also aimed at Colombia threatening President Gustavo Petro to close down drug operations and to watch his ax. This created a diplomatic breakdown with Colombia, recalling its ambassador (Telesur, 2025b).

On January 3rd, 2026, the U.S. Imperialist forces executed a contemporary slave-catching maneuver (Reichel, 1988) and initiated a forceful and violent special forces operation against the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. They apprehended and kidnapped President Nicolas Maduro Moros along with his spouse, first combatant Cilia Flores. The presidential couple was incarcerated

in Brooklyn, New York, USA, and faced narcoterrorism charges. The brutal operation resulted in the deaths of 47 Bolivarian soldiers, as well as 32 Cuban soldiers from the Ministry of the Interior and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba, who were tasked with ensuring the security of President Maduro (Al Jazeera, 2026), in addition to numerous innocent civilians. The President of Cuba, Miguel Diaz-Canel, echoed the sentiments of a colonel who perished in combat, stating, " Only over my cadaver will they be able to take or assassinate the President [Maduro]" *Honor y Gloria* (Telesur, 2026). This act of aggression was carried out in direct violation of the United Nations Charter and International Law.

Reproduction of the Perpetual Foreigner

With so-called U.S. American exceptionalism against Mexico and the South, reinforced through violence, hatred, and the breakdown of humanity and a civil society, it is often the indignant and the underprivileged who endure various forms of antagonisms and violence. Throughout U.S. history, in times of nativist surges, the perpetual foreigner resurfaces and can be understood as a racist and a xenophobic form of racism where ethnic minorities are 'othered' in the U.S. (Healey & Stepnick, 2022; Gonzalez, 2022). The stereotype is often perpetuated through institutions, the media, and systemic biases, not just solely individual prejudice. What becomes prevalent is who is not U.S. American, and who is excluded from the national category (Barlow et al., 2000). This stereotype strips U.S. Americanness from people of ethnic groups (Huynh et al., 2011).

Holding The Line: Adult Education

The suffering endured by humanity fosters an awareness of injustice. During periods marked by violence, nativism, and intolerance, it is the responsibility of adult education to utilize its methodologies as a call to action for a humane, civil, and democratic society. As highlighted by Lai (1995), andragogy recognizes the vast experiences that adult learners contribute, which can provide significant teaching opportunities within the educational framework. As a result, individuals may find it challenging to truly connect with new ideas if their experiences are minimized or overlooked. Thus, neglecting these experiences constitutes a different form of institutional oppression; andragogy neither affirms nor negates experiences but rather encourages reflection on both contemporary and past experiences.

The true purpose of adult education has always been to promote democracy and an enlightened society, and it must continue to do so into the future. In

order to better prepare adult educators with critical awareness, it is essential to critically evaluate customs, various contexts, practices, and histories. This is necessary so that teachers can assist students in realizing that education necessitates choice and that informed students are necessary for that choice (Brown, 2010). According to Benavot et al. (2022), lifelong learning needs to cultivate moral settings that allow people from many knowledge traditions to interact, reciprocate, respect, be courteous, value, and acknowledge the "other." This should be accomplished through a 'sense of possibility' that supports learning as spiritually and politically healing, reflecting the human spirit's longing for life in a truly radical spiritual battle. In the dialectic of self and other, as well as in the dialectical framework of human agency, human action intertwines with spiritual significance and changes the soul (Kanpol, 1996).

Drawing Upon a Critical Theory of Adult Education

To make sense of a global society controlled by predatory corporations and dominated by technocratic and instrumental rationality, which consciously act to control the wider society and block deep historical collective enlightenment, empowerment, and transformative action, a critical theory of adult education supports that we should intentionally and concretely analyze how society functions as a school (Welton, 1991). By referencing a range of contexts, including the social, experience, learning, and awareness in the face of neoliberal reforms and the progression of an imperialist stage of capitalist development, Carpenter (2012) argues that a Marxist feminist approach should be anchored in adult education.

A Marxist approach to educational theory, according to Carpenter & Mojab (2022), draws on feminist, queer, anti-colonial, and anti-imperial theorization in addition to other shared histories within the larger Marxist tradition. A Marxist feminist perspective uses the global class relations of capitalism to analyze the particularities of gender, sex, and race. Marxist historical analysis is essential to the creation of a modern social analysis, according to Carpenter & Mojab (2023), who place a strong focus on history and the significance of historical processes and forces in comprehending reality.

Education is one of many places where hegemony can be renegotiated as part of a long revolution. A critical theory of adult learning should continue to advance a war of position that involves advances or retreats when translating working in and against the system, or, as stated in Brazil, being tactically inside and strategically outside the system (Mayo, 2005). In terms of militarism, industry, race, and gender relations, this is especially true of Trumpism and the neoliberal agenda (Mayo, 2021). Mayo also offers guidance on the value of

critically and dialectically interacting with status quo ideology and the ability to endure such tension. In line with the Gramscian concept of social transformation, which holds that dominant forms of thought and practice can be challenged in the vast arena of struggle for a civil society (Mayo, 2003).

According to Mayo (1995), Gramsci's conception of hegemony offers dialectical tools for examining the ways in which the ruling class aims to control social relations. The dominant culture in capitalist countries, on the other hand, normalizes social interactions that appear neutral and natural inside the market economy, and as such, this is the only sensible way for a society to be structured. To make the argument for the creation of more adult learning spaces that are critical, public, and socially committed, Borg & Mayo (2008) contend that hegemony is never absolute and that we must offer several instances of counter-hegemonic adult education both locally and globally that are critical, public, and socially committed. McLaren (1997) contends that practitioners and theorists are unable to critically engage with Marx's work because of the knee-jerk Marxophobia that permeates American adult education. Marxophobia maintains that even bringing up Marx is un-American and implicitly condones the repression and genocide committed by totalitarian communist governments across history.

In response, Brookfield (2001) argues that a critical theory of adult education must recognize the importance of Marxist ideas and be interpreted as a critical conversation with Marx. When it comes to commodification—the process by which human qualities or relationships are viewed as a product or good that can be purchased and sold on the open market—this becomes very necessary. Marx (2024) developed the theory of value and surplus labor, which holds that the portion of the workday where the worker creates value for which they are not paid is called surplus labor. The difference between necessary and surplus labor, as well as how capitalists take advantage of this excess value to boost their capital, is known as the commodification of labor power. The basis of capitalist exploitation, which is a direct disparity between the capitalist and the worker, is the appropriation of surplus value.

Marxism delivers a knockout punch through the critique of surplus value and labor in the U.S. as it relates to so-called undocumented immigrants. According to both the American Immigration Council & Institute of Taxation and Economic Policy (2025), in 2022, undocumented immigrants paid an estimated \$96.7 billion to 97 billion in federal, state, and local taxes. There was an estimated \$46.8 billion in federal taxes and \$29.3 billion in state and local taxes in 2022. Undocumented immigrants pay into social security and Medicare, where they contributed more than \$25 billion and \$6 billion, respectively, from

which they are largely ineligible to draw benefits. The wealthiest citizens in many states pay lower effective state and local taxes than undocumented immigrants. In 2023, the purchasing power of households with undocumented immigrants was \$299 billion. Additionally, in 2023, they paid more than \$167 billion in rent, which supports the housing market.

Reflection

In the past, fascism called for heedless loyalists and blind patriots who brought misery, death, and devastation to the world. We require a constructive sense of patriotism that challenges the nation-state (Lewin, 2013), with an internationalist consciousness, revealing a strong commitment to justice and equity for the greater good of society. According to McLaren & Monzo (2022), the only superpower in the world today employs its divinely mandated preemptive power to democratize rogue nations through the brutality of war, while symbolically highlighting the cultural inferiority of its new immigrant populations from the south.

In the context of education, Mayo (2023) recommends the implementation of a political economy-based anti-racist curriculum that incorporates economic history and cultural engagement. Additionally, it would also need to be based on a thorough understanding of colonialism. It is possible to cultivate social solidarity in a way that goes beyond borders created by humans. The critical consciousness-based flight of the imagination would extend over the entire world. A moral and humanistic Marxism should offer a radical hope for comprehending the continuous fight for the liberation of the poor, marginalized, exploited, oppressed, insignificant, and most hated within ethnocentric frameworks of capitalist societies (Zhixiong & Rowland, 2013). In the spirit of social justice for the common good.

References

- Acuña, R. (2021). *Occupied America: A history of Chicanos*. Pearson.
- Al Jazeera (2026) *Nearly 50 Venezuelan soldiers killed in US abduction of President Maduro*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/1/17/nearly-50-venezuelan-soldiers-killed-in-us-abduction-of-president-maduro#:~:text=The%20US%20raid%20began%20with%20the%20bombing,s even%20days%20of%20mourning%20for%20those%20killed>. Accessed 06/02/2026
- American Council of Education (2025). *Trump's Executive Orders Shift Higher Education Landscape*. <https://www.acenet.edu/News-Room/Pages/Trump-EOs-Shift-Higher-Education-Landscape.aspx> Accessed 06/02/2026
- American Immigration Council (2025). *New Data: Immigrants Keep Economy Strong, As Congress Considers Wasting Billions on Mass Deportation*. <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/press-release/immigrants-keep-economy-strong-as-congress-debates-mass-deportation/#:~:text=Undocumented%20immigrants%20are%20essential%20contributors,aides%20were%20immigrants%20in%202023>. Accessed 31/10/2025
- Barlow, K. M., Taylor, D. M., & Lambert, W. E. (2000). Ethnicity in America and feeling "American". *The Journal of psychology*, 134(6), 581-600.
- Benavot, A., Hoppers, C. O., Lockhart, A. S., & Hinzen, H. (2022). Reimagining adult education and lifelong learning for all: Historical and critical perspectives. *International Review of Education*, 68(2), 165-194.
- Betz, H. G. (2017). Nativism across time and space. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 23(4), 335-353.
- Bloch, K. R., & Myers, Q. W. (2018). The normalization of nativism: From extremist groups to the oval office. *Race, Gender & Class*, 25, 179-183.
- Borg, C., & Mayo, P. (2008). Globalisation, Southern Europe and European adult education policy. *Policy Futures in Education*, 6(6), 701-717.
- Brookfield, S. (2001). Repositioning ideology critique in a critical theory of adult learning. *Adult education quarterly*, 52(1), 7-22.
- Brown, T. (2010). Teaching adult education history in a time of uncertainty and hope. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 50(3), 497-517.
- Carpenter, S., & Mojab, S. (2023). The Class in Race, Gender, and Learning. In (R. Hall, Accioly & K. Szadkowski Eds.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of Marxism and Education* (pp. 93-110). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Carpenter, S., & Mojab, S. (2022). Marxist Feminism and Education: Gender, Race, and Class. In A. Maisuria (Ed), *Encyclopedia of Marxism and Education* (pp. 453-466). Brill.
- Carpenter, S. (2012). Centering Marxist-feminist theory in adult learning. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 62(1), 19-35.
- Charalambous, P., Romero, L. & Kim, S.R. (2025). *Trump has tapped an unprecedented 13 billionaires for his administration. Here's who they are*. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/trump-tapped-unprecedented-13-billionaires-top-administration-roles/story?id=116872968> Accessed: 16/01/2026

- Chavez, L. R. (2013). Spectacle in the desert: The Minuteman Project on the US-Mexico border. In J. A. Dowling & J. X. Inda (Eds). *Governing Immigration Through Crime: A Reader*, (pp. 25-46). Stanford University Press.
- Corpi, S. (2025). U.S. military, charter airlines play larger role in costly and dangerous migrant deportation operations. <https://www.tpr.org/border-immigration/2025-02-01/u-s-military-charter-airlines-play-larger-role-in-costly-and-dangerous-migrant-deportation-operations>
- Davies, (A). 2025. Biden warns of dangers of oligarchy taking shape in US. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c1weqz3ydr0> 16/01/2026
- Epstein, K. (2026). *What is ICE and what powers do its agents have to use force?* <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cp80ljjd5rwo> 06/02/2026
- Ferreirra Santos, S. (2025). *What is the 1798 law that Trump used to deport migrants?* <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cy871w21d3vo> Accessed 16/01/2026
- Garcia, M. T. (1985). La frontera: The border as symbol and reality in Mexican-American thought. *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, 1(2), 195-225.
- Gonzalez, J. (2022). *Harvest of empire: A history of Latinos in America*. Penguin.
- Green, L. (2011). The nobodies: neoliberalism, violence, and migration. *Medical anthropology*, 30(4), 366-385.
- Healey, J. F. & Stepnick, A. (2022). *Race, ethnicity, gender, and class: The sociology of group conflict and change*. Sage Publications.
- Institute of Taxation and Economic Policy (2025). Reuters: Fact Check: Undocumented Can, and Do Pay Taxes. [https://itep.org/reuters-fact-check-undocumented-immigrants-can-and-do-pay-taxes/#:~:text=Undocumented%20immigrants%20paid%20nearly%20\\$97,Read%20more](https://itep.org/reuters-fact-check-undocumented-immigrants-can-and-do-pay-taxes/#:~:text=Undocumented%20immigrants%20paid%20nearly%20$97,Read%20more). Accessed 31/10/2025
- Huynh, Q. L., Devos, T., & Smalarz, L. (2011). Perpetual foreigner in one's own land: Potential implications for identity and psychological adjustment. *Journal of social and clinical psychology*, 30(2), 133-162.
- Kanpol, B. (1996). Critical pedagogy and liberation theology: Borders for a transformative agenda. *Educational Theory*, 46(1), 105-117.
- Knickmeyer, E. (2025). *Trump administration designates 8 Latin American cartels as 'foreign terrorist organizations'*. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/trump-administration-designates-8-latin-american-cartels-as-foreign-terrorist-organizations>
- Kurtzleben, D. (2025). *Trump uses 'common sense' to make a political point. It has populist appeal.* <https://www.wesa.fm/2025-10-22/trump-uses-common-sense-to-make-a-political-point-it-has-populist-appeal> Accessed 16/01/2026
- Lai, J. C. (1995). *Andragogy of the Oppressed: Emancipatory Education for Christian Adults*. Fielding Institute.
- Leza, C. (2019). *Divided Peoples: Policy, Activism, and Indigenous Identities on the US-Mexico Border*. University of Arizona Press.
- Lewin, E. (2013). Constructive patriotism in wartime. *Open Journal of Political Science*, 3(4), 107-112.
- Marx, K. (2024). *Das Kapital (La Capital)*. Minerva Heritage Press.
- Mayo, M. (1995). Adult education for change in the nineties and beyond: Towards a critical review of the changing context. In M. Mayo & J. Thompson (Eds.) *Adult Learning, Critical Intelligence and Social Change*. Leicester (pp. 5-17). National Institute of Adult Continuing Education.

- Mayo, P. (2023). Hegemony, Education and Flight. Gramscian Overtures, *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies JCEPS*, 20(3), 66-80.
- Mayo, P. (2021). The turn to Gramsci in critical studies in education in North America. *International Gramsci Journal*, 4(2), 43-68.
- Mayo, P. (2005). 'In and against the state': Gramsci, war of position, and adult education. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies JCEPS*, 3(2), 1-14.
- Mayo, P. (2003). A rationale for a transformative approach to education. *Journal of transformative education*, 1(1), 38-57.
- McLaren, P., & Monzó, L. D. (2022). Guevara, Ernesto 'Che' (1928-1967). In Maisuria (Ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Marxism and Education* (pp. 321-340). Brill.
- McLaren, P. (1997). *Life in schools: An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education*. Longman.
- Navarro, A. (2008). *The immigration crisis: Nativism, armed vigilantism, and the rise of a countervailing movement*. Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.
- Navarro, A. (2005). *Mexicano political experience in occupied Aztlan: Struggles and change*. Rowman Altamira.
- Neuman, S. (2025). Here are 6 'Beautiful Bill' tax changes that will benefit wealthy Americans. <https://www.npr.org/2025/11/05/nx-s1-5590112/trump-beautiful-bill-taxes-republican-rich-wealthy> Accessed 16/01/2026
- Newth, G. (2023). Rethinking 'nativism': beyond the ideational approach. *Identities*, 30(2), 161-180.
- Paley, D. (2015). Drug war as neoliberal Trojan horse. *Latin American Perspectives*, 42(5), 109-132.
- Pinto, R. & Khan, L. (2025). Breaking Down Trump's Attempt to End Birthright Citizenship. <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/blog/breaking-down-trump-end-birthright-citizenship/> Accessed 16/01/2026
- Reichel, P. L. (1988). Southern slave patrols as a transitional police type. *American Journal of Police*, 7 (2), 51-78.
- Rios, M. (2026). A timeline of US strikes on boats that have killed 119. <https://www.cnn.com/2025/11/02/politics/timeline-us-strikes-caribbean-pacific-vis> Accessed 06/02/2026
- Telesur (2026). Miguel Diaz-Canel: they gave their lives in the fulfillment of their Mission <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42E2249I3Rk> Accessed 06/02/2026
- Telesur. (2025a). Trump imposes tariffs on imports from Mexico, Canada, and China. <https://www.telesurtv.net/trump-impone-aranceles-a-importaciones-de-mexico-canada-y-china/> Accessed 06/02/2026
- Telesur (2025b). Trump Accused of Unlawful Assaults at the Caribbean: 101 Organizations Demand Accountability. <https://www.telesurenglish.net/trump-accused-of-unlawful-assaults-at-the-caribbean-108u-s-organizations-demand-accountability/> Accessed 06/02/2026
- Welton, M. (1991). Shaking the foundations: The critical turn in adult education theory. *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, 5, 21-42.
- Zhixiong, L., & Rowland, C. (2013). Hope: The convergence and divergence of Marxism and liberation theology. *Theology today*, 70(2), 181-195.

Confronting Nativist discourse: Drawing upon a Critical Theory of Adult Education for humanising antagonisms along the Mexico-US borderlands

Jesus Jaime-Diaz

Abstract

This paper examines the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment in the U. S. during the second Trump oligarchy, focusing on deportations of undocumented Mexican/Latina/o American immigrants, and the threat from *La Frontera*/Borderlands. It discusses nativist discourses aimed at immigrants. Affirmed is a transformative adult education reinforced through a critical history that confronts harmful rhetoric, promoting a democracy that empowers marginalized groups in the spirit of social justice for the common good.

Key words

nativism, borderlands, immigration, critical history, solidarity, internationalism, adult education

Lutter contre le discours nativiste: s' appuyer sur une théorie critique de la éducation des adultes pour humaniser les antagonismes le long de la frontièr entre le Mexique et les États-Unis.

Jesus Jaime-Diaz

Résumé

Cet article examine la montée du sentiment anti-immigrés aux États-Unis durant la seconde oligarchie Trump, en se concentrant sur les expulsions d'immigrés américains mexicains/latina/o sans papiers, ainsi que sur la menace provenant de La Frontera/Borderlands. Il analyse les discours nativistes visant les immigrants. Il affirme l'importance d'une éducation des adultes transformatrice, renforcée par une histoire critique qui affronte les rhétoriques nuisibles, en promouvant une démocratie qui autonomise les groupes marginalisés dans l'esprit de la justice sociale pour le bien commun.

Mots clés

nativisme, région frontalière, immigration, histoire critique, solidarité, internationalisme, éducation des adultes

Como afrontar el discurso nativista: recurriendo a una teoría crítica de la educación de adultos para humanizar los antagonismos en la frontera entre el Mexico y Estado Unidos

Jesus Jaime-Diaz

Resumen

Este artículo examina el auge del sentimiento antiinmigrante en los EE. UU. durante la segunda oligarquía de Trump, centrándose en las deportaciones de inmigrantes indocumentados Mexicano/Latina/o Americanos y en la amenaza desde La Frontera/Borderlands. Analizan los discursos nativistas dirigidos contra los inmigrantes. Se afirma una educación de adultos transformadora, reforzada a través de una historia crítica que confronta la retórica dañina, promoviendo una democracia que empodera a los grupos marginados en el espíritu de la justicia social para el bien común.

Palabras clave

nativismo, tierras fronterizas, inmigración, historia crítica, solidaridad, internacionalismo, educación de adultos

Co-creating and Advancing Knowledge on Professional Activism Engagement and Education

Ana Luísa Costa, Henrique Vaz and Isabel Menezes

*CIIE - Centre for Research and Intervention in Education, Faculty of
Psychology and Education Sciences, University of Porto, Porto,
Portugal*

1 Introduction

This article presents a study that deepens and expands knowledge on professional activism (PA) engagement and education by involving activists themselves – politically committed professionals who advocate for the rights of people in situations of vulnerability with whom they work. Through focus group discussions that encouraged reflection on prior research, this study advances understanding of the dimensions potentially contributing to explaining PA (dis)engagement and the spaces, processes, and needs of PA education, considering formal, non-formal, and informal settings.

The interest in studying this political dimension of the work carried out by professionals in the educational, social, and community fields arises from the theoretical conception of intervention as intrinsically political and a potentially critical and liberating educational practice. It also draws on the vision of the professional as both educator and learner, engaging in dialogical exchange, critical construction, and mutual commitment (Freire, 1979; hooks, 1994; Ledwith, 2011; Martín-Baró, 1986).

In this regard, we also emphasise that studying the processes of education and engagement implicated in this professional activist stance and practice contributes to its social impact: knowing how to be and act as a professional activist can more fully contribute to addressing (and resolving) the problems they deal with.

Additionally, another key motivation of this study was the recognition of the importance of returning and discussing the research findings with the participants, ensuring their agreement and fostering their active involvement in the research process (Amado, 2014; Lather, 1986; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lietz & Zayas, 2010). This

concern is grounded in valuing intersubjectivity, the legitimacy and potential of multiple voices, the connection between theory and practice in the construction of knowledge, the fostering of researcher-participant co-learning, and in questioning the power relations in research/knowledge production (Amado, 2014; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lather, 1986, 2017; Lietz & Zayas, 2010). Accordingly, this study was developed based on practices that reinforce its participatory, interactive, and democratic nature.

2 Background

2.1 PA engagement

In addition to the growing literature that values and encourages the professional political involvement in response to social injustice (e.g., Greenslade et al., 2015; Herbert & Levin, 1996; Jansson et al., 2016; Kozan & Blustein, 2018; Lustig-Gants & Weiss-Gal, 2015), there are also many guidelines of professional representative institutions (e.g. professional associations/orders), or government bodies, which encourage such engagement, namely in their professional codes of ethics (e.g., American Psychological Association, 2025; International Federation of Social Workers, 2023; National Association of Social Workers, 2025; American Medical Association, 2025). These guidelines encourage professionals' engagement in political action, such as legislative or policy change, or in advocating for its implementation, in the best interest of people in situations of vulnerability and in the pursuit of social justice.

However, a gap appears to persist between PA encouragement and implementation (Pawar, 2019), evidenced by the continued prioritisation of micro-level intervention approaches, even when sensitive to issues of social injustice, to the detriment of mobilisation for systemic and structural change. This tendency hinders professionals' involvement in the political processes that underlie the injustices and suffering experienced by the people they work with (Goodman et al., 2004; Jansson et al., 2017; Vera & Speight, 2003).

Grieger and Ponterotto (1998) already argued that advocacy and activism are among the most potentially controversial and public actions in confronting injustice. Professionals can understand these actions differently, ranging from relatively safe tasks to high-risk ones, depending on their sense of personal and professional security within the workplace or community. This is why they also pose a challenge to professionals who, by publicly taking on this ethical commitment, risk provoking the discontent or even anger of those in positions of greater power, such as their institutional leaders, as well as distrust and resistance from coworkers, thereby jeopardising their professional credibility or even their jobs.

A discomfort and risk that seem to be unavoidable in the struggle for social justice, and about which Freire (1997) said:

“I do not have to hide my fears. However, what I cannot allow is for my fear to immobilise me. If I am sure of my political dream, with tactics that may perhaps reduce the risks I face, I must carry on with the struggle. Hence the need to command my fear, to educate my fear, from which my courage is finally born.” (p.39)

In this sense, while research shows that some professionals and organisations view these activist functions as being separate from their responsibilities, training, and professional purposes, it also reveals that there are professionals who, despite possible adversities, take on this role with a strong commitment. They may do so because they view their engagement in the sociopolitical arena as “a just and noble cause, supported by the ethos of the profession” (Melton, 2018, p. 83), even if this needs to be carried out in more covert ways (Greenslade et al., 2015), independently, and without professional resources or guidance (Greenslade et al., 2015; Toporek, Lewis & Crethar, 2009).

According to Greenslade et al. (2015), the literature has established that, particularly when faced with organisational and professional conflicts, professionals are confronted with three possible responses: to remain and deal with the situation, to leave, or to remain and resist. Even though the barriers professionals face in this process often outweigh the motivations and incentives (Kozan & Blustein, 2018), there are always professionals who remain and resist – a response that has been far less explored in research (Greenslade et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, the work context and professionals’ experiences can also play a crucial role in fostering PA learning and the construction of a PA identity, enhancing professionals’ capacities to overcome the obstacles they may encounter in its practical implementation (Costa, Vaz & Menezes, 2021b; Costa, 2023).

In this regard, MacDonnell and Buck-McFadyen (2016) also offer a counterpoint to the dominant view of professionals’ political inertia, suggesting that they do, in fact, engage in PA and in broader forms of activism, but often in highly contextualised and invisible ways, even to the professionals themselves. This invisibility is shaped by social and structural power dynamics that marginalise, shape, or even prevent certain forms of activism, particularly when carried out by women, racialised people, those from lower social classes, or in precarious employment situations.

2.2 Education for and in PA

In addition to affirming the importance of PA engagement and the need for favourable conditions to promote it, the literature has particularly problematised the preparation of professionals to act politically within their work contexts. It highlights gaps in formal education programs, as well as the need to strengthen and consolidate this dimension in the training of professionals (Domanski, 1998; Figueira-McDonough, 1993; Heinowitz, 2012; Marszalek et al., 2017; Melo et al., 2017; Serrano-García & Lugo-Hernández, 2016; Vera & Speight, 2003).

This emphasis on the importance of preparing professionals who work with people in situations of vulnerability for political practice has been highlighted in various fields, particularly psychology (Goodman et al., 2004; Heinowitz et al., 2012; Kozan & Blustein, 2018; Serrano-García & Lugo-Hernández, 2016; Vera & Speight, 2003), social work (Herbert & Levin, 1996; Jansson et al., 2017), education (Groundwater-Smith & Sachs, 2002; Montañaño et al., 2002; Picower, 2012), and nursing (MacDonnell & Buck-McFadyen, 2016; Melo et al., 2017). It reflects an expectation that such preparation will foster professionals' political know-how (awareness, knowledge, and skills) and promote their engagement in PA, as well as the commitment to the goal of advancing social justice (Heinowitz et al., 2012; Herbert & Levin, 1996; MacDonnell & Buck-McFadyen, 2016).

Additionally, the literature has shown that the lack of investment in these professionals' political training contributes to maintaining obstacles to their engagement in PA, such as a lack of political awareness or perceived competence in discussing political issues, reinforcing the need to generalise and strengthen this knowledge (Heinowitz et al., 2012; Jansson et al., 2017; Melo et al., 2017).

On the other hand, critical perspectives on adult education within the scope of activism engagement have highlighted the importance of moving beyond the confines of formal education contexts (through institutional course offerings and attendance). They emphasise the need to recognise the relevance of incidental or spontaneous learning ("as people live, work, and act socially"), informal learning ("where people naturally and socially teach and learn from each other in workplaces, families, community organisations, and social action"), and non-formal learning (structured and systematic, taking place in a set of social contexts) within emancipatory social and political struggles (Foley, 1999, p. 7).

These perspectives stress the importance of adopting a broad understanding of education and learning, highlighting the intellectual and educational nature of activism (Choudry, 2015; Foley, 1999) and the contribution it can make to enriching, expanding, and challenging dominant understandings of education, learning, and

knowledge production, particularly regarding how and where these processes occur (Choudry, 2015).

They underline that by exposing and challenging the contradictions and failures of structures and systems that (re)produce inequality and injustice, PA requires mobilising a set of guiding principles, practices, and strategies, which presuppose critical historical perspectives (including self-criticism), but which are also based on ideas emerging from current struggles (Choudry, 2015). It therefore involves processes of conscientisation, politicisation and specialisation, which result above all from social (critical) learning, situated in practice, and which, considering the mutually constitutive nature of thought and action, requires time and opportunities for discussion and reflection (Choudry, 2015, 2020; Foley, 1999; Montaña et al., 2002). Thus, the learning and knowledge production that result from engaging in the practical and theoretical tasks of activism also incorporate a significant identity change or definition, which is co-constructed (Drew, 2015; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Montaña et al., 2002; Ollis, 2008, 2010). A comprehensive and expansive learning and transformation that changes and shapes activists' epistemologies, identities, practices and political philosophies (Curnow et al., 2019).

This conscientizing and politicising trajectory contributes to the continuity of this path, fostering a sustained commitment to activism in a continuous cycle of learning in/and action (Choudry, 2015, 2020; Foley, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Ollis, 2010).

2.3 Empirical insights informing the discussion

As this study builds on empirical insights from previous research, we first briefly present the main findings shared and discussed with the participating professional activists. This previous research was conducted in Portugal and followed a mixed-methods approach. It began with interviews with 12 professional activists, allowing the exploration of the PA meanings, learning processes and outcomes (Costa, Vaz & Menezes, 2021a, Costa et al., 2021b), which paved the way to a broader analysis of PA repertoire and engagement predictors, through an online survey with a sample of 338 professionals working with PSV (Costa, Vaz & Menezes, 2023, 2025).

The qualitative findings portrayed PA as a praxis grounded on a sense of (in)justice that motivates professionals to defend those they work with through interventions guided by and aspiring toward a utopian ideal of transformation (Costa et al., 2021a). These results also reveal that their PA know-how stems from their political socialisation and (activist) professional experience (Costa et al., 2021b), giving rise to or strengthening learning outcomes such as 'critical, social, and political consciousness', 'sense of (in)justice and empathy', and 'know-how to speak out'.

A first analysis of the subsequent quantitative research revealed a typology of PA practices: 'collective PA', involving group collaboration and mobilisation (e.g., public meetings, demonstrations); 'individual PA', concerning singularity in political action (e.g., information sharing and discussion by publishing articles or opinion pieces); 'specialised PA', that is more technical-scientific, formal or institutional (e.g., conference presentations, contact with policy makers); and 'radical PA', which is more alternative and bold, less conventional and riskier (e.g., occupations, illegal interventions) (Costa et al., 2023).

A second-phase analysis identified potential predictors for each type of PA, suggesting the influence of personal and psychological factors, particularly emotional and attitudinal, as well as social and contextual elements (Costa et al., 2025).

In sum, and highlighting key results, this study has shown that a strong identification with PA (seeing oneself as a social justice advocate) allied with a greater social and contextual enablement for PA (e.g., the profession's positioning about PA, political socialisation and experience, social and political context), leads to an increased involvement with all types of PA.

Also, the more the organisation where professionals work encourages PA engagement and the more they perceive themselves as capable of promoting social justice, the more they will engage in collective PA (group-based public political actions) and specialised PA (formal and requiring expertise).

Additionally, the results reveal that acting more radically may trigger less support from co-workers, ultimately due to differing conceptions about PA as a professional role. Moreover, the more years of work these professionals have, the more they tend to engage in specialised and radical PA, possibly favoured by their greater experience, knowledge, and stable employment conditions.

Finally, they reveal a tendency for greater male involvement in individual actions when experiencing emotions of revolt – a finding that underscores the need for further research on the gender-emotion relationship in this dynamic.

It is also important to emphasise that the role of training and emotions (particularly positive ones) loses prominence, despite initially showing predictive potential in preliminary analyses.

These empirical insights raised new questions and highlighted the need for and relevance of furthering knowledge about PA engagement and education, thereby forming the basis for the study presented in this article.

3 Method

We conducted a qualitative study using focus group discussions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018) with a group of professional activists, to encourage participant interaction and facilitate the sharing of detailed and elaborated accounts of the topic under study (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Cohen et al., 2018).

3.1 Participants

Thirteen professional activists participated in this study. As mentioned, these are individuals who work with people in situations of vulnerability in educational, social, and community contexts in Portugal, who are recognised for their political engagement within their work. Nine self-identified as women, three as men, and one as non-binary. Twelve are white, and one is a Black woman, aged 28 to 67. They primarily work in urban contexts, in Porto and Lisbon, with one participant working in Viseu, an inland city.

Their professional backgrounds include Psychology, Social work, Education, Public policy, Chemistry, Psychiatry, Law, and Languages, Literatures, and Culture. The intervention contexts are diverse, encompassing non-governmental organisations, schools, universities, government and healthcare institutions; and referring to areas as gender, social justice, harm reduction, health (education, access to), screening (e.g., HIV, HCV), prisons, poverty and social exclusion, drug policies, people who use drugs, people experiencing homelessness, intersectionality, trans people, sexology, inclusive education, discrimination, human rights, citizenship and participation. Finally, regarding professional positions/functions, this group includes: leaders of organisations, services, schools, projects and teams, project technicians, researchers, secondary-school teachers and university lecturers, trainers, consultants, advisers, activists, community mediators, psychologists, social workers and one psychiatrist/hospital doctor. When mentioned in the section '4 Findings', each participant is identified using a two-letter code to ensure anonymity.

3.2 Data Collection

Three focus group discussions were conducted, two with five participants and one with three. Participants were identified through personal and professional contacts, together with recommendations from other participants and professionals in the field, using a snowball sampling strategy (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Participants were contacted and invited in person, as well as via email and social media.

The focus groups were conducted online, at the participants' decision, allowing for broader national coverage. Each session was facilitated by the first author, with support from another researcher. A discussion guide structured the sessions, including an initial reading of an informed consent form and a request for confirmation of participation (sent via email).

The discussions started with a brief presentation of the research problem, the study objectives, and the key empirical findings from previous research (see section '2.3 *Empirical insights informing the discussion*'). This introduction served as a starting point for group discussion, during which participants were encouraged to ask questions at any time or seek clarification at the end of the presentation. The goal was to foster the exchange of opinions, reflections, doubts, and suggestions, particularly through collective discussion of the findings based on their activist work and knowledge of this professional role. Specific questions were also posed to help guide the conversation and clarify particular aspects (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lietz & Zayas, 2010).

The sessions were audio- and video-recorded with participants' consent and fully transcribed. Although the authors did not transcribe them, the first author verified their accuracy by checking them against the recordings (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.3 Data Analysis

Given the purpose of this study, the data collected from the focus groups were analysed to explore participants' reflections, opinions, and contributions regarding the previous research findings, expanding and adding depth to them. Thus, this was developed through a deductive-inductive, reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013, 2019), guided by previous theoretical and empirical assumptions, while remaining open to identifying new themes that assumed particular relevance in this study.

The analysis of the testimonies enabled the identification, interpretation, and description of thematic patterns and interrelationships within the participants' narratives, which were considered relevant to the fulfilment of the study's objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013, 2019). This analysis was developed manually by the first author and then revised by all authors.

4 Findings

The findings presented in this article contribute to problematising and further advancing the understanding of PA engagement and education. While participants corroborate most of the findings from previous research, they also expanded the

discussion by proposing novel and complementary interpretative paths, raising new themes and suggesting future research questions, thereby enriching and complexifying the conceptualisation of the subject.

I really like what you presented. (...) a kind of feeling that people are reading something they had already thought about, but could not quite put into words (...). That is more or less the feeling. (P.E., 47 years old, woman, project manager/trainer)

(...) The first sense is this sense of familiarity (...). There are several elements in this framework that I recognise and identify with, and I would say that I see them reflected in my own career, in my work, and in my life experience. (T.A., 64 years old, man, teacher/school leader)

Their contributions are reflected in eight themes identified in the participants' narratives, which are portrayed in the following thematic map (Figure 1). To structure the analysis, these themes were organised under two overarching domains: *'Dimensions shaping PA engagement and repertoire'*, comprising six themes related to individual (personal and psychological), social, and contextual dimensions; and *'Spaces of PA education and identity building'*, comprising two themes related to how professional activist knowledge (being and doing) is, and can be, learned and connected to practice.

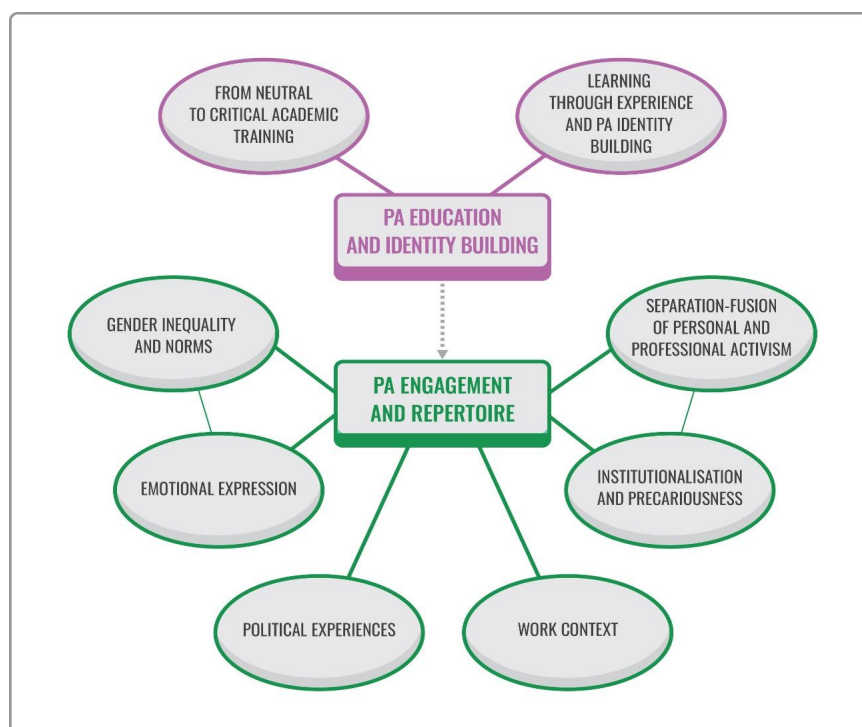


Figure 1. Thematic map.

4.1 Dimensions shaping PA engagement and repertoire

4.1.1 Gender inequality and norms

Gender inequality was highlighted, corroborating previous findings under discussion, particularly the heavy workload experienced by women as professional activists, their greater vulnerability to the obstacles and risks inherent to PA, and the additional effort required to be heard, valued, and considered trustworthy. Participants contribute to the discussion by highlighting the cultural weight and gender roles, the issues of place of speech and “space for speech” and debate, family organisation, and the unequal distribution of tasks, as well as the consequent reduced availability, opportunity, and capacity of women to participate politically.

In general, it is men who take the lead in various matters, and, therefore, it is natural that they are also at the forefront of activism and are more visible (...) they are also more trained to... they feel more at ease to defend causes. (R.E., 67 years old, woman, psychiatrist/hospital assistant)

(...) Men have much more confidence in occupying public spaces, while women are expected to show some reserve. (N.S., 36 years old, man, NGO leader and project technician/researcher)

The fact that women still have a second and a third shift after their regular shift has something to do with the availability we have to be activists. (B.O., 46 years old, woman, social service manager/researcher)

Still on this topic, participants emphasised the need for men working in this field to reflect more deeply on inequality, considering both their role in reproducing it and the importance of moving beyond being sensitive to being actively committed to combating inequality, which requires giving up privileges. At the same time, gender was also seen as a catalyst for professional activist engagement, particularly for women and LGBTQIA+ people, through personal identification with the cause.

Even in spaces where we have men who identify as men, as allies in these issues, even these figures do not so easily give up their male privilege. It is not just about being sensitive; it is about taking up the cause of equality between men and women. They have to realise that this is an active exercise. It is not just a principle; it is a choice of conduct in the smallest things, including not being the first to speak. (P.E., 47 years old, woman, project manager/trainer)

4.1.2 Emotional expression: strategy, management and gender

Despite attributing importance to emotions of revolt and positive emotions, emotions of revolt seem to prevail in the discourse of the participants, which they consider can lead to expressions (e.g., crying) or actions that are more immediate, less reflective or more explosive and which tend to discredit or be less effective. They therefore stress, above all, the importance of having a strategy in mind, of trying to manage these emotions, possibly also mobilising positive ones, in order not only to be alert to the problems faced by the people they work with (or release emotions), but also (and above all) to find solutions to them. It is also proposed that the lack of this reflection and more impulsive action may lead to a lack of self-efficacy, particularly in individual and radical activism.

(...) It is useful to feel angry, upset, dissatisfied with the things that happen, but then to reflect on it and think, 'OK, but how am I going to digest this and convey it in a way that will bring about change?' (...) I think that sometimes anger does not work in certain contexts (...) I think that, on some occasions, it has backfired on me. (R.S., 43 years old, man, psychologist/advisor)

In addition, a relationship between emotions of anger, gender and sexual orientation was also highlighted, from the perspective that certain expressions of anger (e.g., banging on the table, speaking louder) are less accepted in women and LGBTQI+ people than in cisgender heterosexual men, influencing the way these people are heard and considered. This reflection indicates that the latter can more easily express emotions of revolt, because they are more likely to be heard and acknowledged. It also helps to understand the prevalence of emotions of revolt and the male gender in individual activism engagement, possibly giving them greater confidence to act individually.¹ One of the participants also points out that this reference is particularly made in relation to white men.

I have no doubt that if I were a man... a white man, wearing a tie, saying precisely what I was saying, and possibly with the same tone... I would win in most situations. (A.R., 41 years old, woman, project technician/psychologist)

I think that when a straight man slams his fist on the table, it is fine (...) If I do it, maybe I am probably "being hysterical". I think there is a bit of that bias: 'There he goes again'. (R.S., 43 years old, man, psychologist/advisor)

¹ References to "LGBTQIA+ people" and "cisgender heterosexual men" reflect participants' accounts of perceived social expectations and assumptions, and do not indicate participants' self-identification.

4.1.3 Political experiences: the inspiring Carnation Revolution

Participants reflect on the influence that significant political events may have on how different generations become politicised, position themselves, and engage in politics – an aspect particularly related to the dimension of social and contextual enablement for PA, considered in previous research. They specifically emphasise the importance of Portuguese democratic history and the impact of April 25, 1974, on the symbolic and practical involvement of these professionals in activism. These historical, social, and political processes also facilitate understanding of the tradition of a more welfare-oriented intervention in the country, helping to explain the diversity of perspectives on the ethical-professional role in working with people in situations of vulnerability. This issue of social justice and this vision of a fairer society (...) is very much institutionalised in Portuguese society after April 25, in this Portuguese democratic experience (...) we all worked towards building a fairer society, which was, in fact, the first version of the Constitution (...) Portuguese democracy was moving towards socialism (...), and I think that this is still very much present in the life of our organisations and in many of our personal beliefs. (T.A., 64 years old, man, teacher/school leader)

Additionally, participants highlight the importance of further exploring how this dimension affects engagement in the various types of PA. From their perspective, generational differences in significant political experiences will lead to a diverse propensity for PA engagement, shaping how they become politicised, position themselves, and engage in politics.

Different generations end up having different significant events, which then condition how they observe, how they understand life in general, or how they position themselves in the world, including the world of work (...) and possibly [their] demands and ways of doing politics. (E.S., 38 years old, woman, NGO leader and technician/researcher)

In my generation, which was greatly influenced by April 25 and the revolutionary process it initiated, collective processes are essential to us. (...) I find it very difficult to say 'I', I say 'we' very easily (...) and I see many young people who are equally eager for justice and common construction, etc., but who talk a lot about 'I'. (T.A., 64 years old, man, teacher/school leader)

4.1.4 Work context: perceived opportunities for PA

Reinforcing the findings from previous research, the participants also highlight the central role of organisational culture and environment, as well as support from both

the organisation and coworkers, in discouraging PA and shaping perceptions of opportunities and possibilities for engagement.

We need time to dedicate ourselves, we need to have energy (...), so all support is important, both organisational and from colleagues, from people in our immediate family context. I think they are all important for professional activism to become a reality. (I.S., 42 years old, woman, team coordinator)

Discussing these findings broadens the debate by incorporating new elements that deepen our understanding of these processes. Firstly, regarding the relationship with the work context, the participants highlighted the prevalence of obstacles to PA in public administration, compared to NGOs. On the other hand, in more activist-oriented organisations, they emphasise the lack of support from other organisations or services, which creates barriers to their work.

All of this is very difficult in public administration, that is, being an activist in a civil society organisation is much easier because of the support and peer relationships (...). There is an underlying fear surrounding this issue of participation (...). People are completely desensitised to the issue of others, and, therefore, we do what we have been doing for years; there is no questioning of the procedure, and the procedure systematically puts others in a position of greater vulnerability (...). It is very, very difficult to be an activist. (...) On the other hand, I am absolutely certain that it is important to be an activist every day. (...) What I feel is that, sometimes, civil society groups are already way ahead, apparently with fewer resources, but with a stronger voice. (B.O., 46 years old, woman, social services manager/researcher)

We sometimes face many barriers (...) [when] coordinating with other more entrenched services (...), which is to fit people into services, when it is the services that have to adapt to people. (S.L., 28 years old, woman, social worker)

Moreover, a debate emerged around the possibilities for activist professionals to participate in the decision-making processes of the organisations in which they work. Views ranged from the position that management bodies should be more open to allowing activists to influence their agenda, to the perspective that activist professionals should not expect to reshape the organisation according to their vision and priorities. This discussion also gave rise to a proposal for categorising or formally recognising PA as a profession in its own right.

(...) Some organisations (...) realise that this is all complex and that you need to know how to play with everyone involved in the process. Other organisations are a little more decisive about what they want for themselves

and, therefore, less open to proposals for change (...). We have had experience (...) of people who find it difficult to understand that the place where they have agreed to work (...) is not their backyard. (I.A., 44 years old, non-binary, community health technician/advisor)

(...) I think we are talking about a structural problem here, which is the lack of categorisation of professional activism (...) because it always seems that in order to do activism, which is actually what you are an expert in, you have to go around doing other things that are the normal organisational parameters for success (D.O., 30 years old, woman, activist/community mediator)

4.1.5 Institutionalisation and precariousness: domesticating and hindering PA

Still within the reflection on contextual aspects, the discussion has given rise to more systemic considerations, namely regarding the impact of the institutionalisation and financial dependence of organisations on the activist mobilisation of professionals.

Fundamentally, questions arise about: the lack of time for activism; the appropriation of struggles (concepts, ideas, ideals) by organisations, considering that, on the one hand, this brings visibility to causes, but on the other, it also functions as a mechanism for controlling and domesticating them; and also the orientation and control of the action and narrative of organisations by the system (i.e., the way society functions, the state, governments, political decision-making bodies, institutional functioning, and funding programs). Most participants who addressed the issue did so from the perspective that this system tends toward the appropriation, domestication, and instrumentalisation of organisations and, in turn, of the professionals' activist practices.

Nowadays, organisations suffer significantly from the ill of institutionalisation. That is, organisations absorb concepts and then take ownership of them, trying to implement them in order to integrate them into the system. This obviously has a positive side, as it allows these ideas to enter the structure and reach a wider audience. However, in some ways, it is also a form of control over the idea, the ideals, and what should be fought for (...). Moreover, we can think about how money then comes to control this, that is, today we have European projects that are for certain types of causes, and that is what dictates (...) this is a way for the system to try to control what narrative comes next and what it wants to happen. (N.S., 36 years old, man, NGO leader and project technician/researcher)

Participants also highlight the impact of precariousness in the sector and in PA engagement, emphasising that this mainly affects younger generations, women, and professionals working in inland regions. Notably, regarding the geographical factor,

they point out that professionals working in the country's interior experience more precarious working conditions and have more limited access to funding resources – a set of factors that inhibit engagement with PA, as well as the continuity of this commitment.

I do not know where I will be in a few years, because the instability, precariousness, and short-term funding do not allow me to work in a place where I can envision myself as an activist. (S.A., 30 years old, woman, social worker/community centre coordinator and technician)

(...) smaller contexts, where resources also tend to be scarcer, require levels of commitment to sustainability that sometimes completely suffocate the possibility of activism (...) If it is true that there are organisations in large urban centres that turn into mere service providers (...) it is far from urban centres that this happens to a greater percentage of organisations, perhaps also because there are fewer organisations there. (I.A., 44 years old, non-binary, community health technician/advisor)

4.1.6 Separation-fusion of personal and professional activism: mental health and work conditions

Perspectives of dialogue, or even overlap, between personal and professional activism stood out, as well as the primacy of professional activism over personal activism, alongside issues of precariousness and poor working conditions. Additionally, attention is drawn to the emotional exhaustion, fatigue, and guilt arising from these processes, which reveal the impact of this work on the mental health of professionals.

(...) I get to Friday, and I am drained because every day we work with highly vulnerable populations and complicated issues (...), and I feel guilty if I do not go to the march or if I do not go to the protest, or if I am not posting and creating things on social media as an activist [on a personal level]. (...) I think it is also related to job insecurity and working conditions (...). It is challenging to balance these two sides when the work you do, in addition to being emotionally demanding, does not provide you with the right conditions. (S.A., 30 years old, woman, social worker/community centre coordinator and technician)

We need to have a creative and innovative capacity (...). We need to have energy, which then turns into exhaustion (...). There is a kind of toxicity inherent to activism. Like, how wonderful we all are, doing so much for others while ruining our own health (...). We end up in burnout, catching ourselves making mistakes that, if we were well, we probably would not make. (P.E., 47 years old, woman, project manager/trainer)

Expanding on this reflection, the issue of the fusion versus incompatibility of professional and personal activism also emerged, particularly in organisations more oriented towards activism. Paradoxically, there is reference to both a lack of support from the organisation for professionals' involvement in personal activism and to expectations of continuity of PA in personal life when it concerns causes related to their work.

I said I was going to join the international feminist strike (...) and I got a message from the organisation's management saying that in this organisation, activism is done every day through our work. Therefore, that strike day would be deducted from my pay (...). I got a scolding, being told that I am already paid to do activism every day and that it makes no sense for me to go on strike, because my activism is working. (A.R., 41 years old, woman, project technician/psychologist)

Highly activist organisations also have this issue, it is expected that that you will take part in certain things outside working hours (...) Since it is about gender equality, we always have to be there (...) There is [also] a kind of pressure from the collective for you to take a stand in a certain way, even if you are not entirely sure (...) You have to be constantly expressing a position, even when this spills over beyond your working hours. (E.S., 38 years old, woman, NGO leader and technician/researcher)

4.2 Spaces of PA education and identity building

4.2.1 From neutral to critical academic training

Although the findings of this study corroborate the perspective that knowing how to be and act as a professional activist derives primarily from political socialisation and (activist) work experience, the discussion of this issue generated important reflections on academic training. These contributions primarily focus on the prevalence in academic contexts of encouragement towards neutrality and individualised (vs. structural) intervention, as well as the view of professionalism as incompatible with political involvement. A perspective on the educational system as a non-disruptive structure is highlighted, reinforcing that the acquisition of activist practice is inevitably achieved through experience. On the other hand, although less predominant, there is also a reference to experiences that encourage critical thinking within academic contexts, particularly in certain areas of specialisation with a more critical approach and a closer connection to practice.

During my academic training (...), I felt that the focus was very individual and the stance... quite prejudiced towards some communities with which I

would later come to work, and also with this discourse of a certain professional neutrality (...) (R.S., 43 years old, man, psychologist/advisor)

The system itself will never be disruptive. Assuming that education, the educational system, is something that is part of the broader system, it will be impossible for the system itself to teach people to be disruptive (...). I think it can provide the foundations (...), but then the way we apply that is something learned outside institutions. (N.S., 36 years old, man, NGO leader and project technician/researcher)

We have been sold the idea that neutrality, being neutral, is what it means to be professional (...) I come from a field in Psychology where I feel I was very much taught to think critically about the system and in a less individualised way (...) I was taught mainly to question the world and to think from that perspective, on the other side of the social control device. However, we know from years and decades of social science research how they have been used to normalise or domesticate. (A.R., 41 years old, woman, project technician/psychologist)

When asked about the role and relevance of education in their engagement with activism, participants shared that higher education can and should foster critical thinking, political awareness, and raise professionals' sensitivity to the importance of adopting a transformative approach in their work, as well as equip them with practical tools. However, there is a transversal perspective that its implementation is learned essentially through practice.

Nothing we are taught is free from positioning, right? So, I do not doubt that yes, this has to be discussed when we are being trained as professionals (...) (A.R., 41 years old, woman, project technician/psychologist)

It makes sense to me that in the most diverse courses there should be a dimension of advocacy (...). Activism, I feel, is something that cannot be taught. (B.O., 46 years old, woman, social services manager/researcher)

I think yes, there should be training, perhaps not in the most conventional sense of the word, right? (...) Training, in the sense of empowerment, involves the development of our competences, which is immense and complex, in the context of what we are discussing here. (...) It could also mean equipping the professional activist with tools to be able to deal with [mental health, burnout]. (P.E., 47 years old, woman, project manager/trainer)

4.2.2 Learning through experience and PA identity building

Finally, participants agreed with previous empirical findings regarding the learning that arises from professional PA experience, reaffirming its educational potential and how it strengthens engagement with practice in the pursuit of building a more just society. What stands out is the transformative nature of these experiences, processes, and knowledges, in terms of how professionals understand the (their) world, how they see themselves and act within it, resulting in the (re)definition of their professional identity and practice.

As soon as I started having experience with professional activism, that was profoundly transformative and profoundly important for what happened in the following years. (I.A., 44 years old, non-binary, community health technician/advisor)

I think that my work lately has been much more connected to activism, being very different from what I first started doing, which was my role as a psychiatrist in the office, focused on treatments, classifications, and those kinds of things. Therefore, I also had to do some work in order to deconstruct a series of models I carried in my work as a psychiatrist, so I could support [the people I work with] and be the ally that I am. (R.E., 67 years old, woman, psychiatrist/hospital assistant)

This activism manifests itself in various ways throughout our professional journey and our lives. (S.L., 28 years old, woman, social worker)

The type of militancy or professional activism that I developed (...) was very much inspired by the places where I worked, and I was strongly socialised into it through the readings I did, people I met, things I attended, films I watched, and multiple sources. However, in some way, it is individual. It is like... a mirror of myself. I am not sure how to put it, but it mirrors my identity, and my identity mirrors it back, and they feed off each other. (E.S., 38 years old, woman, NGO leader and technician/ researcher)

5 Discussion and Conclusion

The involvement of professional activists in discussing previous empirical findings on PA engagement and education facilitated the co-creation and advancement of knowledge on the topic, generating new insights while also opening new avenues for research (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lietz & Zayas, 2010).

Moreover, being aimed at confronting, deepening, and expanding the knowledge acquired in the previous research, this study embodied the self-reflexive dimension of research, while also attempting to stimulate and document the impact of the research itself as a process that promotes participants' self-reflection on their experiences and on the world they live in, fostering (self-)knowledge and learning ('catalytic validity', Lather, 1986; 'ontological authenticity', Guba & Lincoln, 1989), as well as a greater understanding and appreciation of other participants' perspectives ('educative authenticity', Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Shannon & Hambacher, 2014).

Thus, in addition to showing the participants' agreement with the general conclusions presented for discussion, this study's findings constitute a substantial contribution to the problematisation of the topics and to advancing their interpretation and understanding.

The data analysis allowed the identification of eight themes, which, although interrelated, were grouped into two broad domains (Figure 1): the dimensions that shape PA engagement and repertoire, and the spaces of PA education and identity building.

About individual dimensions, the gender inequalities, norms, roles, stereotypes, social expectations, and relations of domination, also permeate this field, influencing not only the participants' levels of participation, but also their identities, practices and approaches, as well as the (perceived) impact of their PA (MacDonnell & Buck-McFadyen, 2016; Petrarca, 2016; Verba et al., 1995). It is considered that men hold a gender advantage in relation to PA, as they have easier access to the public sphere, greater capacity to participate, and greater ease in expressing emotions of revolt. Expressions that are less accepted in women and in LGBTQIA+ individuals, who are therefore compelled to anticipate strategies for managing their emotions in order to ensure the effectiveness of their activist action. These reflections help explain the [cisgender and heterosexual] male predominance in individual activism when experiencing emotions of revolt, identified in previous studies. A result still requiring further empirical investigation.

Concerning the social and contextual aspects, participants emphasise the impact that experiencing certain critical events can have on professionals' personal and professional development, on their discourse, and on their political mobilisation (Costa et al., 2021a, 2025; Kozan & Blustein, 2018; MacDonnell & Buck-McFadyen, 2016; Petrarca, 2016; Verba et al., 1995). In this regard, they highlight the impact of the lived or mediated experience of April 25, 1974, and the importance of developing research that deepens the understanding of how this dimension affects engagement with different types of PA, particularly across generations.

Moreover, corroborating the expectations of previous research and the literature, this study's findings reaffirm the central role of organisational culture, environment, and support from both organisation and co-workers, in terms of either encouraging or discouraging PA, and in shaping the auspices of agency or the perceived opportunity to participate. Consequently, this work context influences professionals' engagement with PA as well as their perception of social justice self-efficacy in such engagement (Costa et al., 2021a, 2025; Greenslade et al., 2015; Heinowitz et al., 2012; Jansson et al., 2016; Kozan & Blustein, 2018; Ritter, 2008).

They further develop this discussion by addressing the institutionalisation and precariousness that affect PA and highlighting the importance of these institutional and societal dimensions (Menezes, 2012) for understanding PA engagement and repertoire. These processes of assimilation and reconversion of the activist experience by the hegemonic political and economic market logic ultimately constrain professionals and their mobilisation in the struggle against social inequalities. Thus, this leads to a political absence that significantly harms the people in situations of vulnerability with whom these professionals work, while also undermining their professional identity (Domanski, 1998; Figueira-McDonough, 1993; Heinowitz et al., 2012).

At the same time, this study's findings affirm the relevance of considering the conditions of inequality, instability, and precariousness that professionals face and that hinder the pursuit of consistent engagement with PA, emphasising that these conditions mainly affect younger generations, women, and professionals working in inland regions – aspects meriting further investigation.

The findings also contribute to the theoretical discussion on the separation-fusion between personal and professional political life (van Deth, 2014, 2021; Verba et al., 1995). Despite the specificities inherent to personal activism (as citizen participation) and PA, the intersections between these forms of activism, evident in this study's findings, indicate the difficulty in distinguishing them as mutually exclusive forms of participation (Verba et al., 1995). This discussion also frames and opens up the possibility of deepening knowledge about aspects common to both, or that result precisely from this fusion, particularly regarding impacts on personal life (e.g., mental health) and professional careers (e.g., conflicts with the organisation versus professional recognition).

Regarding PA education, the empirical findings from previous research, discussed in this study, indicate that having specific training in PA, while not directly influencing engagement in PA, may nonetheless play a relevant role by promoting identification with PA and professionals' self-efficacy for activist action. This expectation is corroborated in the present study, with the findings highlighting the potential of higher education to promote awareness-raising and preparedness for PA. In this perspective, and in line with literature, strengthening professionals' political know-

how (awareness, knowledge, skills) may foster their alignment with this professional role and promote their confidence and motivation to act politically in their work (Costa et al., 2025; Goodman et al., 2004; Heinowitz et al., 2012; Jansson et al., 2017; Kozan & Blustein, 2018; MacDonnell & Buck-McFadyen, 2016; Melo et al., 2017; Serrano-García & Lugo-Hernández, 2016).

Moreover, this study findings further highlight the relevance of both approaches to PA education elaborated in the theoretical framework: the one arguing for investment in education for PA within initial and continuing professional training, in order to raise awareness and equipping professionals with tools to PA – Education for PA (Domanski, 1998; Figueira-McDonough, 1993; Heinowitz, 2012; Marszalek et al., 2017; Melo et al., 2017; Picower, 2012; Serrano-García & Lugo-Hernández, 2016; Vera & Speight, 2003); and the one advocating that PA education happens through practice, experientially, situated in emancipatory social and political struggles, often incidentally or spontaneously and informally – Education in PA (Choudry, 2015, 2020; Foley, 1999; Montaña, 2002; Ollis, 2010).

Furthermore, they reveal that PA engagement, and the learning that arises from this experience, is envisaged by professional activists as a strong transformative process, a (re)construction of their professional self (identity and practice) (Choudry, 2015, 2020; Curnow et al., 2019; Ollis, 2008, 2010), which is not fixed and entails both objective and subjective transformations, influenced by a diversity of personal, social, and contextual dimensions. It is the outcome of a personal and professional trajectory situated within different contexts and life courses, involving past, present, and future (Fillieule, 2010, 2015; Wenger, 1998).

Finally, regarding the limitations of this study, we note that the group of participants could have been more heterogeneous, particularly in terms of geography and gender identity, allowing for a more in-depth exploration of the aspects under discussion. Notwithstanding, these findings make a significant contribution to advancing this field of research, enabling the analysis and understanding of professional activists perspectives on previous research findings concerning PA engagement and education, their experiences and subjectivities regarding this professional role, as well as their relationships and interactions with the multiple life, social, organisational, and macro-social contexts in which they are embedded, and how these relationships are expressed in the phenomenon under study.

Furthermore, this study generated new insights which enabled the identification of areas requiring further research, namely the relationship between PA and mental health (e.g., burnout), gender (norms/inequalities), and work context issues (geographical, organisational culture, employment (in)stability), as well as the need to explore further the PA education (dis)investment in formal, non-formal and informal education contexts, and its potential to mitigate the impact of the identified dimensions on professionals' PA engagement and repertoire.

Therefore, considering the growing relevance of PA in the face of contemporary educational and societal challenges, we hope these new insights contribute to further reflection on PA engagement and education in research and practice, thereby expanding this field of knowledge and action.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank all the participants in the study, as well as researchers Norberto Ribeiro and Pedro Menezes (CIIE, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, University of Porto) for their support in the development of the focus groups.

Declaration of conflicting interest

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding statement

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was funded by national funds, through the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology, IP (FCT)/Portuguese Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation, under A. Costa employment contract, established through the Scientific Employment Stimulus-Individual Programme [grant no. 2023.06314.CEECIND/CP2878/CT0004], and under the doctoral research grants no. PD/BD/135472/2017 and COVID/BD/152738/2022. It was also partially supported by national funds through FCT, I.P., under the multi-year funding awarded to CIIE [grants no. UIDB/00167/2020, UIDP/00167/2020, and UID/00167/2025]. Since 2025, CIIE, the host institution, has also received support from the European Union – NextGenerationEU under the Recovery and Resilience Plan [grant no. UID/PRR/167/2025]. The authors also acknowledge funding from FCT under the PROACTCOP project [grant no. 2023.12513.PEX].

References

- Amado, J. (2014). *Manual de Investigação Qualitativa em Educação*. [Manual of qualitative research in education]. 2nd ed. Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra. <https://doi.org/10.14195/978-989-26-0879-2>
- American Medical Association (AMA). (2025). "Health Care Advocacy". <https://www.ama-assn.org/health-care-advocacy>
- American Psychological Association (APA). (2025). "2025 Advocacy priorities". <https://www.apaservices.org/advocacy/actions/advocacy-priorities>
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2): 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners*. Washington, D.C.: Sage.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative research in sport, exercise and health*, 11(4): 589–597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
- Choudry, A. (2015). *Learning Activism: The Intellectual Life of Contemporary Social Movements*. University of Toronto Press.
- Choudry, Aziz (2020). Activist learning and knowledge production. In I. van Ackeren, H. Bremer, F. Kessl, H. C. Koller, N. Pfaff, C. Rotter, D. Klein, & U. Salaschek (Eds.), *Bewegungen: Beiträge zum 26. Kongress der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Erziehungswissenschaft* (1st ed., pp. 641–652). Verlag Barbara Budrich. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv10h9fjc.49>
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research Methods in Education*. 8th ed. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315456539>
- Costa, A. L., Vaz, H., & Menezes, I. (2021a). Exploring the meanings of professional activism. *Community Development*, 52(2): 244–261. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15575330.2020.1866049>
- Costa, A. L., Vaz, H., & Menezes, I. (2021b). The activist craft: Learning processes and outcomes of professional activism. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 71(3): 211–231. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713620988255>
- Costa, A. L., Vaz, H., & Menezes, I. (2023). A typology of professional activism in educational, social and community intervention. *Educação & Sociedade*, 44, e264686. <https://doi.org/10.1590/ES.264686>
- Costa, A. L., Vaz, H., & Menezes, I. (2025). The Professional Becoming Political: Exploring Predictors of Engagement with Professional Activism in Portugal. *The International Journal of Community and Social Development*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/25166026251313594>
- Creswell, J. W. & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry. *Theory Into Practice* 39 (3): 124–130. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip3903_2
- Curnow, J., Davis, A. & Asher, L. (2019). Politicization in Process: Developing Political Concepts, Practices, Epistemologies, and Identities through Activist Engagement. *American Educational Research Journal*, 56 (3): 716–752. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831218804496>

- Domanski, M. D. (1998). Prototypes of Social Work Political Participation: An Empirical Model. *Social Work*, 43 (2): 156-167. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23717298>
- Drew, Lara. (2015). Embodied Learning Processes in Activism. *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, 27 (1): 83-101. <https://doi.org/10.56105/cjsae.v27i1.3410>
- Figueira-McDonough, J. (1993). Policy Practice: The Neglected Side of Social Work Intervention. *Social Work*, 38 (2): 179-188. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23716995>
- Fillieule, O. (2010). Some elements of an interactionist approach to political disengagement. *Social movement studies*, 9 (1): 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742830903442436>
- Fillieule, O. (2015). Propuestas para un análisis procesual del compromiso individual. *Intersticios. Revista sociológica de pensamiento crítico*, 9 (2).
- Foley, G. (1999). *Learning in Social Action: A Contribution to Understanding Informal Education*. Global Perspectives on Adult Education and Training. London: Zed Books.
- Foley, G. (2001). Radical Adult Education and Learning. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 20 (1-2): 71-88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370010008264>
- Freire, P. (1979). *Conscientização: Teoria e Prática da Libertação: Uma Introdução ao Pensamento de Paulo Freire*. São Paulo: Cortez & Morales.
- Freire, P. (1997). *Professora Sim, Tia Não: Cartas a Quem Ousa Ensinar*. São Paulo: Editora Olho d'Água.
- Goodman, L. A., Liang, B., Helms, J. E., Latta, R. E., Sparks, E. & Weintraub, S. R. (2004). Training Counseling Psychologists as Social Justice Agents: Feminist and Multicultural Principles in Action. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 32: 793-837. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000004268802>
- Greenslade, L., McAuliffe, D. & Chenoweth, L. (2015). Social Workers' Experiences of Covert Workplace Activism. *Australian Social Work*, 68 (4): 422-437. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2014.940360>
- Grieger, I. & Ponterotto, J. G. (1998). Challenging Intolerance. In Lee, C. C. & Walz, G. R. (Eds.), *Social action: A mandate for counsellors* (17-34). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
- Groundwater-Smith, S. & Sachs, J. (2002). The Activist Professional and the Reinstatement of Trust. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 32 (3): 341-358. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764022000024195>
- Guba, E. G. & Lincoln, Y. S. (1989). *Fourth generation evaluation*. Sage.
- Heinowitz, A. E., Brown, K. R., Langsam, L. C., Arcidiacono, S. J., Baker, P. L., Badaan, N. H., Zlatkin, N. I., & Cash, R. E. (G.). (2012). Identifying Perceived Personal Barriers to Public Policy Advocacy within Psychology." *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 43 (4): 372-378. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029161>
- Herbert, M. & Levin. R. (1996). The Advocacy Role in Hospital Social Work. *Social Work in Health Care*, 22 (3): 71-83. https://doi.org/10.1300/J010v22n03_05
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

- International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). (2023). Freedom, Equality, and Justice for All: The Essential Role of Social Work in Advancing Human Rights. <https://www.ifsw.org/freedom-equality-and-justice-for-all-the-essential-role-of-social-work-in-advancing-human-rights/>
- Jansson, B. S., Nyamathi, A., Heidemann, G., Bird, M., Ward, C. R., Brown-Saltzman, K., Duan, L. & Kaplan, C. (2016). Predicting Levels of Policy Advocacy Engagement among Acute-Care Health Professionals. *Policy, Politics, & Nursing Practice*, 17 (1): 43–55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527154416644836>
- Jansson, B. S., Nyamathi, A., Heidemann, G., Duan, L. & Kaplan, C. (2017). Validation of the Policy Advocacy Engagement Scale for Frontline Healthcare Professionals. *Nursing Ethics*, 24 (3): 362–375. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969733015603443>
- Kozan, S. & Blustein, D. L. (2018). Implementing Social Change: A Qualitative Analysis of Counseling Psychologists' Engagement in Advocacy. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 46 (2): 154–189. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000018756882>
- Lather, P. (1986). Scientific Research in Education: A Critical Perspective. *British Educational Research Journal*, 30 (6): 759–772.
- Lather, P. (2017). Validity, qualitative. *The Blackwell encyclopedia of sociology*, 1-5.
- Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511815355>
- Ledwith, M. (2011). *Community Development: A Critical Approach*. 2nd ed. Bristol, UK: Policy Press.
- Lietz, C. A. & Zayas, L. E. (2010). Evaluating Qualitative Research for Social Work Practitioners. *Advances in Social Work*, 11 (2): 188–202. <https://doi.org/10.18060/589>
- Lustig-Gants, S. & Weiss-Gal, I. (2015). Why Do Social Workers Become Policy Actors? *Journal of Policy Practice*, 14 (3–4): 171–190. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15588742.2015.1017684>
- MacDonnell, J. A. & Buck-McFadyen, E. (2016). How Activism Features in the Career Lives of Four Generations of Canadian Nurses. *Policy, Politics & Nursing Practice*, 17 (4): 218–230. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527154416688669>
- Marszalek, J. M., Barber, C. & Nilsson, J. E. (2017). Development of the Social Issues Advocacy Scale-2 (SIAS-2). *Social Justice Research*, 30: 117–144. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-017-0284-3>
- Martín-Baró, I. (1986). Hacia una psicología de la liberación. *Boletín de Psicología*, 22: 219-231. <http://www.uca.edu.sv/deptos/psicolog/hacia.htm>
- Melo, W. S. D., Oliveira, P. J. F. D., Monteiro, F. P. M., Santos, F. C. D. A., Silva, M. J. N. D., Calderon, C. J., ... & Simão, A. A. C. (2017). Guia de Atributos da Competência Política do Enfermeiro: Estudo Metodológico. [Guide of attributes of the nurse's political competence: a methodological study]. *Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem*, 70(3): 526-534. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7167-2016-0483>
- Melton, M. L. (2018). Ally, activist, advocate: Addressing role complexities for the multiculturally competent psychologist. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 49 (1): 83-89. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pro0000175>

- Menezes, I., Fernandes-Jesus, M., Ribeiro, N. & Malafaia, C. (2012). Agência e participação cívica e política de jovens. In Menezes, I., Ribeiro, N., Fernandes-Jesus, M., Malafaia, C. & Ferreira, P. (Eds.), *Agência e participação cívica e política: jovens e imigrantes na construção da democracia*. Porto: Livpsic.
- Montaño, T., Lopez-Torres, L., DeLissovoy, N., Pacheco, M. & Stillman, J. (2002). Teachers as Activists: Teacher Development and Alternate Sites of Learning. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 35 (3): 265–275.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/713845315>
- National Association of Social Workers (NASW). (2025). “Advocacy.”
<https://www.socialworkers.org/Advocacy>
- Ollis, T. (2008). The ‘Accidental Activist’: Learning, Embodiment and Action. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 48 (2): 316–335.
<https://www.ajal.net.au/the-accidental-activist-learningembodiment-and-action/>
- Ollis, T. (2010). The Pedagogy of Activism: Learning to Change the World. *International Journal of Learning* 17 (8): 239–249.
<https://doi.org/10.18848/1447-9494/CGP/v17i08/47225>
- Pawar, M. (2019). Social Work and Social Policy Practice: Imperatives for Political Engagement. *The International Journal of Community and Social Development*, 1 (1): 15–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2516602619833219>
- Petrarca, F. R. (2016). Carreira profissional e ativismo social: As lógicas do engajamento na defesa de causas. [Professional Career and Social Activism: The Logics of Engagement in Defending Causes] *Estudos De Sociologia*, 21 (40): 99–116. <https://periodicos.fclar.unesp.br/estudos/article/view/7575/5798>
- Picower, B. (2012). Teacher Activism: Enacting a Vision for Social Justice. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 45 (4): 561–574.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2012.717848>
- Ritter, J. A. (2008). A national study predicting licensed social workers' levels of political participation: The role of resources, psychological engagement, and recruitment networks *Social Work*, 53 (4): 347–357.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/53.4.347>
- Serrano-García, I. & Lugo-Hernández, E. A. (2016). Involving Psychologists in Public Policy in Puerto Rico: Processes and Results. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice*, 7 (1): 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.7728/0701201606>
- Shannon, P. & Hambacher, E. (2014). Authenticity in Constructivist Inquiry: Assessing an Elusive Construct. *Qualitative Report*, 19 (52).
- Toporek, R. L., Lewis, J. A. & Crethar, H. C. (2009). Promoting Systemic Change through the ACA Advocacy Competencies. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 87 (3): 260–268. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2009.tb00105.x>
- van Deth, J. W. (2014). A conceptual map of political participation. *Acta politica*, 49: 349–367. <https://doi.org/10.1057/ap.2014.6>
- van Deth, J. W. (2021). *What is political participation?* In Oxford research encyclopedia of politics.
- Vera, E. M. & Speight, S. L. (2003). Multicultural Competence, Social Justice, and Counseling Psychology: Expanding Our Roles. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 31 (3): 253–272. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000003031003001>

- Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L. & Brady, H. E. (1995). *Voice and equality: Civic voluntarism in American politics*. Harvard University Press.
- Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of practice: Learning as a social system. *Systems thinker*, 9 (5): 2-3.
-

Co-creating and Advancing Knowledge on Professional Activism Engagement and Education

Ana Luísa Costa, Henrique Vaz & Isabel Menezes

Abstract

This study advances knowledge on Professional Activism (PA) engagement and education by actively involving professional activists in a reflective dialogue with prior research findings. It deepens understanding of the dimensions that may contribute to PA (dis)engagement, as well as the spaces, processes, and needs associated with PA education across formal, non-formal, and informal contexts. A qualitative research design was adopted, drawing on focus group discussions, and the data were analysed through a reflexive thematic analysis combining deductive and inductive approaches. By enabling participants to reflect on previous research, the findings contribute to problematising and further elaborating the conceptualisation of PA engagement and education, by introducing complementary interpretative perspectives, raising new themes and emerging questions for future research. Overall, this study led to the identification of eight themes, which, although interrelated, were grouped into two broad domains: the 'Dimensions shaping PA engagement and repertoire' and the 'Spaces of PA education and identity building'.

Keywords

Professional activism; social justice; qualitative research; reflexive thematic analysis; focus groups; adult education.

Co-création et développement des connaissances sur l'engagement et l'éducation à l'activisme professionnel

Ana Luísa Costa, Henrique Vaz & Isabel Menezes

Résumé

Cette étude contribue à faire progresser les connaissances sur l'engagement et l'éducation à l'activisme professionnel (AP) en impliquant activement des activistes professionnels dans un dialogue réflexif avec les résultats de recherches antérieures. Elle approfondit la compréhension des dimensions susceptibles de contribuer à l'(dés)engagement dans l'AP, ainsi que des espaces, processus et besoins associés à l'éducation à l'AP dans des contextes formels, non formels et informels. Une approche de recherche qualitative a été adoptée, fondée sur des discussions en groupes de discussion, et les données ont été analysées à l'aide d'une analyse

thématique réflexive combinant des approches déductives et inductives. En permettant aux participants de réfléchir aux recherches antérieures, les résultats contribuent à problématiser et à approfondir la conceptualisation de l'engagement et de l'éducation à l'AP, en introduisant des perspectives interprétatives complémentaires, en soulevant de nouveaux thèmes et en ouvrant des pistes de recherche futures. Dans l'ensemble, cette étude a permis d'identifier huit thèmes qui, bien qu'interreliés, ont été regroupés en deux grands domaines: les 'Dimensions façonnant l'engagement et le répertoire de l'AP' et les 'Espaces d'éducation à l'AP et de construction identitaire'.

Mots-clés

Activisme professionnel; justice sociale; recherche qualitative; analyse thématique réflexive; groupes de discussion; éducation des adultes

Co-creación y avance del conocimiento sobre la implicación y la educación en el activismo profesional

Ana Luísa Costa, Henrique Vaz & Isabel Menezes

Resumen

Este estudio contribuye a ampliar el conocimiento sobre la implicación y la educación en el Activismo Profesional (AP) mediante la participación activa de activistas profesionales en un diálogo reflexivo con hallazgos de investigaciones previas. Profundiza en la comprensión de las dimensiones que pueden contribuir al (des)compromiso con el AP, así como de los espacios, procesos y necesidades asociados con la educación para el AP en contextos formales, no formales e informales. Se adoptó un diseño de investigación cualitativa basado en discusiones en grupos focales, y los datos fueron analizados mediante un análisis temático reflexivo que combinó enfoques deductivos e inductivos. Al permitir que los participantes reflexionaran sobre investigaciones previas, los resultados contribuyen a problematizar y desarrollar la conceptualización de la implicación y la educación en el AP, introduciendo perspectivas interpretativas complementarias, planteando nuevos temas y abriendo preguntas emergentes para futuras investigaciones. En conjunto, este estudio permitió identificar ocho temas que, aunque interrelacionados, se agrupan en dos grandes ámbitos: las 'Dimensiones que configuran la implicación y el repertorio del AP' y los 'Espacios de educación en el AP y construcción identitaria'.

Palabras clave

Activismo profesional; justicia social; investigación cualitativa; análisis temático reflexivo; grupos focales; educación de adultos.

University Education in Prison: the ethnographic story of a (participatory) research journey.¹

Sandra Vatrella

University of Naples Federico II

Maria Chiara Calo²

University of Naples Federico II

Introduction

In recent decades, university education in prisons has experienced significant global expansion, driven by a renewed awareness of the transformative potential of education in contexts of deprivation of liberty. This development reflects a consolidated normative recognition of education as a fundamental human right, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reaffirmed by key international instruments concerning social, cultural, and educational rights (UDHR 1948; UNESCO 1960; ICESCR 1966).

Within prison contexts characterised by endemic overcrowding, institutional fragmentation, and resource scarcity, educational practices may become “special observers of invisible realities, megaphones to make ‘inner voices’ heard, privileged channels for opening dialogue with other external communities².”

In this vein, starting from an educational experience within an university course in prison, in which research activities were re-signified and mobilised as educational practice, this article aims to understand whether and how

¹ This article is the outcome of the collaboration of the authors. However, in order to ascribe responsibility, we declare that Maria Chiara Calo’ wrote *Introduction, Prison and University at stake: a Theoretical Challenge, Context: the Prison University Campus, Hepna: the beginning of our journey*. Sandra Vatrella is the author of *Hepna in progress* and *Conclusions*.

² So, the Inner voices mentioned in the last paragraph

engagement in research may produce effects that can be analytically interpreted as de-prisonizing, by exploring its potential contribution to reshaping students' relations to knowledge, to themselves, and to the institutional space they inhabit.

To this aim, it presents a still-in-progress project entitled *Higher Education in Prison: Needs Analysis* (HEPNA). It is a project launched at the Prison University Campus (P.U.C.) of Naples "Federico II" that involves a group of incarcerated students who participate as researchers in shaping the research process, its tools, data collection and analysis practices.

In what follows, we first outline the theoretical framework that informs our work and briefly describe the context in which the project unfolded. We then offer an ethnographic account of the process.

Prison and University at stake: a Theoretical Challenge

The article develops a theoretical framework that brings classic studies on the Prison Community (Clemmer 1958) into dialogue with critical approaches in the sociology of education. In particular, it draws on Foucauldian studies with specific reference to the relationship between discipline (1975) and subjectivation (2001).

In this sense, we refer to the Prison Community as the social world that produces itself and re-produces through the mechanisms of prisonization: processes that operate by means of internal norms and codes affecting the ways individuals come to relate to themselves and to others.

In our case, these mechanisms operate primarily by governing the conditions of speech and audibility. Their effects are observable above all in the behavioural conformity of docile bodies – accustomed to silence and trained to avoid forbidden words – who daily experience the difficulty of expressing and acting upon a desire or a will, as well as the experience of not being heard.

However, when the Prison community comes into relation with the University community, the mechanisms of prisonization are somehow undermined.

As Borghini, Pastore and Tancorre (2016, 193) suggest, the presence of the university in prison can introduce innovative elements into processes of prisonization, mitigating some coercive features of the total institution while establishing symbolic and practical bridges between inside and outside.

From this perspective, attention shifts away from prisonization understood solely as a disciplinary effect and towards learning processes as potential sites of what we define as *de-prisonization*.

To analyse such shifts, we draw on Foucault's notion of technologies of the self (Foucault 1988), understood as socially mediated practices through which individuals act upon themselves in order to transform their thoughts, conduct, and modes of being. In the case discussed here, research-based education functions as a context-bound strategy that enables students to engage in a sustained exercise of "putting oneself to the test" and a practice of reflexivity that allows them to enact "a concern with self that involves a new experience of self" (Ivi, 28).

Putting oneself to the test refers to the critical practice through which subjects confront their own features and limits within contemporary reality, to identify possible points of transformation and to shape the concrete form that such change might take.

By reflexivity, we refer to the exercise through which subjects turn themselves into objects of critical inquiry, enacting a concern with the self that at the same time opens up cognitive and speculative possibilities.

That being said, the de-prisonizing processes we discover become visible in specific transformations that - as we will show - we conceive not as stable achievements, but as contributions to situated and reversible forms of self-government.

This framework directs attention now to the institutional context within which certain processes of learning – and *transformation* – become possible in prison. Accordingly, in what follows, a brief description of the context is provided.

Context: the Prison University Campus

HEPNA takes place within Italian Prison University Campuses (P.U.C.), whose history dates back to 1998 at "Le Vallette" prison in Turin. Since then, the collaboration between prisons and universities has made it possible to launch important study programmes in various prisons throughout the country. However, it was only in 2018, with the establishment of the National Conference of Delegates of University Rectors for Prison University Centre

(CNUPP³), that the formal coordination of those responsible for university-level educational activities in prisons was achieved. Since 2018, more than 40 universities have joined the project, promoting teaching and training activities in 120 prisons for approximately 1,837 enrolled students (CNUPP report 2025). In that same year, the University of Naples Federico II also joined these universities by establishing its own P.U.C. in the “P. Mandato” prison in Secondigliano.

In this context, the P.U.C. of the University of Naples Federico II stands out for the specificity of the residential model it has adopted: it is, in fact, among the few examples at the national level that provide a section dedicated to incarcerated students, within which it is possible to combine the residential dimension with the pursuit of a university degree program.

In particular, the detained students are housed in two dedicated units: one high-security wing, Ionio, and one medium-security wing, Mediterraneo.

The Ionio unit, in particular, hosts a dedicated section in which around 50 students, enrolled in 13 different degree programmes, live together. Within this section, in addition to the sleeping quarters, there are also three classrooms that students use both to attend lectures and to study independently or with their fellow students. It is precisely through this organisational arrangement that the university community enters the prison, and the outside world finally crosses its boundaries.

So far, we have described the context in which the project is taking place. From this point onward, we move into the core of the work, which began as a teaching experience in the Sociology of Education course at the P.U.C. we have been responsible for since 2023. It is in this specific context that we work and HEPNA gradually took shape.

Consistently, in what follows, we present a sort of ethnographic page, field notes interwoven with some theoretical observations about the data we have collected up to now⁴.

³ Set up within the Conference of Italian University Rectors (in Italian CRUI)

⁴ The ethnographic account is based on empirical data that includes fieldnotes, classroom interactions, collectively produced research documents (e.g., the questionnaire and its revisions), and written/oral contributions prepared by student-researchers for public events. Identifying details have been modified to protect participants, in line with institutional requirements and consent procedures.

Hepna: the beginning of our journey

What does education in prison mean? What meanings should the sociology of education take on in prison? What kinds of learning goals should be pursued? What learning outcomes should be expected? What methods, strategies and teaching practices can and should be enacted?

These are only some of the questions that arise for those called upon to take on the challenge of teaching in prison. It was from these, and from many other questions, that our own teaching journey began. That is, muddling through the need to listen to students and the possibility of building a shared path. On the one hand, we were confronted with the need to overcome the tendency to silence due to a sort of “shyness of poor⁵” (linked to a shame of crime and a chagrin of punishment) that the students come with. On the other hand, we felt the possibility of constructing with them a shared heritage of new meanings. In this way, amid doubts and questions, we began looking for an instrument drawing on the toolbox of research methodology, a toolbox we started to think of as a box containing teaching strategies. This led to the idea of referring to the biographical approach in social research (Rosental 2004; Bertaux 2016; Tamboukou 2010), and then, of developing the instrument that we called educational biography, i.e. a life story in which events and experiences, people and relationships, spaces and contexts are re-interpreted in terms of their educational functions. This implies, following Biesta (2015), that in our attempt, students should have learned to remember, re-read and recognise their life in terms of the qualifications they acquired, the socialisation processes in which they have been engaged in their life-path, and the experiences of subjectivation they had and would like to develop in view of the future.

Once the tool had been identified, we launched the laboratory, but the attempt to enable students to reflect on and re-signify their biographies produced only partially successful results.

Our aim was for students to retell and reinterpret their personal stories as expressions and integral parts of a collective history, using sociological conceptual tools.

However, the results proved interesting less for the contents themselves or for the students’ ability to experience theory as embodied within personal and

⁵ The expression is taken from the book *Lettere a una professoressa. Scuola di Barbiana* (Milani, L. 2017)

collective histories, and more for the statements they were eventually able to articulate and the claims they could finally voice.

In this regard, it is interesting to note how knowledge changed between the first and the last lesson.

During the first lesson, when we asked:
What does education mean?

The students replied:

Education means not causing trouble, not shouting, not mistreating women, not taking the place of an elderly person.

At first, education is something that students can define only by referring to a specific context of meaning (that of good manners). Moreover, they can define this context only by providing operational definitions constructed by resorting to the figure of speech called litotes (double negative, the denial of a supposed contrary), i.e. avoiding affirmative phrases.

During the last lesson on the same question, the students answered:

We realised we didn't know it... Education is what you learn by living, what you learn with others, and what you learn from others. What do we do now? It's difficult to re-establish a knowledge, a meaning, that we took for granted...

Then they continued:

Then there is re-education. Only here (in prison), the term re-education is used, but this makes time in prison a stigma. We were about 20, when mistakes were easy to make, pressure was easy... today, after more than 20 years, we really needed someone to put us to the test. It would be important to put the education and the re-education programmes we undertook to the test.

Comparing the excerpts from the first lesson with those from the last, we can see how the students moved from silence to speech, from denial to affirmation as capacity to express themselves through the need to show and demonstrate the effects of a transformation.

They seem to say that the critical attitude they developed must also be an experimental one. In other words, students seem to say with Foucault: "this work done at the limits of ourselves must [...] put itself to the test of reality, of contemporary reality, both to grasp the points where change is possible and

desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take" (Foucault in Rabinow 1998a: 316).

After about a month, the students passed the exam with flying colours. Yet, a subtle sense of dissatisfaction joined us: the feeling of a journey that had just begun, of a horizon barely glimpsed.

So far, we have described the first year of the course in sociology of education. From here on, the story gets complicated.

Hepna in progress

The new academic year begins, but:

There is only one student - so we are told - the course is at risk, and perhaps it is no longer running.

Thus, we prepared for the first lesson of the new year at P.U.C. without high expectations, but when we entered the classroom, we found something unexpected: four students waiting to welcome us. A new student and, alongside him, those from the previous year.

We want to continue!

That's what the students told us during the first lecture of the year, showing themselves in the expression of a desire and a will. It is at the same time the practice and the aspiration of testing oneself, an exercise that gives rise to that practice of reflexivity that still accompanies us today.

This is how we started our discussion of what we wanted to do and what we could do, talking about possibilities and expectations, speaking about needs: The need to show up for themselves (or to be present for themselves) and to share their stories.

The need to share the 'bad' lesson they learned because it is their story to tell.

The possibility of building meaning and creating other time, not to atone for their wrongdoing, but for the need to participate, because they tell me:

Everyone talks about us, but no one asks us anything. No one thinks about giving us a microphone.

It began from here, the idea of building this possibility. The possibility of authors writing their own narrative, an informed and competent narrative to be told in the first person and to be a mouthpiece for.

Thus, the idea emerged of launching an education and research journey centred on students and their knowledge, their lives, their rights and, last but not least, their voice.

So, we spent the month of January as a brainstorming session driven by a few key questions. Among others:

- How can we make the most of our knowledge? How can we put our knowledge to work?
- What can we do in the context full of limitations for us and them in which we are all working on?
- What can we authoritatively talk about and knowingly (consciously) build on?

These are just some of the questions that arose during our meetings. But it is precisely by answering these questions that both the research group and project gradually took shape.

Regarding the research group, we formed a team composed of five researchers: the two of us and three students from the sociology degree course at the P.U.C. in Secondigliano: Antonio, Luigi e Angelo.

Regarding the research project, our reflection led us to identify higher education in prison and the educational needs of P.U.C. students as areas of inquiry, to further question the different meanings that education in prison itself assumes, as well as its multiple functions (qualification, socialisation, and subjectivation [Biesta 2010; 2016]).

Needless to say, the research aims we identified also represent educational aims. First, due to the themes that the project intercepts, i.e. topics that students can address, recognising (valorising and enhancing) the competences they bring. Second, due to the role they acquire in the field. The project represents the possibility of being part of a research path that makes students responsible for themselves and others: actors in a process of understanding that leads to a process of change. It means, in a Foucauldian perspective, a process in which caring for self means caring for others so as to render oneself and others

competent to “occupy a place in the city, in the community, or in interindividual relationships” (Foucault 1984: 118).

In order to pursue both research and educational aims, we constructed a methodological strategy addressing and incorporating both the limitations and the possibilities afforded by the context.

Regarding this, it is important to point out that – as we said before - the P.U.C. community, i.e. the space where the educational needs we investigate take shape, represents a sort of campus within a prison facility. Therefore, our subject is particularly difficult to investigate, due to the multiple constraints of the prison space and the rules and regulations that act in a differentiated way on the members of the research group.

Regarding the students-researchers-detainees involved, they are called upon to manage, first, the three roles they hold in the research field and, consequently, the methodological reflexivity that these roles allow to develop; i.e., as Antonio notes, the awareness and fear that:

I won't be able to see... I live here. I'm too caught up in the things you ask me to look at. They concern me.

Regarding us - as teachers and researchers - rules and regulations that prescribe behaviours and actions are related, among others, to long and cumbersome bureaucratic procedures needed to obtain legal permission to conduct research, procedures that we had experienced but underestimated.

We assumed that our role as teachers would somehow allow us to speed up the process or make it easier. But that was not the case.

Suffice to say that the application was submitted in February, but the official permit only arrived in August and, in fact, is still awaiting finalisation (the final formal step is still pending). Despite procedural delays, the project has continued (and it is proceeding) along a path fraught with uncertainties but also with hopes and expectations. We didn't know if or when the authorisations would arrive. However, we knew that we would continue, we knew that our research would somehow take shape inside and/or beyond the educational setting we shared. It is therefore against this uncertain context that we gave shape to a research strategy that identifies the questionnaire as our starting point, since it allows us to reconstruct the context scenario in which the P.U.C. project is realised. We refer to the socio-demographic profile of inmates residing at the P.U.C., with specific regard to the qualification's dimension

(Biesta 2016). This implies being able to discover places, spaces and times of the educational paths that led detainees to university education: i.e., the way in which knowledge, skills and dispositions took shape.

So, we started to build the tool to be administered. Regarding this, it is relevant to underline the way we worked: the questionnaire was not constructed according to the framework established by the methodological literature on the topic. The conceptual categories to be operationalised seemed too distant from the competences brought by the detainee researchers partaking in the project. Above all, as Antonio says about this, sometime later:

It is our words that we need. Who could get there better than us? We are the ones who occupy this space and live it.

The excerpt thus reveals an awareness and methodological reflexivity that accompany investigative choices at every stage of the research. Therefore, we chose to turn the process upside down, starting from the questions and knowledge embedded in the students' practical actions, focusing on what they know about a familiar space. So, first, we began to reflect on the P.U.C.: on what is there and what is missing, on how to uncover all the contradictions of both an educational provision that often seems too distant from the needs of prisoners, and educational practices that develop regardless of the context, without considering what studying and learning entail for adults who live in prison.

Second, we began a slow process of concertation and cooperation on words and meanings, issues to be omitted, and themes to be addressed, often putting into question dimensions and themes we had taken for granted.

In short, we developed the questionnaire by experimenting with a sort of *educational game* that questioned the meaning and knowledge that we all bring with us to the field, modifying and re-modifying the form, style and intentions of the questions that were ultimately incorporated into a tool that we built, revised and corrected, transforming it into an almost qualitative tool that was decidedly more complex (even to administer) than a simple questionnaire.

It was precisely within this shared work of negotiating meanings that one of the most revealing moments emerged from the lively debate triggered by the term *colleague*, a word we introduced while discussing pedagogical relationships between peers and which continues to be debated both inside and outside the prison.

In this regard, Antonio's account is particularly revealing:

You should know that we attach a stigma to the word colleague, because that's how prison officers call each other in order to hide their identities. Therefore, calling one of our comrades a colleague would be equivalent to associating him with the figure of a policeman. You see!!! This is where the transition-transformation phase that is underway in this place comes into play. In fact, it is within this process that we have unblocked-disarrested the term colleague and use it among ourselves as well.

These are the words with which Antonio speaks of the effects produced by the discussion on the term "colleague", during the European Researchers' Night, i.e. the event that represents the turning point of our project.

So far, we have described a slow, thoughtful, and selfless endeavour. It is a task that we have carried out in the knowledge that the possibility of "leaving" the field of "mere" teaching remained subject to official authorisation. Only in this way could we give official status to our reflections and legitimize the research actions beyond what was configured as a simple educational laboratory.

However, while we were waiting for the permit to arrive, something unexpected happened:

"The European Researchers' Night was to be held on September 25th. Departments were invited to participate with initiatives involving P.U.C. students".

These was the tones of a late and hasty notice, but precious for the opportunity to test the tool we were working on, begin constructing the empirical base (i.e. collecting data by means of the questionnaire) and allow student-researchers to test their often-declared desire for a leading role that puts their voice to the test within the framework of an event – to be held at Secondigliano prison – in which, in addition to all the students of the P.U.C., external sociology students would also participate.

So, starting from mid-May, the research process took on a different rhythm. The meetings began to intensify, as well as the work aimed at closing the questionnaire we were working on, to ensure that Antonio, Luigi and Angelo could then administer it to their 47 colleagues.

During this time, the air at the P.U.C. was thick with tension and anticipation; it was as if time stood still and yet paradoxically every small change could be felt and seen.

At the same time, we also launched a complex organisational process for the Researchers' Night at the P.U.C. chaired by the student researchers. Meanwhile, as the organisation proceeds, the questionnaire administration begins, but as Angelo states in his contribution for the European researchers' Night:

Conducting research in prison is not easy. At all. There are numerous limitations, including space, time, and technology. In terms of space, the biggest challenge was finding it. There are only four classrooms, and they are almost always occupied. In terms of time, we needed to balance our time with the free time of our colleagues. Imagine it! It takes more than an hour to answer questions. An hour feels infinite in the sweltering heat of prison in August. Furthermore, the European researchers' night was getting closer, and only in the last few days of July did we receive word that the professors couldn't reach us in August. We had many questions and many doubts, but we had no way to communicate with them because even with learning remotely, we then would have been interrupted for the August holidays.

By clearly outlining the limits of the context, the excerpt shows how the long-awaited exercise of putting oneself to the test has changed significantly. It is no longer just a desire but a practice, an exercise carried out in solitude, having acquired autonomy and awareness. So, despite difficulties and limitations Antonio, Luigi and Angelo managed to complete the questionnaire administration.

However, once again, something unexpected happened.

On September 12, a notice arrived from the Department of Penitentiary Administration (DAP) that required the initiative to be reworded: students from outside the P.U.C. were not allowed to enter the prison. That is the main reason why Antonio, Luigi e Angelo faced the difficulties and the challenges that the research represented: to be protagonists of a process to be told. To be able to bring their testimony to their colleagues.

We won't dwell on the complications that the DAP's decision has entailed. We'll simply highlight the group's reaction.

When we asked them if they intended to continue even without their colleagues from outside, even in the climate of uncertainty in which we were working (if the DAP hadn't accepted our reformulation, we would have wasted all our work), Antonio, Luigi, and Angelo replied without hesitation:

We want to continue! We can't give up now!

This is what they told us at that dramatic meeting where, despite ourselves, we became accomplices (or so we felt) to a system that consistently stifles actions and reactions, thoughts and words.

The DAP's approval would only arrive on September 22nd, only three days before the event. An event that, as Luigi said at the end of his speech with a trembling voice and a steady gaze:

You listened to us, and for a moment we weren't just prisoners, but people sharing a dream, an idea, a journey. This journey has changed me profoundly: it has given me tools to think, to feel part of something, to give voice to the real needs of those who, like me, approach study in a context full of limitations, but also of potential. This is my educational transformation. Not just the passage from one level to another, but from a condition of marginalisation to one of participation. The transition from who I was to who I am becoming. Sometimes it seems like we have nothing to give, but today we discovered that together we can create.

Luigi's words crystallise the meaning of HEPNA and clarify the kind of transformation at stake. What emerges is not simply an educational progression, but a change in the conditions of subjectivity. Being listened to and "having a voice" enables students to speak in the first person, making their experiences and needs publicly intelligible and showing the transformation to which we refer. It is the de-prisonization processes that emerge here: a process enacted through speech, reflexivity, and participation.

Conclusions

As mentioned, the project is still ongoing. However, it is worth taking stock of what has emerged so far.

The way in which prison rules and regulations are enacted, between the possibilities they grant and the prohibitions (but also the unexpected and uncertainty) they impose, intertwines with the discretionary power that the university exercises, sometimes colluding with the mechanisms of

prisonization on which the prison community is founded, and which education should counteract. i.e. The social processes by which incarcerated people learn and embody the norms, values, and cultures of the prison community.

In this sense, prisonized subjectivities emerge from a strategic interplay between technologies of government and technologies of the self. However, this strategic interplay can also produce something else.

The ethnographic account we offered shows how learning mechanisms can be more complex and controversial than those captured by the concept of prison community.

Moreover, it demonstrates how sharing a research process can become a key pedagogical tool for coming into critical consciousness. It enacts a more or less strategic use of technologies of the self that finally leads to what we can call de-prisonization.

It is what happened when detainees moved: from being silent to being affirmative, from forbidden words to “dis-arrested” words, from the impossibility of talking about themselves to the necessity of doing so, from the desire to take the floor to the ability to do so in front of an audience.

Briefly, from the *I want to continue* to the test of reality that the students first demand (at the beginning of the research journey), then practice (during the journey) and finally embed as an achievement; as a way of showing the *transformation* they have enacted.

This is the process of de-prisonization to which we refer, a process that works by “dis-arresting” words and possibilities, and by making the prison community tellable for themselves and for others.

This is why the contribution ends with the words of Antonio, Angelo, and Luigi, the inner voices of a research journey developed through and about the prison community, which they daily experience and which they will now *tell you* about.

Inner voices

Prison communities exist. They are alive and full of humanity.

But they are communities characterised by strong external and internal closures. In the first sense, relationships with other civil communities are virtually non-existent, which turns them into islands. Islands of punishment.

In the second sense, there is a lack of internal connection, so that the various sections of a single prison seem to have their own dynamics, sometimes at odds with one another.

In our triple role as inmates, students, and researchers, we have grasped the difference between our section and the one next door.

To be clear, the simple corridor dividing the two spaces, where one is for studying and the other is not, is a sign of two opposing realities, two alternative ways of understanding prison communities. It is almost banal to point out that in the first space there is a possibility of transformation, of returning a new person to the community, while in the second this possibility is denied.

We like to imagine what the university experiences can become: special observers of invisible realities, expert eyes and minds – with the will to observe and understand, megaphones to make the "inner voices" heard, hands that can contribute to erase the stigma attached to us by a cynical society, ripping away a label stuck on us that will remain even after we have repaid our debt to the state.

The opportunity to attend university represents a privileged channel for opening dialogue with external communities, starting with the scientific community that you so admirably represent and to which we are sincerely grateful.

*Angelo T. - Antonio D.C. - Luigi C.
Sociology degree course - P.U.C. University of Naples Federico II*

References

- Behan, C. (2021). *Education in Prison: A Literature Review*. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.
- Bertaux, D. (2016). *Le récit de vie-4e édition*. Paris: Armand Colin.
- Biesta, G. (2010). *Good Education in an Age of Measurement*, Boulder: Paradigm Publisher.
- Biesta, G. (2015). "What is education for? On good education, teacher judgement, and educational professionalism", *European Journal of education*, 50(1), 75-87.
- Borghini, A., Pastore, G., Tancorre, P. (2016). Il Polo Universitario Penitenziario di Pisa: esperienza e opportunità formativa, in Ciancarelli, R., Camuti, F., Roma, A. *Teatro come ambiente arricchito*. Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 185,199.
- Cardano, M. (2011). *La ricerca qualitativa*. Bologna: il Mulino.
- Cardano, M. and Gariglio, L. (2022). *Metodi qualitativi. Pratiche di ricerca in presenza, a distanza e ibride*. Rome: Carocci.
- Clemmer, D. (1958). *The prison community*. New York: Rinehart & Company Inc.
- Demazière, D. and Dubar, C. (1997) *Analyser les entretiens biographiques: l'exemple des récits d'insertion*. Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval.
- Ferraro, G. (2018). *La delusione della libertà: per una cittadinanza senza nazione*. Milan: Mimesis.
- Ferraro, G. (2024). *Il valore della pena e l'imperdonabile. Per la critica della ragione penale*. Rome: Castelvecchi editore
- Foucault, M. (1975). *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*. Paris: Gallimard
- Foucault, M. (1988). *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, in Martin, L. H., Gutman, H. and P.H. Hutton (eds). London: Tavistock Publications.
- Foucault, M. (1998a), *On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress*, in Rabinow, P. (Eds), *The Foucault Reader*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1998b). *L'Etica della cura di sé come pratica della libertà*, in Foucault, M., *Estetica dell'esistenza, etica, politica*. Archivio Foucault 3. Milano: Feltrinelli.
- Foucault, M. (2001). *L'herméneutique du sujet. Cours au Collège de France (1981-1982)*. Paris: Gallimard/Seuil.
- Foucault, M. (2008). *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Foucault, M. (2017). *Subjectivity and truth: lectures at the College de France, 1980-1981*. Berlin: Springer.
- Freire, P. (2024). *L'educazione come pratica della libertà*. Milan: Mimesis.
- Irrera, O., Lorenzini, D., Tazzioli, M. (2016) *Foucault and the Making of Subjects*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Mayo, P. (2013) Lorenzo Milani in Our Times. *Policy Futures in Education*, 11(5), 515-522.
- Mayo, P. (2024), Don Lorenzo Milani and his international impact in education and beyond. *The lab's quarterly* 2024/ a. XXVI / n. 2
- Milani, L. (1967). *Lettera a una professoressa*. Firenze: Libreria editrice fiorentina.
- Pastore, G. (2017). Pratiche di conoscenza in carcere. Uno studio sui Poli Universitari Penitenziari. *The lab's quarterly*, 19(3), 81-102.

- Rosenthal, G. (2004). "Biographical Research." In *Qualitative Research Practice*, ed. C. Seale et al., 48-64. London: Sage.
- Tamboukou, M. (2010). *Narrative and the Politics of Life History*. London: Routledge.
-

University Education in Prison: the ethnographic story of a (participatory) research journey.

Sandra Vatrella & Maria Chiara Calo'

Abstract

University education in prison has expanded significantly in recent decades, supported by the recognition of education as a fundamental human right and by its transformative potential in contexts of deprivation of liberty. Drawing on a university teaching experience in prison, this article presents *Higher Education in Prison: Needs Analysis* (HEPNA), a participatory research project that involves incarcerated students as co-researchers in defining aims, tools, and practices. The article argues that participation in research can transform students' relationships to themselves and to the knowledge they produce and mobilize.

Keywords

university in prison, technologies of the self, de-prisonization

L'enseignement universitaire en prison : récit ethnographique d'un parcours de recherche (participative).

Sandra Vatrella & Maria Chiara Calo'

Résumé

L'enseignement universitaire en milieu carcéral s'est considérablement développé au cours des dernières décennies, soutenu par la reconnaissance de l'éducation comme un droit humain fondamental et par son potentiel transformateur dans les contextes de privation de liberté. S'appuyant sur une expérience d'enseignement universitaire en prison, cet article présente le projet « Higher Education in Prison: Needs Analysis » (HEPNA), un projet de recherche participatif qui implique des étudiants incarcérés en tant que co-chercheurs dans la définition des objectifs, des outils et des pratiques. L'article soutient que la participation à la recherche peut transformer les relations des étudiants avec eux-mêmes et avec les connaissances qu'ils produisent et mobilisent.

Mots-clés

université en prison, technologies du soi, dé-emprisonnement

La enseñanza universitaria en prisión: relato etnográfico de una trayectoria de investigación (participativa).

Sandra Vatrella & Maria Chiara Calo¹

Resumen

La enseñanza universitaria en el entorno penitenciario se ha desarrollado considerablemente en las últimas décadas, respaldada por el reconocimiento de la educación como un derecho humano fundamental y por su potencial transformador en contextos de privación de libertad. Basándose en la experiencia de la enseñanza universitaria en prisiones, este artículo presenta el proyecto «Higher Education in Prison: Needs Analysis» (HEPNA), un proyecto de investigación participativa que involucra a estudiantes encarcelados como coinvestigadores en la definición de objetivos, herramientas y prácticas. El artículo sostiene que la participación en la investigación puede transformar las relaciones de los estudiantes consigo mismos y con los conocimientos que producen y movilizan.

Palabras clave

universidad en prisión, tecnologías del yo, de-prisonización

Educational Third Places as Sites of Inquiry and Social Emancipation: Lessons from Community-Based Adult Education in Northern Italy

Sabina Barbato

Introduction

Contemporary adult education is increasingly shaped by socio-economic dynamics that prioritise individual performance, employability, and measurable outcomes. Within this framework, learning risks being reduced to an adaptive mechanism, marginalising its collective and democratic dimensions.

In response, educational third places emerge as hybrid environments located between formal education, work, and civil society. These spaces allow for alternative configurations of learning grounded in participation, dialogue, and shared experience.

This article explores educational third places as sites of inquiry. By bringing Dewey's theory of inquiry into dialogue with critical pedagogy, it proposes a framework capable of reconnecting learning with democratic life and social transformation. The study is based on two empirical cases in Northern Italy and aims to develop a model that can be generalised beyond the specific contexts analysed.

Inquiry as a Process of Knowledge and Transformation

Dewey's theory of inquiry provides a key framework for understanding learning as an active and situated process. Inquiry begins in an indeterminate situation, where habitual action is disrupted and requires reconstruction through reflection and experimentation.

This process unfolds through identifiable stages: the emergence of a problematic situation, the formulation of hypotheses, experimentation, and the reconstruction of meaning. Inquiry is therefore not only cognitive but practical and social, linking individual experience to collective dynamics.

While Dewey does not explicitly frame inquiry as emancipatory, his conception of democracy as a form of associated living opens a space for dialogue with critical pedagogy. Freire's concept of conscientisation and Giroux's understanding of education as a cultural and political practice extend inquiry by foregrounding power relations and social awareness.

In this perspective, inquiry becomes a mediating process connecting experience, reflection, and social transformation.

Educational Third Places: From Concept to Practice

The concept of the "third place," initially developed by Ray Oldenburg, refers to informal social spaces distinct from home and work. In education, third places have been reinterpreted as hybrid environments that combine learning, social interaction, and civic participation. They are neither schools nor workplaces, yet they engage with both.

Educational third places are characterised by openness, accessibility, and relational density. They welcome diverse publics, often across generations, and foster learning through participation rather than instruction. For adult education, these spaces are particularly significant because they allow learning to emerge from concrete projects, community needs, and shared interests.

Importantly, third places challenge the idea that education must be confined to institutional settings. They expand the geography of learning and reframe education as a collective endeavour embedded in local territories. This territorial anchoring does not limit their relevance; rather, it creates conditions for learning that can be interpreted and adapted elsewhere.

Methodology and Context

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretative approach consistent with the logic of inquiry. Rather than testing predefined hypotheses, the research develops through engagement with empirical contexts, allowing analytical categories to emerge progressively.

Fieldwork was conducted between 2022 and 2024 in two Italian educational third places:

- Cascina Oremo (Biella)
- Rondò dei Talenti (Cuneo)

Data collection included semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and analysis of educational materials. This approach recognises knowledge as situated and constructed through interaction between researcher and context.

Case Studies

Case Studies and Functioning of Educational Third Places

The two case studies do not present predefined educational models. Instead, they consist of evolving practices that respond to concrete needs within their territories. Their functioning can therefore be understood only through interpretative analysis.

Table 1 - Functioning and Characteristics of Educational Third Places

Aspect	Rondò dei Talenti (Cuneo)	Cascina Oremo (Biella)
Type	Educational third place (childhood, civic, cultural)	Educational third place (youth, social inclusion)
Target	Children, families, educators	Adolescents, young adults, vulnerable groups
Orientation	Experiential, creative, intergenerational	Critical, inclusive, emancipatory
Territorial link	Strong school-family-city connection	Local anchoring, inclusion, social integration
Co-education	Highly present	Present
Spatial function	Modular, sensory, circulatory	Refuge-space, self-development, natural setting
Innovation	Imagination and plurality of talents	Transformation, engagement, reorientation
Educational aim	Revealing diverse talents	

These structures function as environments where inquiry is enacted through practice. They do not apply a fixed methodology; rather, they generate situations that require interpretation and reconstruction.

At Rondò dei Talenti, inquiry emerges through creative and dialogical mediation: educators initiate processes through questions rather than instructions, and learning develops through collective experimentation.

At Cascina Oremo, inquiry is embedded in practices of inclusion and reconstruction, where individuals engage in activities that reconnect them with social and professional pathways

1. Cascina Oremo (Biella)

Cascina Oremo is an educational community located on the outskirts of Biella. It brings together training programmes, cultural activities, environmental projects, and social initiatives. Adult education at Cascina Oremo focuses on inclusion, sustainability, and citizenship, often engaging adults who have experienced educational or social marginalisation. Inquiry at Cascina Oremo emerges through collective projects linked to the territory, such as ecological initiatives or intergenerational workshops. Educators act as mediators, helping participants articulate problems, explore alternatives, and reflect on their actions. Learning is embedded in doing, but always accompanied by moments of reflection and dialogue.

2. Rondò dei Talenti (Cuneo)

Rondò dei Talenti is a large educational hub dedicated to guidance, creativity, and talent development. While it works extensively with young people, it also offers pathways for adults, particularly in relation to career transitions, lifelong learning, and civic engagement. Adult learning at Rondò dei Talenti is structured around inquiry-based pathways that encourage participants to explore their interests, competencies, and social roles. The emphasis is not on performance but on orientation and judgement. Here too, educators function as facilitators of inquiry rather than instructors.

Findings: What Do These Third Places Teach Us?

The analysis shows that inquiry operates as a process through which individual experiences are transformed into shared knowledge.

Three main dynamics emerge:

- Problematisation: learning begins from indeterminate situations that require interpretation
- Mediation: educators support the formulation of hypotheses through dialogue and practice
- Reconstruction: experience is reorganised collectively, generating new meanings

These processes highlight how educational third places function as environments of democratic learning.

However, tensions also emerge. These spaces operate within broader socio-economic frameworks that may limit their transformative potential

Discussion: Toward a Pragmatic-Critical Framework

The study proposes a framework based on the articulation of three dimensions:

- Inquiry (Dewey) as a method of investigation
- Experience as the material of learning
- Critique (Freire, Giroux) as a political orientation

This articulation forms a pragmatic-critical framework in which:

- inquiry structures action
- experience grounds learning
- critique directs it toward social transformation

Educational third places can thus be understood as laboratories where this integration becomes visible and operational.

Importantly, this framework is not limited to the Italian cases analysed. It can be transferred to other contexts of adult education where learning is connected to experience, participation, and social engagement.

Conclusion

Educational third places contribute to rethinking adult education by reconnecting learning with experience and social life. The integration of inquiry and critical pedagogy provides a framework for understanding education as both a practical and a political process. Rather than offering a fixed model, this study proposes a transferable orientation that can inform educational practices in diverse contexts.

References

- Biesta, G 2017. *The Rediscovery of Teaching*. London: Routledge.
- Dewey, J. 1916. *Democracy and Education*. New York: Macmillan.
- Dewey, J. 1938. *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Freire, P. 1970. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Giroux, H. A. 1988. *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning*. South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.
- Giroux, H. A. 2011. *On Critical Pedagogy*. New York: Continuum.
- Oldenburg, R. 1999. *The Great Good Place*. New York: Marlowe & Company.
-

Educational Third Places as Sites of Inquiry and Social Emancipation: Lessons from CommuniBased Adult Education in Northern Italy

Sabina Barbato

Abstract

University education in prison has expanded significantly in recent decades, supported by the recognition of education as a fundamental human right and by its transformative potential in contexts of deprivation of liberty. Drawing on a university teaching experience in prison, this article presents *Higher Education in Prison: Needs Analysis (HEPNA)*, a participatory research project that involves incarcerated students as co-researchers in defining aims, tools, and practices. The article argues that participation in research can transform students' relationships to themselves and to the knowledge they produce and mobilize.

Keywords

university in prison, technologies of the self, de-prisonization

Les tiers lieux éducatifs comme sites d'enquête et d'émancipation sociale : leçons de l'éducation des adultes basée sur la communauté dans le nord de l'Italie

Sabina Barbato

Résumé

Cet article explore des tiers lieux éducatifs en tant que sites communautaires d'apprentissage, d'enquête et d'émancipation sociale pour adultes. En s'appuyant sur la logique d'enquête de John Dewey et les idées de la pédagogie critique, il examine comment l'apprentissage émerge de situations indéterminées à travers l'expérience collective, la médiation et la participation démocratique. À l'aide d'une recherche qualitative menée dans deux tiers lieux italiens – Cascina Oremo (Biella) et Rondò dei Talenti (Cuneo) – l'étude analyse comment ces espaces fonctionnent comme des laboratoires pour l'éducation des adultes, favorisant le jugement,

l'inclusion et l'engagement civique. Plutôt que de présenter l'éducation comme neutre ou purement instrumentale, l'article soutient que les tiers-lieux basés sur la recherche permettent aux adultes de reconstruire leur expérience, de développer une capacité d'action critique et de s'engager dans leurs contextes sociaux et territoriaux. Les résultats mettent en évidence le rôle des éducateurs en tant que médiateurs, l'importance de l'investissement et de la gouvernance locaux, ainsi que les tensions inhérentes au fonctionnement dans des cadres néolibéraux. L'article conclut en discutant de la pertinence des tiers lieux pour les éducateurs d'adultes à l'échelle internationale et de leur contribution potentielle à la reconstruction démocratique.

Mots-clés

Enquête, Communauté éducative, Participation démocratique, Transformation sociale, Pensée critique

Lugares de Terceros Educativos como Sitios de Investigación y Emancipación Social: Lecciones de la Educación de Adultos Basada en la Comunidad en el Norte de Italia

Sabina Barbato

Resumen

Este artículo explora los terceros lugares educativos como espacios comunitarios de aprendizaje adulto, indagación y emancipación social. Basándose en la lógica de la indagación de John Dewey y en los conocimientos de la pedagogía crítica, examina cómo el aprendizaje surge de situaciones indeterminadas a través de la experiencia colectiva, la mediación y la participación democrática. Utilizando investigación cualitativa realizada en dos terceros lugares italianos— Cascina Oremo (Biella) y Rondò dei Talenti (Cuneo)—el estudio analiza cómo estos espacios funcionan como laboratorios para la educación de adultos, fomentando el juicio, la inclusión y la participación cívica. En lugar de presentar la educación como neutral o puramente instrumental, el artículo sostiene que los terceros lugares basados en la indagación permiten a los adultos reconstruir la experiencia, desarrollar agencia crítica y comprometerse con sus contextos sociales y territoriales. Los hallazgos destacan el papel de los educadores como mediadores, la importancia de la inversión y gobernanza locales, y las tensiones inherentes a operar dentro de neoliberal marcos. El artículo concluye discutiendo la relevancia de los terceros lugares para los educadores de adultos a nivel internacional y su potencial contribución a la reconstrucción democrática. Palabras clave: Investigación, Comunidad Educante, Participación Democrática, Transformación Social, Pensamiento Crítico.

Palabras clave

Consulta, Comunidad educativa, participación educativa, transformación social, pensamiento crítico

Convivialidad y omnigracia en Iván Illich y Aldo Capitini. Dos caminos para una sociedad liberada.^{1*}

Carlo Orefice

Universidad de Siena, Italia

Antonio Vigilante

Universidad de Siena, Italia

Las razones de un acercamiento

Entre las figuras destacadas que el siglo XX nos ha legado por su capacidad de subvertir los axiomas culturales dominantes, Iván Illich ocupa un lugar de alto relieve. Escritor, filósofo y teólogo austriaco, de quien conmemoramos los cien años de su nacimiento (1926-2002), Illich fue un verdadero “pensador nómada”, una figura cosmopolita cuya obra supo traspasar todas las fronteras, siendo traducida y discutida en todo el mundo. Su fama global, lo convierte en la actualidad en un punto de referencia imprescindible para quien desee analizar críticamente la modernidad, habiendo propuesto, con décadas de antelación, algunas herramientas intelectuales para imaginar un mundo más a la medida de los seres humanos.

Por esto, partiendo del aliento internacional de Illich que nace la exigencia de un diálogo con un protagonista muy diferente, pero sorprendentemente cercano: el italiano Aldo Capitini (1899-1968). A pesar de la profundidad de sus intuiciones sobre la democracia, la educación y la no violencia, Capitini ha permanecido durante mucho tiempo como un tesoro custodiado casi exclusivamente dentro de las fronteras nacionales: fundador de la Marcha de la Paz Perugia-Asís y teórico radical, pagó el precio de una cierta

^{1*} Esta contribución es fruto de una reflexión conjunta entre los autores. Únicamente por razones de atribución científica, se especifica que Antonio Vigilante es responsable del párrafo 2, mientras que Carlo Orefice lo es del párrafo 3; los párrafos 1 y 4 han sido elaborados por ambos autores. La traducción al español del artículo es de Carlo Orefice.

desclasificación política y de una práctica deliberadamente ligada al territorio, factores que, junto con la barrera lingüística, limitaron su circulación en el extranjero.

Aproximar estos dos perfiles, por lo tanto, no es un simple ejercicio académico o una operación promocional con motivo de un aniversario, sino un necesario acto de mediación cultural. Aunque operaron en contextos muy lejanos y de forma totalmente independiente, Illich y Capitini se descubren hoy como compañeros de camino en una visión del mundo de extraordinaria actualidad.

Lo que los une es, ante todo, una crítica radical a las instituciones, vistas a menudo no como soportes, sino como dispositivos capaces de generar dependencia y pasividad: el primero, criticándolas cuando éstas se convierten en monopolios radicales que quitan libertad y autonomía al hombre para convertirlo en un usuario pasivo; el segundo, cuando tienden a cristalizarse, excluyendo así la participación de los individuos y sofocando su tensión ética.

Ambos, desplazaron luego la mirada hacia los márgenes, identificando en la centralidad de los excluidos (para Illich, los no escolarizados, los consumidores pasivos, los pobres, los “excluidos de la palabra”; en el caso de Capitini, los débiles, los enfermos, los discapacitados e incluso los muertos, cuya unidad con los vivos fue pensada dentro de una compleja *metafísica práctica*) a los verdaderos sujetos capaces de desencadenar un cambio profundo: no para ser integrados pasivamente en un sistema existente, sino como verdaderos protagonistas de una transformación radical de la sociedad desde abajo, desde el punto de vista de quienes están al margen de la sociedad capitalista, competitiva y excluyente.

Es por esto por lo que, la propuesta pedagógica de estos dos autores se mueve en la misma frecuencia: la convicción de que una educación auténtica no puede ser impartida desde arriba, sino que debe nacer de una relación dialógica y horizontal, capaz de devolver a cada individuo su dignidad y voz.

Contra el cierre institucional

El diálogo propuesto entre Illich y Capitini, aunque necesariamente sintético en este espacio, ayuda a comprender cómo los “cierres” modernos que habitan nuestras sociedades actuales (burocracias digitales, lógicas algorítmicas, sistemas sanitarios hiper tecnológicos) solo pueden ser contrastados a través de una reapropiación de la responsabilidad individual. La conexión entre ambos autores reside en la idea que la verdadera libertad no es “concedida” por el Estado o por una institución, sino que nace, precisamente, de la

capacidad de los ciudadanos para crear espacios de relación no mediados por el poder. En cierto sentido, si Capitini proporciona la base ética y política de esta participación (el “quién”), Illich efectúa una crítica técnica a cómo las herramientas nos dominan (el “cómo”). Juntos, estos dos autores ofrecen un manual para evitar que la sociedad se convierta en un “instituto total”, restando así al individuo su capacidad de actuar, pensar y curarse de forma autónoma.

A este respecto, para aclarar mejor lo propuesto, resulta útil recorrer brevemente algunos momentos de la vida de estos autores, deteniéndose en algunas de sus obras.

Capitini nació en Perugia en 1899. Estudiante en la Scuola Normale Superiore de Pisa, fue destituido de su cargo de secretario en 1932 debido a su negativa a afiliarse al Partido Fascista. De regreso en Perugia, trabajó tejiendo redes de oposición al régimen basadas en un pensamiento político y religioso, que pretendía hacer un vuelco radical de la visión del mundo fascista, y cuya primera expresión fue *Elementi di un'esperienza religiosa* publicado en 1937, un libro que logró escapar a la censura gracias a la referencia a la religión, que evidentemente resultaba tranquilizadora. El filósofo reivindicó siempre el carácter religioso de su pensamiento, lo que le alejó de las simpatías de muchos laicos, mientras que a la Iglesia no se le escapó el carácter subversivo de su propuesta (su libro *Religione aperta*, publicado en 1955, fue incluido en el Índice; seis años después, Capitini pidió al obispo de Perugia borrar su nombre del registro de bautizados). Una oposición radical a la Iglesia católica que no le impidió dialogar y colaborar con católicos individuales o incluso con sacerdotes más o menos heréticos como Ferdinando Tartaglia y don Lorenzo Milani, bajo el principio de severidad máxima hacia la institución, acompañada de afecto hacia los creyentes individuales.

Illich era ordenado sacerdote católico precisamente en los años de mayor fricción de Capitini con la Iglesia. Tras trabajar como vicario parroquial en Nueva York en una parroquia puertorriqueña, fue nombrado vicerrector de la Universidad Católica de Puerto Rico. En 1968, año de la muerte de Capitini, es convocado ante la Congregación para la Doctrina de la Fe; se niega a responder a las preguntas del Santo Oficio y, de hecho, abandona el ejercicio del ministerio ordenado sin llegar a renegar nunca de su fe. La raíz de su crítica a las instituciones parece ser, por tanto, profundamente teológica: la convicción de que el mensaje evangélico había sido traicionado por su institucionalización. A diferencia de Capitini, Illich se niega a hablar como teólogo porque, afirma en una entrevista:

“quien pretende hablar como teólogo se reviste de la autoridad que le confiere la jerarquía. Yo no pretendo estar investido con ese mandato” (Illich 2008, 19).

Y, sin embargo, el pensamiento religioso sigue operando tras sus análisis radicales de las instituciones y las tendencias de la sociedad contemporánea, hasta hipotetizar la existencia de una suerte de *Illich Code* (cfr. Hartch, 2015, p. 146), que esconde la crítica a la institución eclesiástica tras la crítica a otras instituciones, empezando por la escolar. En una intervención de 1971 en la Thomas More Association de Chicago, Illich parece admitirlo:

“Mi único motivo, personal e íntimo, para analizar la escuela fue poder entender qué le pasó verdaderamente a la iglesia” (ivi, 1947).

En Capitini se plantea desde los *Elementi* la oposición entre abierta y cerrada: la persuasión religiosa, movimiento que, partiendo de la conciencia de la propia finitud, llega a la unidad con cada ser viviente. El autor no puede evitar entrar en contraposición con la institución, debido a su rigidez y la pretensión de poseer la verdad última, la condena a la perdición para quien se aleja de ella y su poder puramente exterior:

“La pretensión de la institución eclesiástica - escribe - nos parece algo, en cambio, limitado, y que no corresponde a esa amplitud de religión a la que hemos llegado” (Capitini 1994, 44).

Tenemos aquí una singular y, para muchos, desconcertante crítica religiosa del catolicismo que, como en Illich, constituye la premisa para el análisis y el rechazo de otros cierres sociales e institucionales. La apertura religiosa de lo íntimo exige una política (la omnicracia: el poder de todos), una sociedad y una educación abiertas.

Por una sociedad y una educación abierta

A partir de estas consideraciones, resulta evidente pensar que, para Capitini e Illich tenía sentido hablar de una educación abierta solo si esta hacía a los individuos menos dependientes de las instituciones y más capaces de colaborar entre pares: la educación no como lugar donde se va para “convertirse en alguien”, sino como un espacio donde se aprende a ser libres junto a las demás personas.

Capitini teorizó y practicó la omnicracia, el poder de todos, que no era una simple variante de la democracia representativa sino su evolución radical, hecha posible por amplias asambleas populares. Tales eran los Centros de

Orientación Social (C.O.S.), espacios abiertos donde los ciudadanos discutían y controlaban la actuación de las instituciones, que el filósofo promovió en la posguerra en Perugia y otras ciudades. Para Capitini, los C.O.S. eran el espacio en el que la omnocracia cobraba vida: una asamblea perennemente abierta donde no se necesitaba un carné de partido para tener voz. El lema de los C.O.S. era “Escuchar y hablar”. Se realizaban dos reuniones semanales, una los lunes para problemas de la ciudad y otra los jueves para problemas políticos. La discusión era regulada mediante una campana usada por un presidente, que aseguraba la libertad de expresión; los protagonistas eran las personas pobres y más necesitadas, que finalmente tenían aquí derecho a la palabra.

“Lo hermoso es esto - escribe Capitini - que esa gente anónima se levanta a hablar, y junto al presidente están el prefecto, el alcalde, los jefes de las administraciones, invitados al C.O.S.”. “Señor Prefecto - pregunta uno - el aceite aún no se ve, y sabemos que en los molinos se vende a escondidas en el mercado negro” (Capitini, 1995, p. 15).

Pero los C.O.S. también impartían cursos de inglés, de historia de las doctrinas sociales, de teoría política, además de analizar en profundidad el programa de los partidos. Y realizaban la unidad entre intelectuales y pueblo, porque quienes hablaban a la gente eran personalidades de la talla de Ernesto Buonaiuti, Guido Calogero (quien junto a Capitini había fundado durante el fascismo el movimiento liberalsocialista) o Piero Calamandrei.

Para Capitini se trataba de impedir que el impulso ético-político de la resistencia se apagara en la democracia de partidos, cuyas posibles involuciones había previsto con extraordinaria lucidez. En esencia, los C.O.S. eran un gimnasio de democracia cotidiana: no se limitaban a votar una vez cada cierto año, sino que se aprendía a estar juntos, a discutir los problemas de la ciudad y a sentirse responsables del bien común. Era la idea de una política que no delega el poder en unos pocos, sino que lo distribuye entre todos, haciendo de cada ciudadano un protagonista activo de la vida social.

Illich, aunque comparte con Capitini esta crítica a las instituciones centralizadas, utiliza un vocabulario diferente que tiene, en el concepto clave de convivialidad, su razón de ser. Si Capitini se concentra en *quién* debe gestionar el poder, Illich desplaza la mirada hacia *cómo* se vive. Para Illich, el enemigo no era solo el dictador, sino la “máquina” - entendida como aparato industrial y burocrático - que se vuelve tan compleja que esclaviza a quienes debería servir. Una sociedad es, por tanto, convivencial cuando sus herramientas (sean la medicina, la escuela o los transportes) son accesibles, comprensibles y manejables por cualquiera. Al explicitar su pensamiento, Illich

denuncia así la “contraproduktividad” de las grandes instituciones: cuando un sistema se vuelve demasiado grande, termina por destruir aquello que pretendía promover (se piensa, por ejemplo, en un sistema de transportes que genera más tráfico del que descongestiona). La convivialidad es, por lo tanto, la reivindicación de una autonomía creativa: el derecho a aprender sin maestros autoritarios, a sanar sin ser reducidos a pacientes pasivos y a moverse sin depender de gigantes tecnológicos.

Aparece claro, pues, que en esta comparación se vislumbra una sintonía profunda en las intenciones de los autores, aun en la diversidad de las herramientas. Capitini nos ofrece el método político: una gestión coral y no violenta del poder, que rechaza la exclusión. Illich nos brinda el método técnico y social: una crítica radical a los medios de producción que privan de la iniciativa personal. Además, las similitudes son evidentes en la aversión común hacia la “cúpula” y en la confianza inquebrantable en la dimensión local y comunitaria. Donde Capitini ve la salvación en la *copresencia*² y en el compromiso coral, Illich la ve en la liberación del individuo de las cadenas de la dependencia técnica. En síntesis, si la omnicracia capitiniana nos enseña a *estar juntos* sin amos, la convivialidad illichiana nos enseña a *usar las cosas* sin convertirnos en sus siervos. Juntas, estas dos visiones, trazan el rumbo hacia una sociedad que no se conforma con ser bien gobernada, sino que aspira a ser, finalmente, dueña de su propio destino.

Repensar la educación de adultos a través de Illich. Algunas consideraciones.

El concepto de convivialidad de Illich, animado por los presupuestos aquí destacados, no debe considerarse un accesorio pedagógico, sino el eje sobre el cual la educación de adultos debe centrarse. También hoy, repensada: no como un proceso transmisivo, sino como una dinámica horizontal de la educación entre adultos. En este escenario, como hemos visto para Illich, pero también para Capitini, el aprendizaje deja de ser una acumulación de competencias

² No es posible aquí un tratamiento, ni siquiera sumario, de la compleja concepción capitiniana de la compresencia. En la conclusión de *Attraverso due terzi di secolo*, un texto que tiene un valor casi testamentario, al haber sido publicado poco antes de su muerte, el filósofo la sintetiza así: “He insistido durante decenios en aprender y en decir que la multiplicidad de todos los seres se podía pensar como poseedora de una parte interna unitaria de todos, como un nuevo tiempo y un nuevo espacio, una suma de posibilidades para todos los individuos, incluso los afectados y los anulados en la multiplicidad natural, visible, sociológica. A esta unidad o parte interna de todos, a su posibilidad infinita, a su novedad pura, a su ‘puro después’, a la finitud y a tantas angustias, la he llamado la compresencia” (Capitini, 1992, p. 15).

comercializables en el mercado, para convertirse en resistencia crítica. El principal desafío reside entonces en la capacidad de reapropiarse de herramientas cognitivas y materiales que sean realmente gobernables desde abajo. Una reapropiación que en la actualidad afecta también al mundo de las herramientas informativas y digitales, y a los espacios sociales vinculados a Internet.

En sus inicios, la red Internet parecía ser una gran herramienta convivial: permitía no solo acceder fácilmente a una gran cantidad de información, sino también generarla con nuevas y sencillas herramientas de publicación, como los blogs. Parecía realizarse el ideal propuesto por Illich en *Deschooling Society* (1971): una gran red que conectaba a las personas, permitiendo compartir conocimientos, experiencias y puntos de vista. Pero el sueño duró poco. La Red se ha centralizado progresivamente, engullida por unas pocas multinacionales que se han vuelto en muchos sentidos más poderosas que los propios Estados nacionales, y el nacimiento de las redes sociales ha contaminado el debate público poniendo en grave riesgo la democracia, incluso en los Estados donde parecía más sólida. La época actual, en la que la invasión de los servicios digitales y los aparatos industriales no se limita a simplificar la vida, sino a modelar el pensamiento mismo, corre el riesgo de deslizarse hacia un totalitarismo informático, donde la manipulación algorítmica sustituye a la libre elección y las propias prácticas elementales de socialización generan beneficios en el ámbito del nuevo “capitalismo de la vigilancia” (Zuboff, 2023).

Educar a los adultos hoy significa, en primera instancia, proporcionar las claves para descodificar estas arquitecturas invisibles, devolviendo a los sujetos el control sobre su propia “caja de herramientas” existencial. Sin embargo, como nos habría sugerido Illich, la dimensión proyectual no puede agotarse solo en la crítica tecnológica; debe traducirse en la creación deliberada de espacios *analógicos*, lugares físicos y relacionales en los que la experiencia humana vuelva a estar mediada por el cuerpo y la palabra viva. En una sociedad fragmentada, donde la diversidad de visiones del mundo a menudo desemboca en polarización o aislamiento, la educación de adultos debe plantearse el ambicioso objetivo de enseñar nuevamente el arte de vivir juntos.

Esto implica un cuidado meticuloso del “marco dialógico”: no basta estar en el mismo espacio, sino que, como hemos visto, es necesario cultivar activamente los valores de la reciprocidad y la escucha que hacen posible el intercambio. La mayor criticidad reside precisamente aquí: en contrarrestar el analfabetismo emocional y relacional que el distanciamiento tecnológico ha alimentado, proponiendo recorridos proyectuales que pongan en valor el conflicto constructivo y la participación activa como únicas defensas contra la pasividad

del consumo cultural. En esta dirección, la categoría de convivialidad aparece pues como fundamental para una educación de adultos, que evidentemente debe repensarse como *educación entre adultos*. Por un lado, es la creación de herramientas que sea posible controlar, contrarrestando la invasión de instrumentos industriales y servicios digitales que llevan a la manipulación, hasta instaurar una nueva forma de totalitarismo informático y tecnológico; por otro, la creación de situaciones en las que sea posible ejercitarse en el arte de *vivir juntos*, dialogando a pesar de la diversidad de visiones del mundo, atentos a cuidar el marco dialógico y los valores que lo hacen posible.

Siguiendo este planteamiento, podemos decir que el pensamiento de autores como Iván Illich y Aldo Capitini delinea una perspectiva radical y profundamente democrática sobre la educación de adultos, sustrayéndola de la lógica de la mera formación profesional para devolverla a la dimensión de la libertad y la participación civil. Illich, a través de su célebre crítica a la “escolarización de la sociedad”, nos advierte que el aprendizaje no debe ser un producto institucionalizado consumido pasivamente, sino un proceso de convivialidad que continúa durante toda la vida a través de redes de aprendizaje informales y el acceso directo a los recursos culturales. Desde esta óptica, la educación de adultos se convierte en un acto de “desescolarización” de las mentes, orientado a recuperar la autonomía individual frente a la dependencia de los expertos.

A esta visión se entrelaza armoniosamente la obra de Aldo Capitini, quien, con el concepto de “omnicracia” y la práctica de los Centros de Orientación Social, ve en la educación la herramienta clave para la gestión directa del poder por parte de todos. Para Capitini, educar al adulto significa promover una “trasmutación” ética y no violenta de la realidad, donde el diálogo coral y la apertura al otro permiten que cada individuo, independientemente de su título académico, se convierta en sujeto activo de la historia. Juntos, los autores sugieren que la educación de adultos no sirve para cubrir lagunas técnicas, sino para despertar la conciencia crítica y la capacidad de cocrear una sociedad más humana, abierta y libre de las jerarquías burocráticas. El contexto actual, caracterizado por la centralización de las infraestructuras digitales y la erosión de los espacios públicos de deliberación y participación democrática, hace urgente este trabajo de reapropiación comunitaria del poder social, buscando en las grietas de un capitalismo cada vez más agresivo aquellas prácticas concretas - asambleas, redes de aprendizaje, espacios de deliberación, pero también redes sociales descentralizadas - en las que la relación horizontal entre adultos es al mismo tiempo método educativo y forma de autogobierno.

References

- Capitini, A. (1969), *Il potere di tutti*. Firenze: La Nuova Italia.
- Capitini, A. (1994), *Scritti filosofici e religiosi*. Perugia: Protagon.
- Capitini, A. (1995), *Origini, caratteri e funzionamenti dei C.O.S. Centri di Orientamento Sociale*. Tavola rotonda nel Cinquantenario dell'istituzione dei C.O.S. Perugia: Regione Umbria, Associazione Nazionale Amici di Aldo Capitini, Comune di Perugia.
- Capitini, A. (2018) [1950], *Nuova socialità e riforma religiosa*. Firenze: Il Ponte Editore.
- Gajardo, M. (2010), *Ivan Illich*. Traduzione e cura di José Eustáquio Romão. Recife: Fundação Joaquim Nabuco, Editora Massangana.
- Hartch, T. (2015), *The Prophet of Cuernavaca: Ivan Illich and the Crisis of the West*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hoinacki, L., Mitcham, C. (edd.) (2002), *The Challenges of Ivan Illich: A Collective Reflection*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Illich, I. (1977), *Nemesi Medica. L'espropriazione della salute*. Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore.
- Illich, I. (2005), *Énergie et équité*. Nancy: Éditions Marée Noire.
- Illich, I. (2008), *Obras reunidas, Vol. II*. A cura di Valentina Borremans e Javier Sicilia. Città del Messico: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- La Cecla, F. (2013), *Ivan Illich e la sua eredità: tra fine della modernità e ombra del futuro*. Milano: Medusa.
- Zuboff, S. (2023), *Il capitalismo della sorveglianza. Il futuro dell'umanità nell'era dei nuovi poteri*. Roma: Luiss University Press.

Conviviality and *omnicrazia* in Ivan Illich and Aldo Capitini. Two paths for a liberated society

Carlo Orefice and Antonio Vigilante

Abstract

The paper proposes a comparison between the thought of Ivan Illich (1926-2002) and that of Aldo Capitini (1899-1968), based on their common critique of institutions as devices of dependency and passivity. Despite having operated in independent contexts, the two authors converge on a vision of education as a horizontal practice of emancipation: Illich through the concept of conviviality and the critique of the counterproductivity of institutions and expert systems; Capitini through the theory of omnicracy and the practice of the Social Orientation Centers (C.O.S.).

The paper shows how this convergence offers analytical tools that remain valid for rethinking adult education in the current context, characterized by the centralization of digital infrastructures and the erosion of public spaces for deliberation. Adult education is thus reinterpreted as a collective construction of critical autonomy and new forms of sociality.

Keywords

Ivan Illich, Aldo Capitini, adult education, conviviality, omnocracy, deschooling, participatory democracy.

Convivialité et omnocratie chez Ivan Illich et Aldo Capitini. Deux chemins vers une société libérée

Carlo Orefice et Antonio Vigilante

Résumé

L'article propose une comparaison entre la pensée d'Ivan Illich (1926-2002) et celle d'Aldo Capitini (1899-1968) à partir de leur critique commune des institutions en tant que dispositifs de dépendance et de passivité. Bien qu'ayant évolué dans des contextes différents, les deux auteurs convergent vers une vision de l'éducation comme pratique horizontale d'émancipation: Illich à travers le concept de convivialité et la critique de la contre-productivité des institutions et des systèmes d'experts; Capitini à travers la théorie de l'omnocratie et la pratique des Centres d'Orientation Sociale (C.O.S.).

L'article montre comment cette convergence offre des outils analytiques toujours pertinents pour repenser l'éducation des adultes dans le contexte actuel, caractérisé par la centralisation des infrastructures numériques et l'érosion des espaces publics de délibération. L'éducation des adultes est ainsi réinterprétée comme une construction collective d'autonomie critique et de nouvelles formes de socialité.

Mots-clés

Ivan Illich, Aldo Capitini, éducation des adultes, convivialité, omnocratie, déscolarisation, démocratie participative.

Convivialidad y omnocracia en Iván Illich y Aldo Capitini. Dos caminos para una sociedad liberada

Carlo Orefice y Antonio Vigilante

Resumen

El artículo propone una comparación entre el pensamiento de Iván Illich (1926-2002) y el de Aldo Capitini (1899-1968) a partir de la crítica común a las instituciones como dispositivos de dependencia y pasividad. A pesar de haber operado en contextos independientes, los dos autores convergen en una visión de la educación como práctica horizontal de emancipación: Illich a través del concepto de convivialidad y la crítica a la contraproduktividad de las instituciones y los sistemas expertos; Capitini a través de la teoría de la omnocracia y la práctica

de los Centros de Orientación Social (C.O.S.). El artículo muestra cómo esta convergencia ofrece herramientas analíticas aún válidas para repensar la educación de adultos en el contexto actual, caracterizado por la centralización de las infraestructuras digitales y la erosión de los espacios públicos de deliberación. La educación de adultos se reinterpreta, así como la construcción colectiva de autonomía crítica y de nuevas formas de sociabilidad.

Palabras clave

Iván Illich, Aldo Capitini, educación de adultos, convivialidad, omnicracia, desescolarización, democracia participativa.

IN MEMORIAM

Dip Kapoor (2025)

Ali A. Abdi

University of British Columbia

Professor Dip Kapoor (University of Alberta) passed away on August 26, 2025. Dip was an outstanding, scholar, teacher and colleague who, beyond his loving family, will be missed by many colleagues and friends in academia and among the global activist community organizations.

I first met Dip when I joined the University of Alberta's Department of Educational Policy Studies in July 2000 as a new Assistant Professor. Having completed his PhD in the same department, he was then teaching there as a sessional lecturer. It wasn't a chance encounter but as he noted when he came into my office and introduced himself, he wanted to know more about me, my work and research intentions. To deploy the selectively over-used cliché of immediately connecting and from there, becoming conversational colleagues and later close friends, wouldn't represent any exaggeration of the moment and its aftermath. Extendedly, from those initial collegial visits and connections, I slowly realized that we had select scholarly affinities on critical and intersecting deconstructive as well as reconstructive knowledge and research interests and intentions.

Beyond the academic parcels though, I was also seeing, sort of inter-reflectively, Dip's open-boundary professional qualities and unguarded generosity with his ideas, perspectives and time, which I still fondly recall and inter-subjectively, despite his permanent departure from this world, appreciate. In those occasions also, I slowly started admiring, even epistemically and stylistically embracing Dip's immense erudition in areas of mutual research interest including but not limited to sociology of education, comparative and international education, and global adult/community education, the latter leading to an edited volume we collaborated on in 2009.

With those early, briefer conversations, slowly and occasionally extending into longer interlocutions, I became more aware of, at a somewhat higher analytical level, Dip's discursive and attached critical gifts to decipher and reconstruct complex conceptual and praxical contexts that relayed, often with telegraphic urgency, his active commitments to protect the basic rights of those extensively marginalized in his native India. It should have been rare that a post-PhD scholar located in Canada who hasn't yet secured a full time position in academia was so actively focused on protecting the rights of people in one of the most rigidly stratified situations in the world.

It was that commitment where he went beyond talking about the situation, and actually cooperated, on counter-oppressive community projects, with Adivasi activists in India around the work of the Center for Research and Development Solidarity (CRDS) in Odisha (formerly Orissa), to actively and on the ground, support Adivasi peoples' rights.

For a brief context, the Adivasi who are recognized as 'Scheduled Tribes', and are said to be the original Indigenous inhabitants of the Indian sub-continent, and who number around 104 million people, are acutely marginalized in socio-economic, political and access to other resources. In supporting the rights of the Adivasi, many times against powerful resources extraction and by direct extension, environment depleting companies, Dip, as he shared with me more than once, faced situations that were neither peaceful nor accommodating.

Yet he never wavered or doubted his resolve to fight against such organized and institutionalized marginalizations. In addition, there were times when in order to push back against the system, along with his Adivasi colleagues, he had to tactically and carefully deploy, as he put it, his own socio-cultural capital (as factually and momentarily on the ground then) to get the attention of local power brokers.

Locally, Dip was also supportive of Canada's Indigenous peoples as well as immigrant populations' rights in his hometown of Edmonton, Alberta, which should also demonstrate his unboundaried commitment to the rights of the unjustly less endowed irrespective of their geographical habitations and politico-economic power contexts.

It was in 2003 that Dip finally secured a tenure track position at McGill University in Montreal, where, via important collaborations with like-minded colleagues, he focused on global human rights and social justice projects that, upon his return to the University of Alberta in 2006, expanded his prolific record of scholarly publications that produced 13 edited/co-edited books as well as over 60 academic journal articles and book chapters.

While some scholars, perhaps I could be counted in this regard, might ride the zeitgeist of topical temporalities, more or less moving with the emerging popularities of certain research areas, Dip never wavered in dissecting, along with his thought-affinity colleagues in almost all parts of the world, the need to take down (for my stylistic preference here) the contemporaneously lives-affecting heavy debris of colonialism, which is mainly operationalized through neoliberal colonialization, neocolonial NGO-ization, savagely elite privileging continuities of politics and economics, and the need to support and sustain emerging global counter-oppression solidarities.

Dip was also an outstanding teacher and much-loved supervisor and mentor. I still recall when a couple of times, I asked him to be a guest lecturer in two of my classes when he was still a sessional lecturer at U of A. The students in both classes were so impressed with his topical erudition and instructional methods that many of them asked me which courses was he teaching so they could enroll in his classes. While his uniquely interactive instructional qualities delighted and selectively challenged those in his courses, Dip was also a supportive and caring graduate supervisor/mentor who always conveyed the message that emerging scholars had a special devoir to contribute to societal transformations.

It was on that teaching and supervision excellence, that Dip received, unsurprisingly for me and I am sure for many of his students and colleagues, the U of A's Faculty of Education Graduate Teaching Award for the 2013-2014 academic year.

In his last edited work, *Contesting Colonial Capitalism in the Americas, Africa and Asia* (2025, Routledge Critical Development Studies), Dip, despite his worsening health situation, somehow managed to bring together over 20 contributors including both established and emerging scholars, and as he has done often, also included his well mentored former students to partake in this important project. The book, which has become a bestseller on amazon.ca, was thematically conceived, which again testifies to Dip's collegial generosity and support, to remember the activist + global rights struggle scholarship of his late McGill colleague and previous collaborator, Professor Aziz Choudry, to whom the volume is dedicated.

In critically endorsing the book and its dedication to Professor Choudry, the UCLA Distinguished Historian, Robin D.G. Kelley, noted how the volume, in its collective spirit, elevates the work of 'the insurgent laboring classes who believe another world is possible'.

I was more than privileged to receive the book as a gift from Dip when I visited him in Edmonton in June 2025 (two months before his passing). I treasure this work as the last scholarly achievement from my dear friend and colleague.

Dip thickly personified and unapologetically embraced the well-rounded and much needed counter-system complex existentiality of the engaged, insurgent intellectual who critically reads the world and acts upon it with deep insight, scholarly depth and courageous alignment with the systemically excluded across the world. He will be immensely missed, but his academic oeuvre and actioned community engagement shall continue to inspire us.

IN MEMORIAM

Michael Newman (1939-2025)

**From Labour Education to Teaching Defiance and
Teaching Agonism in Polarised Times**

Rick Flowers

University of Technology Sydney

Michael Newman was teacher, writer, mentor, colleague, and, in the fullest sense, a public intellectual. He came of age intellectually in the traditions of radical adult education and critical theory, shaped by Paulo Freire and by the Frankfurt School. He belonged to a remarkable generation of scholars – including Jack Mezirow, Griff Foley, Mechtild Hart, Jane Thompson, Shirley Walters, Astrid von Kotze, Linda Cooper, Stephen Brookfield, and Bud Hall – who took adult education seriously as a political, ethical, and cultural project. For this generation, adult education was never merely about skills or credentials. It was about democracy, power, dignity, and people’s capacity to understand and shape their own lives.

Throughout his career, Michael returned to a deceptively simple question: what does it mean to teach adults well – and courageously – in difficult times? Not how to manage people, not how to measure them, and not how to keep them compliant, but how to support learning that is honest, critical, and ethically grounded. For Mike, teaching was always a moral and democratic practice, sustained through reflection, dialogue, and a principled resistance to intellectual and political fashions.

Seen in retrospect, Michael’s intellectual life can be understood as unfolding across three major political eras. His books, articles, and institutional work do not merely respond to these eras; they help us understand how democratic education might persist through them.

First Era: Labour, Collective Politics and Democratic Education

Michael's formative intellectual and professional years unfolded during the heyday of organised labour and collective working-class politics. This was a period when trade unions, mass membership organisations, and community associations still provided relatively stable infrastructures for political education and collective learning. His early publications, including *Adult Education and Community Action* (1975) and *The Poor Cousin: A Study of Adult Education* (1979), already reflected this context. In these works, Michael examined the marginal status of adult education within formal systems while insisting on its democratic potential. Learning, he argued, was inseparable from participation, collective agency, and social purpose.

This orientation deepened through his extensive involvement in union education. As a National Trainer at the Clyde Cameron College in Albury-Wodonga, part of the Trade Union Training Authority, and through his work with unions in Australia and South Africa, Michael became immersed in traditions of labour education that treated learning as a form of political formation. These experiences culminated in *The Third Contract: Theory and Practice in Trade Union Training* (1993). The book offered a theoretically informed and empirically grounded account of union education as collective learning, organisational development, and democratic practice. It situated education within struggles over power, representation, and institutional authority. The award of the Cyril O. Houle Award for this work signalled international recognition of Michael's ability to connect scholarship with movement practice.

During this first era, Michael's work assumed that adult education was embedded in relatively durable collective structures. Although he was never naïve about internal conflicts and compromises, there was still a sense that political education operated within recognisable organisational worlds.

Second Era: New Social Movements and Plural Politics

From the 1970s onwards, Michael's work increasingly engaged with the rise of new social movements: feminism, environmentalism, Indigenous rights, peace activism, and community organising. These movements were more decentralised, culturally oriented, and internally diverse than earlier labour struggles. They foregrounded identity, recognition, and difference alongside class and material interests. Michael did not retreat into nostalgia for earlier political forms. Instead, he took these movements seriously as sites of learning, experimentation, and ethical struggle. His book *Defining the Enemy: Adult*

Education in Social Action (1994) exemplifies this phase. Here, he examined how educators engage with conflict, power, and political struggle across diverse movements. He analysed how “enemies” are named, constructed, and contested, and how education operates within morally ambiguous political terrain. The book was neither a manual for mobilisation nor a romantic celebration of activism. It was a reflective and ethically attentive analysis of political education in contested contexts. Its second Cyril O. Houle Award reflected its significance for the field.

Around the same time, Michael broadened his intellectual register through *Maeler’s Regard: Images of Adult Learning* (1999). Drawing on literature and philosophy, this book explored learning as a relational, interpretive, and ethical process. Rather than abandoning politics, Michael expanded his understanding of how adults make meaning through narrative, imagination, and attentiveness to experience. It reflected his growing interest in the moral and existential dimensions of learning.

Institutionally, this second era was reflected in his work at UTS and through the Centre for Popular Education. He convened multi-day seminars that brought together figures such as Jane Thompson, Mechtild Hart, and Jack Mezirow for sustained collective reflection. These were slow, demanding, generous intellectual spaces that resisted academic acceleration. Through the Centre, Michael also worked closely with emerging movement organisations. We ran workshops in Redfern, an inner-Sydney suburb shaped by working-class histories, long-standing Aboriginal communities, and intensifying gentrification. These workshops addressed real tensions over housing, identity, development, and belonging. They exemplified Michael’s commitment to democratic dialogue across difference. We also co-led workshops for environmental organisations including The Wilderness Society, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, and the Australian Conservation Foundation. One memorable series was held at the home of Peter Garrett – lead singer of Midnight Oil and long-time ACF chair – in Mittagong. Sitting in a living room, drinking tea, talking about movements, learning, and power, captured Michael’s style: informal, serious, relational, and intellectually rigorous.

Teaching under Constraint: *Teaching Defiance*

This second era culminated in *Teaching Defiance: Stories and Strategies for Activist Educators* (2006), written against the backdrop of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the global “War on Terror,” and intensifying neoliberal restructuring of education. The book gathered stories of educators who continued to teach critically under institutional pressure. It foregrounded fear, doubt,

compromise, and persistence. It resisted heroic narratives, insisting instead on moral responsibility under constraint. In many respects, *Teaching Defiance* functions as Michael's intellectual autobiography: a lifetime reflection on what it means to remain ethically committed in difficult times.

At the same time, Michael continued to provoke scholarly debate. His article *Calling Transformative Learning into Question: Some Mutinous Thoughts* (2012) challenged the increasingly orthodox and individualised character of transformative learning theory. Responses by John Dirkx, Patricia Cranton, and Elizabeth Kasl, followed by Michael's own concluding reflections, exemplified his role in sustaining serious intellectual dialogue through *Adult Education Quarterly*. He returned to these debates in *Transformative Learning: Mutinous Thoughts Revisited* (2014), reaffirming the need for socially grounded learning theory.

Across these interventions, Michael consistently resisted managerial, technocratic, and fashionable abstractions. He sought to reconnect educational concepts to social, ethical, and political realities.

Third Era: Fragmentation, Platforms and Polarisation

Since the publication of *Teaching Defiance*, the landscape of citizenship, activism, and public learning has changed profoundly. Political identities have hardened. Digital platforms shape public debate. Misinformation circulates at scale. The boundaries between left and right activism have blurred. The language of resistance is now claimed across the political spectrum. Collective movements still exist, but they are more unstable, networked, and vulnerable to internal fracture and external manipulation. Activism is increasingly shaped by affective online communities rather than durable organisations. Educators now work in environments marked by distrust, grievance politics, and fragile civic cultures. Under these conditions, traditional models of critical pedagogy and movement-based education face new limits. Fact-checking and debunking are necessary but often insufficient. Direct correction can deepen defensiveness. Evidence becomes an identity marker. Moral urgency can be read as moral arrogance. Michael did not live to write a major book directly addressing this era. Yet his later work anticipates many of its dilemmas. His emphasis on ethical responsibility, critical dialogue, and moral courage under pressure speaks directly to contemporary conditions. It is in this context that my own recent work on agonism has emerged.

Agonism, associated especially with Chantal Mouffe, is not antagonism. It does not seek to destroy opponents. It seeks to transform enemies into adversaries:

people with whom we disagree profoundly but still recognise as legitimate participants in democratic life. Agonistic education aims to sustain disagreement without demonisation, conflict without humiliation, and critique without contempt. It focuses on understanding how strongly held views arise, what fears and identities sustain them, and how dialogue might enable movement without coercion. Rather than asking only who is wrong, it asks why positions become compelling in the first place. Why do some people become misogynistic, climate sceptical, or conspiratorial? Why do others become feminists, climate activists, or anti-racist advocates? How do belonging, recognition, and moral injury shape political learning?

My recent work – including *Challenging Hateful Misinformation*, *Beyond Moral Panic*, *Citizenship in the Age of AI*, and *Discomfort, Dissent and Deliberation* – extends Michael’s project into this third era. It seeks to think pedagogically within fragmented platform politics while remaining faithful to his ethical commitments. In many ways, my recent body of work represents not a departure from Michael’s legacy, but its renewal. I believe he would have adapted. He would not have abandoned defiance. He would have insisted that courage today sometimes means staying in difficult conversations, that resistance sometimes means listening, and that naming power must be accompanied by creating spaces where people can change without humiliation.

Mentorship, integrity and Legacy

After Griff Foley, Michael became my doctoral supervisor. He read my work with meticulous care, using pencils. His annotations were acts of attention. They said: this matters, and you matter. He helped me see that scholarship was an ethical practice.

Michael believed deeply in the circulation of ideas. Long before open access became fashionable, he made his work freely available. He chose to self-publish to retain accessibility and control. He valued recognition because he wanted ideas to matter, not because he sought prestige. His two Cyril Houle Awards and the inaugural UTS Social Justice Award reflect both scholarly impact and ethical commitment.

Beyond ideas, we remember the person: the quiet humour, the careful phrasing, the thoughtful pauses, the short sentences and chapters, the sense that he was always thinking one step deeper without needing to display it.

He showed us that scholarship can be rigorous without being cold, political without being dogmatic, critical without being cruel.

For me, he strengthened the joy and reward I found in this field. That is an extraordinary gift.

We miss the corridor conversations and phone calls. But we carry him with us – in our classrooms, our writing, our thinking, and our attempts, however imperfect, to work democratically with others.

Good on yer, Mike

IN MEMORIAM

Rita Süßmuth (1937 – 2026)

A Tribute to Professor Dr. Dr. h. c. mult. Rita Süßmuth – pointing at some of her achievements in adult education and lifelong learning

Heribert Hinzen

Rita Süßmuth was born on 17th February 1937 in Wuppertal, and died on the 1st of February 2026 in Neuss, Germany, at the age of 88 years.

Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier ordered a state funeral for the 24th of February 2026 which will take place in the plenary of the German Parliament.

Her political career

Prof. Süßmuth was an important, well known and highly respected person of public life in Germany. She served as a Federal Minister of Youth, Family, Women and Health. During her time as Minister, HIV Aids had become a key issue, and she strongly argued against any form of discrimination. Other areas of her outstanding engagement included gender and women, migration and integration, democracy and participation, equality and justice, human rights and peace.

She had been a member of the German Parliament from 1987 to 2002. She was elected President of the German Parliament for two periods, and stayed for a full decade from 1988 to 1998. It was a most important period for Germany with the end of the *Berlin Wall*, and the re-unification of East and West Germany. It was also the time when Europe changed dramatically.

Prof. Süssmuth remained active throughout her lifetime. In 2024 she started a new initiative called *ParitätJetzt (ParityNow)* – claiming gender parity in parliaments as a human right. Supporting women had been on her agenda in many ways, she was however disappointed that after so many attempts and struggles still no more than one third usually are women, unfortunately from national down to local levels. The initiative is preparing for their next action day in June 2026.

As a professional

Rita Süssmuth studied history and French literature in Tübingen and Paris, later for her doctoral degree pedagogy, sociology and psychology in Münster. She taught in Osnabrück and Bochum, and later became a Professor in the comparative studies of education at the University of Dortmund as well as the Director of the Research Institute *Women and Society* in Hannover before her political career started in the late 1980s.

She has been the President of the German Adult Education Association (Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband e.V., DVV) from 1988 to 2015, and then because of all her achievements became the first Honorary President, a position she played actively till the very end.

Prof. Süssmuth was a strong advocate of community-based adult learning and education, especially of the German system of Volkshochschulen (folk high schools). She supported their inclusive and integrative functions for the local communities, rural and urban. She called for the acceptance of cultural diversity and saw the Volkshochschulen as instruments for democratic cohesion.

She has been an appreciated supporter of the international work of the Volkshochschulen, and served on the Board of Trustees of DVV International for the last two decades. In recognition of her services, the *Rita Süssmuth Award for the International Volkshochschule* was established in 2019. The Frankfurt Volkshochschule was awarded in 2025 for their civil engagement and exchange with Sweden; Potsdam for their cooperation with Namibia and their work on colonial heritage.

Prof. Süssmuth was a convinced European, and an advocate for lifelong learning as an instrument for adult education and participation, peace and international development. She served on committees of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe as well as the International Organization for Migration – having adult education and lifelong learning on her mind. Her

continuous involvement in such organizations and issues concerned with crisis and conflict, war and re-building society, taking care of refugees and asylum seekers, bringing migration and integration together is still needed today, or maybe even more than ever in regions she worked for specifically, like Southeastern Europe or the Mediterranean where so much more peace-building is called for as recent developments and destructions have shown. (Mayo 2026).

In 1997 she was elected President of CONFINTEA V in Hamburg (Knoll 2014). She played that role very actively, and from that time a number of colleagues in the leadership of partners like Prof. Paul Belanger, Director of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Lalita Ramdas, President and Prof. Budd Hall, Secretary General of the International Council for Adult Education, and Prof. Paolo Federighi, President of the European Association for the Education of Adults continued to exchange and work together. *The Hamburg Declaration and Agenda for the Future* (UIE 1997) was a strong future-oriented document which had actually only been possible through the sustained leadership of longstanding partners (Hinzen 2022).

This was especially again the case when the European Union was advocating towards a *Memorandum for Lifelong Learning* – she was in the lead together with Paolo Federighi and Wolfgang Leumer in tough consultations in Brussels where she could put all her weight as President of the German Parliament and President of DVV to reach to a document which is important till today. It created the room for the EAEA to take over a *Study on European Adult Education: Trends and Issues*, identifying recommendations which later could then be found in Communications of the EU on *It is Never Too Late to Learn*, and the subsequent *Action Plan It is Always a Good Time to Learn* (Hinzen 2011).

Some personal reflections

I was already in the leadership of DVV International for a decade when Rita Süßmuth was elected DVV-President in 1988 for the first time. She was the first women in this position, and nobody was expecting that she would run this office so successfully for 27 years to come.

The *winds of change* where blowing heavily, and it was Jakob Horn who at a very early phase informed Rita Süßmuth of the interest and potential to open new offices for DVV in Poland and Hungary at the turn of 1990 and 1991.

I recall that she invited me to join her to travel to Warsaw and have consultations with her fellow parliamentarian, member of the Sejm, Andrzej

Szczypiorski, a renowned romancier, whose novel *Die schöne Frau Seidenmann* was in my travel suitcase. The novel is situated in the Warsaw Ghetto, and of course the Polish-German history and appropriate ways for reconciliation through joint educational activities was always present in the negotiations. I was impressed how well they could communicate on the broader political changes, and how easy for them it was to turn to the practicalities of an agreement towards opening an Office in Warsaw in 1991 for joint programs.

The Office in Budapest had been opened in 1990, and as part of its opening events an exhibition on the experiences of the Volkshochschulen in Germany was made available to Hungarian colleagues. It was the beginning of a very successful cooperation which continues to last in many ways till today. I was invited to join the University of Pécs as Honorary Professor in 1996, and I continue to teach there till today. Colleagues from Hungary join the University of Würzburg in their Adult Education Academy as moderators and doctoral students as participants. In the years 1992 to 1994 further Offices were opened in St. Petersburg, Bucharest and Sofia, often with strong support from Rita Süßmuth through parliamentary and political relationships.

Those years of the early 1990s were also the time when the historical past of Volkshochschulen in East and West Germany could come together in the reunification process. Süßmuth encouraged DVV to have a special project on bringing the Volkshochschulen together as they were reminded on their common history as the Weimar Constitution 1919 had as its famous clause 148: “An adult education system, including the Volkshochschulen, was to be supported on the levels of the state, the Länder, and the municipalities” (Hinzen, Meilhammer 2022). Many Volkshochschulen in East Germany, like Dresden or Leipzig and in West Germany like those in Düsseldorf, Hamburg or Cologne were established on the grounds of the Weimar Constitution. The President of the Constitutional High Court, Prof. Andreas Voßkuhle reminded us on the celebratory event of 100 Years of Volkshochschule in St. Pauls Cathedral how important the Volkshochschulen for the democratic and social development today and in the future (Voßkuhle 2019). An illustrated book looking at 100 stories of the history of the Volkshochschule, including the international dimension, were published (Schrader, Rossmann 2019).

The CONFINTEA V European Follow-up Conference was held in 2002 in Sofia – with Prof. Süßmuth as President of the Conference providing the keynote address, bringing the European perspectives together with the global orientation, deeply inspiring for the national delegations – *Lifelong Learning in Europe: Moving towards EFA Goals and CONFINTEA V Agenda*.

2003 was also the year when she joined the *Lifelong Learning Festival* in Skopje, the capital of what today is called Northern Macedonia. Travelling with her was most enlightening with so many chances for side-discussions on the way, a rich learning experience where she provided so many insights for work in a region which was still suffering from conflict and war, and where DVV International had been invited to serve on the *Round Table Democracy and Human Rights of the Balkan Stability Pact*.

In 2008 the adult education community enjoyed the presence and keynote from Rita Süßmuth on *Adult Learning and Education for Equity and Inclusion within the Context of Participation, Mobility and Competetion. A Contribution to Moving from CONFINTEA V to VI* at the European CONFINTEA VI Pre-conference which took place in Budapest in 2008. It was an important event where the Hungarian Minister of Education István Hiller as well as the Korean Minister of Education Prof. Shinil Kim, host of the Asia-Pacific Pre-conference, participated.

Celebrating Anniversaries of DVV International

Prof. Süßmuth took the international work of the German Volkshochschulen quite serious. There are numerous examples of activities and engagements, also in respect to the organizational development: During the time she served as President of DVV, the former Department for Adult Education in Developing Countries became the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education, today better known as DVV International (Samlowski 2015). Let me mention three anniversaries specifically where Rita Süßmuth played an important role as President or Honorary President of DVV:

- In 1994 the Institute celebrated 25 years since its foundation in 1969, with Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Dr. Eduard Spranger, providing a keynote in front of a full house of representatives from Government, civil society and universities from Germany and internationally. Rita Süßmuth contributed *The European dimension of adult Education* to the anniversary publication (Hinzen 1994).
- In 2009 the Institute turned 40 years, and together with partners from UNESCO, ICAE, ASPBAE and EAEA the conference on *Financing Adult Education for Development* was an important event on the way to CONFINTEA VI, later in the year in Belém. In her *Introduction*, Rita Süßmuth stated: "The two slogans that have been used over and over in advocacy still stand. "Lifelong learning for the North, and basic education for the South", and EFA has been translated into "Except for Adults", and in the following discussion she argued for the need to move to advocate *lifelong learning for all*. The anniversary publication

carried deeper reflections on the development of DVV International (Samlowski 2009; Hinzen 2009).

- 2019 was the year when the Volkshochschulen celebrated their 100 years. And it was DVV International who invited the international community to the city of Weimar, renowned as the place where the Weimar Constitution of 1919 backed the first democracy in Germany, to celebrate its 50 years. Here it was the Federal Minister of BMZ, Dr. Gerd Müller who advocated for a global orientation, but with a priority for Africa. Throwing the net wider, it was Prof. Aaron Benavot who in his keynote reminded us of *The invisible friend: Adult education and the Sustainable Development Goals* (Benavot 2018). The anniversary publication provides a history of DVV International looking at 50 years through providing 50 stories from different continents (Hirsch, Jost, Waschek 2019).
- At the same event the *Rita Süßmuth Award for the International Volkshochschule* was established with initial awards presented to the Volkshochschulen of Bonn, Hannover and Ulm for their international or intercultural activities.

Publications

Throughout her professional life as a pedagogue and an andragogue, as a parliamentarian and a politician, as a citizen and in later life – Rita Süßmuth was a prolific writer, and she used a variety of media to bring her messages across. Most of her writing was in German, and some of her publications include monographies, commission reports, collections of her writings. Here are some of the titles, with translations in brackets:

- 2001: *Zuwanderung gestalten – Integration fördern* (Crafting Immigration – Promoting Integration)
- 2002: *Wer nicht kämpft, hat schon verloren* (Who does not fight has already lost)
- 2003: *People on the move: the challenges of migration in transatlantic perspective*
- 2007: *Bildung als globale Herausforderung. Zwei Statements – ein Gespräch with Hermann Glaser* (Education as a global challenge)
- 2020: *Überlasst die Welt nicht den Wahnsinnigen: ein Brief an die Enkel* (Don't leave the world to the insane ones: a letter for the grandchildren)
- 2022: *Parität jetzt! wider die Ungleichheit von Frauen und Männern: eine Streitschrift* (Parity now! Against the inequality of women and men: a pamphlet)
- 2022: *Keine Zeit mehr, abzuwarten* (No time to wait)

Prof. Süßmuth was also a renowned presenter and speaker, especially on those areas of her keen concern – women or migrants rights, social justice and learning throughout life. If requested to speak for us at an international event, she asked for a draft of a presentation which she enjoyed to discuss in advance. Later, she would never read it as a lecture or paper, but she preferred to integrate what she found important for her own thinking and select what she wanted to bring across by speaking quite freely, and full of energy. Interwoven and added with her notes she would later adopt the draft as her contribution to the forthcoming publication and report. Some of these writings have been mentioned throughout the text, and with more details in the references.

Awards and recognitions

Her engagements were highly recognized and rewarded in many ways, including the

- Grand Cross 1st class of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany
- Magnus Hirschfeld Medal for Sexual Reform
- Reminders Day Award for her great commitment to the fight against AIDS
- Viadrina-Price of the European University Viadrina Frankfurt
- Adam-Mickiewicz-Price for services to German-French-Polish cooperation
- Honorary citizen of Neuss

She was awarded several Honorary Doctorates, including from the Universities of Bochum and Augsburg in Germany, internationally from Universities in Bulgaria, France, Israel, Poland and the US.

Prof. Süßmuth kept her interest in higher education. She strongly supported the Turkish-German-University Consortium, and served as their Honorary President. In 2018 Süßmuth was awarded the Mercator Visiting Professorship for Political Management at the Universität Essen-Duisburg's NRW School of Governance.

In 2006 she was inducted into the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame. In her nomination note it is stated: “Suessmuth influenced the growth of continuing education in Eastern Europe, i.e. Bulgaria and Serbia, and especially Kosovo. In 2003, she led the Skopje-Conference, bringing together for the first time since the last war all eight ministries of the

region of the-once Yugoslav territory to discuss the policy, legislation and financing of adult education.”

Saying good bye

Shortly after Prof. Rita Süßmuth died, I prepared a note for the *Newsletter* of the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame (IACE) to inform members. So many colleagues knew her from conferences and other joint ventures. Of those inducted in the same class of 2006, at a beautiful ceremony in the University of Bamberg, orchestrated by Prof. Jost Reischmann, are alive and active: Sir Alan Tuckett, Prof. Ekkehard Nuissl, Prof. Tom Schuller and myself; those who died already include Paul Belanger, Joachim H. Knoll and Franz Pöggeler.

A good number of colleagues who received the note from IACE wrote back to me. A few of them should be mentioned and quoted here:

- “What sad news you bear - and thank you for letting me know. She was a fierce fighter for ALE and its greater funding domestically and through ODA. I last met her in June 2016 in Berlin during the XIV German Adult Education Conference, themed on Digital Participation in ALE. She was as inspiring as ever. And hearing her speak, along with Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, her successor as head of DVV, one had a solid sense that international cooperation, multilateralism and adult education were in good hands with such staunch and competent defenders. How distant that all seems today... But the image that stays most vividly in my mind is my last view of Rita Süßmuth - boogie-ing away to a live band during this VHS Conference party! I hope - wherever she is - that she is dancing with as much joyful abandon as on that summer night in Berlin. It is so deserved.” - Maria Lourdes Almazan Khan, Former Secretary General of the Asia South Pacific Association of Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE)
- “This is truly sad news. When we founded EAEA, her support was essential. Despite holding the office of President of the Bundestag (if I recall correctly?), she dedicated a great deal of time to us. I remember once she flew specifically from Zurich to Brussels just to meet with me and support our efforts in promoting the creation of the Grundtvig Programme. She spoke with us with a sense of cooperation and positive complicity, like a *primus inter pares*. I have always been grateful to her, both as a former president and founder of EAEA - alongside others from DVV, such as the unforgettable Prof. Günter Dohmen - and on a personal level. Her support made the pursuit of our goals much less

arduous, whether at the European Parliament, the Commission, or through our work with UNESCO in Hamburg.” -

Prof. Paolo Federighi, Former President of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)

- “Prof. Rita Süßmuth was clearly a remarkable leader whose legacy in the German Parliament, women's rights, and education – particularly through CONFINTEA V – has left a lasting impact. Her contribution as a long-standing President of DVV and her 2006 induction into the Hall of Fame are testaments to her dedication.” - Prof. Suwithida Charungkattikul, President, Friends of PASCAL International Member Association (PIMA)
- “Remembering CONFINTEA V in Hamburg in 1997 with Rita, its vibrant atmosphere and poetic resolution. It was a strong aspiration for the European Memorandum on Lifelong Learning in 2000, and later on for the EU Grundtvig Programme 2007-13. CONFINTEA VI in Belém in 2009 was all about implementation of the utopian visions of CONFINTEA V, and maybe they have now come a bit further with CONFINTEA VII in Marrakech in 2022 and its call for lifelong learning as a human right, on par with basic education. One day the history behind the history of the creation of the Grundtvig Programme should be written. And an updated history of the history behind CONFINTEA as well. As well as for ICAE.” - Prof. Arne Carlsen, Former Director, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL)
- “That is sad news but a life to celebrate. She had a very distinguished career in academic and in public life and was deeply supportive of adult and lifelong education. I remember her at the Confintea V in Hamburg.” - Prof. Timothy Ireland, Vice President, PIMA
- “Very sad. I recall some wonderful conversations with Rita during the preparation for the Hamburg meetings. She was an exceptional human being. Condolences to family and friends.” - Prof. Budd Hall, Former Secretary General, International Council for Adult Education (ICAE)

In memoriam - thank you

Both the German and international adult education world must thank her greatly. We acknowledge her achievements in life with appreciation and respect and will remember her with gratitude as a visionary leader, colleague and mentor, a fighter and friend.

Certainly, Rita Süßmuth has been one of the most important persons in my professional life, highly influential for my personal life also.

There are so many milestones we could travel together, from her beginnings in DVV, her engagements for DVV International, being classmates of the 2006 Hall of Fame induction, her initiative in the DVV Executive Board to pave the way for my final full-time professional years in Southeast Asia. The DVV General Assembly in 2015 was another joint experience: She stepped down as President, and I got my farewell after those decades in the leadership of DVV International.

Finally, I should like to mention also the invitation by Prof. Egetenmeyer to take good care of Prof. Süßmuth during the day she was the guest of honor of the University of Würzburg for the Adult Education Academy in 2023 celebrating the 10th Anniversary - and her inspiring key note on *Adult Education - Science for Practice*.

References

Links to Websites

<https://www.dvv-international.de/en/our-work/news/detail/prof-dr-rita-suessmuth-farewell-to-a-fighter>

<https://www.volkshochschule.de/verbandswelt/dvv/ehrenpraesidentin-rita-suessmuth.php>

<https://halloffame.outreach.ou.edu/Inductions/Inductee-Details/rita-suessmuth-phd>

<https://icae.global/en/2026/02/rita-sussmuth-has-passed/>

<https://www.pimanetwork.com/post/vale-professor-rita-sussmuth>

Articles by Rita Süßmuth

1994: Die europäische Dimension der Erwachsenenbildung (The European Dimension of Adult Education). In: IPE, 12, 318-329.

2003: Lifelong Learning in Europe: Moving towards EFA Goals and CONFINTEA V Agenda. AED, 60, 187-196.

2007: Grundfragen, Probleme und Strategien von Migration und Integration im Bericht der Weltkommission für international Migration (Basic questions, problems and strategies for migration and integration in the Report of the World Commission for Migration. In: Bildung und Erziehung (Education and Formation), 3, 263-271.

- 2009: Adult Learning and Education for Equity and Inclusion within the Context of Participation, Mobility and Competetion. A Contribution to Moving from CONFINTEA V to VI. *AED*, 72, 147-152.
- 2009: Financing Adult Education for Development. An Introduction. *AED*, 73, 55-60.

Others

- Benavot, A. (2018). The invisible friend: Adult education and the Sustainable Development Goals. *AED*, 85, 4-9. <https://www.dvv-international.de/en/adult-education-and-development/editions/section-1-playing-a-role/introduction/the-invisible-friend-adult-education-and-the-sustainable-development-goals>
- Hinzen, H. (1994). Our story and history. 25 Years of the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association. *AED*, 43, 7-56.
- Hinzen, H. (2011). Policy developments towards lifelong learning in the European Union. In J. Yang & R. Valdés-Cotera, R. (Eds), *Conceptual evolution and policy developments in lifelong learning*, 98-109. Hamburg: UIL. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf00001920_81
- Hinzen, H. (2022). Convergence and ICAE in the context of CONFINTEA and UNESCO: Memories, reflections and perspectives. *Convergence*, 43(1), 17-30. <https://www.convergencejournal.org/vol-43-no-1-2.pdf>
- Hinzen, H., & Meilhammer, E. (2022). 100 years of Volkshochschule in Germany – 50 years of DVV International: Signposts for local and global comparative perspectives on adult learning and education. *IRE*, 68(1), 125-154. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s1115902209944-y>
- Hirsch, E., Jost, C., & Waschek, G. (Eds) (2019). *50 Years: Half a century of adult education*. Bonn: DVV International. <https://www.dvv-international.de/en/materials/publications/anniversary-publication-50-years-dvv-international>
- Knoll, J. H. (2014). The history of the UNESCO International Conferences on Adult Education – from Helsingör (1949) to Hamburg (1997): International education policy through people and programmes. In: T. D. Ireland & C. H. Spezia (Eds.), *Adult education in retrospective: 60 years of CONFINTEA*, 13-28. Brasilia: UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000227635>
- Mayo, P. (2026). 'Southern' Europe and beyond in the Mediterranean: Critical Essays on Adult Learning and Education. Vol. 37 of the series *International Issues in Adult Education*. Brill: Leiden, Bosten. DOI 10.1163/9789004751194
- Samlowski, M. (2009). *dvv international – 40 years: How we became what we are*. *AED*, 72, 39-72. <https://www.dvv-international.de/en/adult-education-and-development/editions/aed-722009/history/dvv-international-ndash-40-years-how-we-became-what-we-are>
- Samlowski, M. (2015). DVV International– 45 Years– And going stronger than ever. In U. Gartenschlaeger & E. Hirsch, E. (Eds.), *Adult education in an interconnected world: Cooperation in lifelong learning for sustainable development*. Festschrift in honour of Heribert Hinzen. *IPE*, 71, 230-237. <https://www.dvv-international.de/en/adult-education-and-development/editions/section-1-playing-a-role/introduction/the-invisible-friend-adult-education-and-the-sustainable-development-goals>

international.de/fileadmin/files/Inhalte_Bilder_und_Dokumente/
Materialien/IPE/IPE_71_web.pdf.

- Schrader, J., & Rossmann, E. D. (Eds.). (2019). 100 Jahre Volkshochschulen. Geschichten ihres Alltags [100 years of Volkshochschulen: Stories of everyday life] Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt.
- Voßkuhle, A. (2019). Der Bildungsauftrag des Grundgesetzes. Rede zur Festveranstaltung "100 Jahre Volkshochschule" [The educational mandate of the German constitution: Keynote speech on the festive event celebrating "100 years of Volkshochschule"] 13 February, Frankfurt/Main. *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 69(16-17), 49-54.
- UIE (UNESCO Institute for Education) (1997). *Adult education: The Hamburg Declaration; the Agenda for the Future*. Hamburg: UIE.
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000116114>

BOOK REVIEW

**Satopathy, S, Realvasquez Vargas, A & Mishra, M.,
*Occupational Health Safety Factors and Their Impact on
the Mental Health of Workers (1st Edition), Singapore,
Springer Nature, 2023, 128 pp.,
ISBN -13-978-981-99-7618-8 (pbk)***

Kevin Caruana Montaldo
University of Malta

This book is part of the series New Perspectives in Behavioural & Health Sciences, which to date, consists of three books, all published in 2023. These books are targeted towards a wide range of professionals and academic researchers in various fields of study, including - but not limited to - mental health, social work, health and safety.

The eight chapters of the book under review have studies that have considered varied work practices, placing emphasis on not only physical stress but also psychosocial stress over a variety of job issues. These include repetitive work, high noise level exposure, dusty environment and their stress impact on the workers' physical and mental health, which contribute to an increase in occupational accidents and fatalities.

The identified impacts echo the World Health Organization's (2022) alert that "1 in every 8 people in the world live with a mental disorder" (p. 4). Reduced work quality, increased absenteeism and lost productivity are among the related collaterals, with substantial impacts on the global economy.

This book is informed by a broad and a successful study, that covers a very diverse range of jobs, investigating the mental health and workplace hazards in physical workplaces, such as construction and mining, agriculture / farm, and white-collar workers.

Specifically, the authors flag a multitude of hazards and risks in dairy farms, agriculture, and construction work. The authors mention seven classifications of hazards, highlighting not only physical musculoskeletal strain, but also the stress caused by other factors over which there is limited or no control, such as weather and environmental changes, crop yield, and the unknown associated financial gain or loss eventually reaped from hard work. These concerns are compounded by the presence of seasonal, unskilled and untrained workers, who are much more at risk of getting injured.

The book highlights the importance of introducing safety factors, ergonomics and periodic training, and the need of scientific analysis for a Safe Systems of Work.

Address to gender and age in the work performance is noteworthy and laudable. This expands the work of feminist educators active in the context of Italy's lauded 150 hours in working class education in the 1970s, and who also focused on mental health work hazards affecting women.

In the literature review on mental health and workplace hazards, the authors review multiple studies (approximately sixteen papers), extracting numerous quotations from a wide variety of authors on a broad collection of occupations; ranging from the high-risk firefighters, mining, construction, teachers and administrative works. Here the emphasis is on interrelations between physical, psychological, and mental health (Satapathy, 2023, pp. 7-11); and how the stress disturbs workers' lives and may provoke them to indulge in increased smoking, alcoholism and substance abuse (Satapathy, 2023).

Two points that I have issues concern the claims that because jobs vary in their nature and conditions, safety regulations must also differ to protect lives and create a risk-free working environment; and that if organizational stakeholders, management, and governments act promptly on safety and sustainability, workers' occupational safety can be fully ensured (Satapathy, 2023). In my opinion, the health and safety risk assessment and establishing a safe method of work is carried out precisely to reduce risks to a level as low as is reasonably practical (ALARP), and not risk-free, nor guaranteed hundred percent. From my experience, in an overwhelming number of cases, the main limitation would be the great financial expense required, that may make the industry's commitment financially unviable.

On the other hand, I fully concur with the stated outcome that occupational safety and accidents have a great impact on the company's reputation and productivity (Enrico Cagno, 2013)

The book also tackles ranking and prediction of sustainability and safety in agricultural sector, analysis of the physical workload, and impacts on mental health.

This is done through a detailed study on both male and female farmers includes an extensive variety of data collection and mathematical analysis, which requires specialised knowledge in research methods to fully appreciate the metadata and interpret the results. Hence, this chapter is more targeted towards the academic researcher.

More generally-speaking, the chapter illuminates how the farming profession encapsulates many hazards because of the physical repetitive work, exposure to environmental elements, chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and risk entailed in the use of machinery - all with detrimental effects on physical or psychological wellbeing.

The book's discussion of construction and mining workers considers high risk and exposure to multiple hazards, and related high injury rate. Indeed, research in this sector found that over one in every four miners suffers injuries inside the mine, and half of the miners suffering from body pain, cardiovascular disorders, hypertension, and mental stress - amongst others (Bauerle, 2018).

The book under review features a study that scopes mines in eight countries, all south of the Equator. Priority is given to risk factors, and to the mental health situation examined by statistical analysis. This is a very realistic study that gives due consideration to how several construction workers are semi or unskilled, lacking proper training or awareness of the regulations, or working for private contractors in irregular employment.

The resultant outcome is that construction workers are more stressed than miners owing to the latter's slightly better training and stricter work regulations.

The book also tackles how white-collar workers are exposed to less physical stress, but much higher mental pressure and stress levels. This has increased over the years due to the competitive environment to increase efficiency and productivity. Advances in technology are causing stress by blurring the work-life boundaries, making one connected to one's work 24/7. The featured study found that that utility officers and engineers scored very high with respect to mental stress levels, and that limited mental health was more predominant among women (Satapathy, 2023).

In sum, a headline finding of this book is that workplace stress is the main cause of psychological stress and mental illness (Satapathy, 2023).

The book is written in easy understandable English terminology, facilitating understanding, without heavy use of technical terms. It however requires a solid understanding research methods to fully appreciate the research and interpretation of the vast data, and to inform an enhanced understanding and awareness of mental health issues that is of assistance to its readers and researchers.

References

- Bauerle, T. Z. (2018). Mineworker Fatigue: A Review of What We Know and Future Decisions. *Mining engineering*, 33–40.
- Enrico Cagno, G. J. (2013). Economic evaluation of OSH and its way to SMEs: A constructive review. *Safety Science*, 53, 134-152.
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2022). *World mental health report: Transforming mental health for all*. Geneva: WHO.
https://www.healthsystemsmatter.com/files/TopicWiseReports/Mental-Health/World%20Mental%20Health%20Report_WHO%202022.pdf

BOOK REVIEW

Slade, B., Mayo, P & Bogossian, T (Eds.), *Adult Education and Difference*, Leiden, Brill 2024, 276 pp., ISBN 9789004692626 (ebk)

Justine Lubnow
University of Malta

Adult Education and Difference is a powerful and highly relevant intervention in the ongoing discourse of adult learning. Published as Volume 36 of the International Issues in Adult Education series, the collection of abstracts, the majority of which were written by (former) students of Erasmus Mundus International Master in Adult Education for Social Change (IMAESC) cohorts, consciously moves beyond a simplified perspective of lifelong learning as a mere mechanism for acquiring vocational skills. Instead, it advocates for critical, social justice-oriented adult education, grounded in the validation of difference, from both a social and ecological perspective.

The book is structured into five distinct parts, each exploring key areas where the field of adult education must directly confront issues of difference and power dynamics. The editors assert that no single form of difference - be it class, gender, race, or disability - can be properly understood in isolation. Instead, the lived experience of marginalisation is largely the product of a complex, interwoven interplay of these factors, which requires both practitioners and scholars to consistently interrogate power by asking, "Who benefits from current adult education provision?" (p. 3), and "Which particular cultures are being valorised, and which are being marginalised?" (p. 3). The ultimate aim is transformative: to educate for the achievement of a world "not as it is but as it should and can be" (p. 3).

Part 1: Interrogating Identity - Gender and Sexuality

This section addresses issues of participation, equity, and liberation through the lenses of gender and sexuality. Contributors challenge traditional binaries and mainstream assumptions, most notably by emphasising the necessity of using inclusive research methodologies when engaging with transgender and gender non-binary individuals (Joksimović). This focus is a direct call for recognising that traditional frameworks have historically and systematically excluded these voices. Furthermore, the section explores the potential of popular culture (de Castro) as a contested yet vital place where critical adult education can effectively unpack complex issues of sexuality and gender representation. The message is clear: adult education must be proactive in recognising evolving identity and using cultural tools to challenge deeply rooted patriarchal norms.

Part 2: Structures of Inequality - Race, Ethnicity, Migration, and Social Class

Here the focus is on systemic barriers, concentrating on the acute social inequalities frequently exacerbated by exclusionary state and political policies. The essays explore the intense challenges faced by adult migrant learners (Yessenova), highlighting the triple burden of simultaneously acquiring a new language plus foundational and functional literacy. The solutions proposed are rooted in the importance of learners experiencing relational and culturally responsive teaching practices. The chapter proposing a mutually beneficial relationship between Universal Basic Income (UBI) and Adult Education (Bouttell) suggests that UBI could function as a disruptive force against prevailing neoliberal pressures, offering individuals the economic stability and freedom necessary to engage in meaningful learning. Other chapters (Bouttell & Livingston) detail the profound efforts of community educators to create genuinely 'welcoming spaces' for refugees and asylum seekers in the face of 'hostile environment' policies, underscoring the vital political and humanitarian dimension of adult learning.

Part 3: The Intersecting Self - Intersectionality and Inclusion

This part moves forward to explore tangible, lived experiences of layered difference. The contributions clearly demonstrate how intersectionality is not just an academic term but an essential and practical analytical tool for creating genuinely inclusive adult education. Case studies from diverse regions, such as the grassroots efforts for social change for disabled learners illustrated in Paraguay (Gimenez), offer concrete examples, while others reflect on the interconnected discourses surrounding disabilities and mental health (Gomez

Deantonio). The authors (e.g., Khurshid & de Castro) powerfully reinforce the central idea that effective education for any group, such as women, cannot treat them as a uniform body; it must account for diversity across ethnicity, class, and ability.

Part 4: Learning Beyond the Institution - Social Movement Learning

This section emphasises the indispensable role of informal and non-formal learning in driving large-scale social transformation. Here the book expands the traditional social justice agenda to include that of the environment. The editors argue compellingly for a critical environmental adult education (Bogossian & Park) that surpasses a 'poor cousin' status to become a core message and practice for social change. By centering human-earth relations, the book advocates for fundamental, bottom-up change, challenging superficial liberal environmentalism in favour of a genuinely transformative approach. The analysis of grassroots anti-racism campaigns in the Global South, such as LUNDU's pedagogical work in Peru (Medel), provides a concrete and valuable model of how social movements operate as powerful educational sites, fundamentally impacting development and education politics.

Part 5: Shifting the Gaze - Beyond Eurocentric Knowledge

The final section delivers a potent and timely call for decolonisation. It challenges the continuing and often unnoticed dominance of Anglo-Saxon knowledge and research methodologies, advocating for a profound intellectual shift towards the Global South (Dagar & Khurshid). The contributions offer critical alternative paradigms, including studies on women's education in the Arab world (Abdullah) and insightful socio-cultural perspectives from non-formal schools for Muslim women in Nigeria (Sa'ad). The book culminates with a reflection on new, future-oriented paradigms for lifelong education that must be planet-centred, peaceful, and sustainable in an era increasingly defined by Artificial Intelligence (Uflewski & Tordzro). This final theme encapsulates the entire aim of the book: to not only critique the deficiencies of the present but to comprehensively sketch intellectual and practical foundations for a more just, ecologically conscious, and globally equitable future for adult education.

Conclusion and Utility

This book is essential reading for graduates and scholars seeking to ground their work in critical theory and the framework of intersectionality, while adult education practitioners will find practical, actionable models for creating welcoming spaces and implementing culturally responsive teaching.

Community organizers and policy analysts will benefit from the forward-looking discussions on economic structures, particularly the proposed reciprocal relationship between UBI and adult education. Finally, researchers focused on critical environmental adult education will discover a vital and much-needed new framework for centring human-earth relations within the broader social justice agenda.

In summary, *Adult Education and Difference* is not simply a collection of essays, but a cohesive and practical mandate for the field. It provides a detailed map of difference and serves as a crucial resource for all those committed to mobilising adult education as a tool to actively redress systemic inequalities, challenge inertia, and overcome indifference.

Having navigated the intersections of race, gender, and class in the first edition, a second could explore how the drive for digital literacy in adult education creates new barriers for neurodivergent learners, the elderly, and those in the Global South facing infrastructural poverty. Looking ahead, high-speed connectivity and AI fluency should not just be positioned as technical skills, but as fundamental human rights within the social justice framework.

BOOK REVIEW

Clancy, S, *Sir George Trevelyan, Residential Adult Education and the New Age: 'To Open the Immortal Eye'*, Switzerland, Springer, 2023, 275 pp., ISBN 978-3031-359-545 (hbk)

Analise Muscat Pulis
University of Malta

This is a novel book expertly written by a leading researcher in the fields of political and adult education (AE), lifelong learning, and social justice. Sharon Clancy, Assistant Professor in Educational Leadership and Management, brings extensive experience as a voluntary sector leader, chief executive officer, and chair; serving as a commissioner, communications officer, and co-editor, while leading international events and research on education inequality, social change, and historical AE (ResearchGate, 2024; University of Nottingham, 2024).

This reader-friendly book transports you back in time; but it may not be the typical book to take on holiday. The subtitle "*To open the immortal eye*" accurately describes Clancy's actions throughout the book by investigating the history of the Shropshire Adult Education College (SAEC), a residential Adult Education College in the United Kingdom (UK), and its impact on the New Age movement. Her meticulous research - originally her Ph.D. study - includes photographs and over a hundred interviews with former students and staff, documented in the Appendices. These make the book a reference guide for scholars, educators, researchers, and policymakers, providing a vivid depiction of what 21st-century education should entail; grounded not only in theory, but also in practical insight, by understanding the complex interplay between educational ideologies, societal values, and institutional structures (Alpaydın & Demirli, 2022). This informative work in the context of AE encourages social change, echoing the thoughts voiced by researchers, particularly Sir Richard Livingstone and Barry J. Hake.

This peer-reviewed exploration of residential AE is part of Palgrave Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning series. Endorsed by researchers like Colin Waugh, Mark Freeman, Barrie Trinder, and Linden West, it investigates the interaction between policy and provision in this sector. Despite its length and intensity, the book is bound to enhance the reader's understanding of residential AE and lifelong learning, regardless of one's degree of competence. Indeed, Clancy's research reveals how Sir George Lowthian Trevelyan, SAEC's Warden, developed innovative AE courses.

Unravelling history's complexities in the first two chapters, and their impact on present-day actions – the book invites “backward travellers” (p. xii) to dwell on historical insights with agency in the future of residential AE (SpringerLink, 2024). Clancy pays tribute to Trevelyan's fascinating forward-thinking methodology and innovative educational philosophy. Particularly, by incorporating spiritual and esoteric subjects, and a holistic approach inspired by the Danish Folk High School movement and Grundtvig's ‘School of Life’ (p. 26). The aim was to cultivate flexible citizens through tutorial-based learning necessary to fostering relevant societal change (Wurdinger & Carlson, 2009), dialogue and experiential learning.

Chapter 3 explores SAEC's historical trajectory from medieval origins, highlighting its dissimilarity from children's education and the tension between self-directed and state-controlled paradigms. The narrative examines pivotal moments like monastic learning, Mechanics Institutes, and Settlement movements, revealing how residential AE reinforced societal stratification. To further immerse the reader into the correct mindset, Clancy explains Lollard's revolt and how the mercantile class led to shifts towards mental cultivation while Industrialisation adapted education to societal needs (Alpaydm & Demirli, 2022).

Chapter 4 is central to this book because it explores SAEC within theoretical frameworks and historical perspectives, emphasising AE's role as a catalyst for social change and highlighting the author's conviction that AE is a response to and a creator of societal transformation (Mayo, 1994). This is done by drawing parallels with medieval notions of education concerning the cultivation of free individuals (Keddie, 2018). Moreover, Chapter 4 discusses the struggles between individualism and collectivism, integrating theoretical perspectives from Paulo Freire and Raymond Williams that underscore the transformative potential of AE, and conscientisation as particularly relevant in understanding education as a tool for raising social consciousness and collective action (Fiallos, 2011).

Chapters 5 and 6, analyse SAEC's transformation from post-war hardship to the 1960s, and its scope; highlighting socio-political dynamics, ideological underpinnings, and the tensions between tradition and progressivism in repurposing historic country houses for education. This adds value to literature by placing the reader in the correct perspective appreciating the scenario, the College's impact on society, its strengths under Trevelyan's leadership, his aristocratic background, inclusivity, and his successor, George Toms. Clancy does not explicitly highlight the College's limitations. To mention a few, for instance, although Trevelyan's commitment to inclusivity is impressive, his aristocratic background might have posed challenges in fostering a truly inclusive environment. Despite striving to democratise educational access, highlighting SAEC's role in postwar educational reforms; and providing vital insights on leadership, ideology, and institutional dynamics that help shape SAEC's enduring legacy, the College may have struggled to reach marginalised or underrepresented communities.

In Chapters 6 and 8, Clancy (2017) depicts Trevelyan as an educational pioneer and a charismatic New Age leader. Considering class-based, political, and cultural perspectives, Clancy examines the importance of memory, place, and space in understanding the significance of SAEC, utilising oral history and archival materials to uncover and re-present its story, exposing the transformative impression on students and staff.

Details of Trevelyan's visionary leadership explained in Chapters 7 and 8, are evident in SAEC's evolving curriculum, which encompassed diverse subjects reflecting his interests, personal struggles, and unique vision of cosmological, spiritual, and ecological unity.

Trevelyan's educational legacy is shaped by his experiences in Germany, craft apprenticeship, and wartime involvement with the Army Bureau of Current Affairs; while his dynamic engagement with diverse ideologies reflects his progressive ethos. Clancy explains that Trevelyan's experimental approach - inclusivity and interdisciplinary learning - faced tensions with local demand and intellectual stimulation. This is unsurprising given Trevelyan's tendency to push boundaries to extremes, especially when shifting towards elitist and esoteric courses that ventured excessively beyond mainstream educational significance. This criticism ultimately led to financial instability, culminating in SAEC's closure under Toms' tenure in 1975.

In relation to this, Chapter 9 further examines SAEC's legacy and its demise. Trevelyan's contributions to New Age thinking, environmentalism, and sustainable development are scrutinised, emphasising holistic education and

spiritual interconnectedness. Clancy discusses the future of residential AE, amidst challenges like privatisation and commercialisation; questions the alignment of mindfulness with societal inequalities (Rashkova, Moi, & Cabiddu, 2024; Oman, 2023), advocating for AE's core mission: fostering social change (Mayo, 1994; Thompson, 2018). Clancy also emphasises the transformative potential of residential education (Clancy & Holford, 2018; Lenehan, 2017). This chapter calls for re-evaluation and utopian thinking to revitalise education and democratic dialogue (Wurdinger & Carlson, 2009).

In sum, this engaging book intertwines personal experiences, inviting readers to critically examine the complex post-war AE dynamics and legacies of institutions like SAEC.

Clancy's core argument on education, particularly amidst democratic crisis, is crucial. She presents the book as personal and political, urging action, expressing anger and sadness, while aligning with Williams' concept that true radicalism fosters hope over despair (p. xi-xii). Through a process of "looking forward backwards" (p. xii), Clancy aims to explore alternative educational visions for radical humanist social change, providing practical insights rather than focusing solely on theoretical frameworks.

Written in an organised and logical manner, with detailed narratives supported by numerous citations from trustworthy sources, the book is an outstanding reference and source of information.

References

- Alpaydin, Y., & Demirli, C. (2022). *Educational Theory in the 21st Century: Science, Technology, Society and Education*. Istanbul, Turkey: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Baril, D. (2023, August 11). *Adult education, a condition for hope*. UNESCO. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/blog-post-adult-education-condition-hope>
- Binti Alias, A. (2016). Wilhelm Von Humboldt: A Critical Review on His Philosophy of Language, Theory And Practice of Education. *Journal of Creative Writing*, 2(2), 21-29.
- Clancy, S. L. (2017). *Adult education, spirit and the 'New Age': Sir George Trevelyan and the Shropshire Adult Education College at Attingham 1948-76* (Thesis). Nottingham, UK: University of Nottingham.
- Clancy, S. L., & Holford, J. (2018). "Life-changing things happen". The role of residential education in the transformation of adults' learning and lives. *Education+ Training*, 60(6), 620-636.

- Fiallos, C. A. (2011). Adult education and the empowerment of the individual in a global society. In S. B., Merriam & A. P., Grace (Eds.). (2011). *The Jossey-Bass reader on contemporary issues in adult education* (p. 170). San Francisco, CA (USA): Jossey-Bass.
- Hake, B. J. (2021). Looking forward backwards. Varieties of capitalisms, alternative futures, and learning landscapes. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, 12(1), 31-45.
- Keddie, A. (2018). Adult education: An ideology of individualism. In J. L. Thompson (Ed.). *Adult education for a change* (pp. 45-64). London: Routledge.
- Lenehan, M. (2017). Residential adult education: Transforming the lives of educationally, socially and economically disadvantaged adults. In G. Kong, & E. Boeren (Eds.). (2017). *Adult education for inclusion and diversity: Proceedings of the 46th SCUTREA conference* (pp. 282-288). Centre for Research in Education Inclusion & Diversity, Edinburgh, Scotland (UK): University of Edinburgh.
- Mayo, P. (1994). A comparative analysis of the ideas of Gramsci and Freire from an adult education perspective. *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, 1-28.
- Oman, D. (2023). Mindfulness for global public health: Critical analysis and agenda. *Mindfulness*, 1-40.
- Rashkova, Y., Moi, L., & Cabiddu, F. (2024). Addressing the societal challenges in organizations: The conceptualization of mindfulness capability for social justice. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 189(2), 249-268.
- ResearchGate. (2024, April 10). Sharon Louise Clancy University of Nottingham | Notts. Retrieved from ResearchGate: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sharon-Clancy>
- SpringerNature Link. (2023). Sir George Trevelyan, Residential Adult Education and the New Age: 'To Open the Immortal Eye'. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-35955-2>
- Thompson, J. L. (2018). *Adult education for a change*. London: Routledge.
- University of Nottingham. (n.d.). School of Education: Sharon Clancy. <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/education/people/sharon.clancy>
- von Gohren, A. (2019, October 16). Education, the Good Life: "The School for Life": N.F.S. Grundtvig. *Veritas Journal*. <https://veritasjournal.org/2019/10/16/the-school-for-life-n-f-s-grundtvig/>
- Williams, R. (n.d.). To be truly radical is to make hope possible rather than despair convincing. Goodreads. <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/221182-to-be-truly-radical-is-to-make-hope-possible-rather>
- Wurdinger, S. D., & Carlson, J. A. (2009). *Teaching for experiential learning: Five approaches that work*. Plymouth, UK: R&L Education.

CONVERGENCE SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Articles are accepted in English, French and Spanish.

General Directions

CONVERGENCE. AN INTERNATIONAL ADULT EDUCATION JOURNAL is a biannual journal published in open access by the UNESCO Chair in Global Adult Education, Faculty of Education, in collaboration with the International Council for Adult Education, aimed at an international readership.

Because of our international distribution, we attempt to select articles of interest to a broad audience of practitioners, field-workers, planners, trainers, teachers, researchers and administrators.

In addressing issues, practices and developments in adult education, CONVERGENCE provides a forum for a discussion and exchange of experiences and ideas. Articles are accepted in English, French and Spanish.

Points to Remember

- We prefer to receive a letter of enquiry describing the content of the proposed article, its treatment and why you believe it is suitable for CONVERGENCE. Our experience has been that those who read the journal regularly are more likely to have a good sense of an appropriate article. The enquiry letter also helps us to judge if a similar subject or the same region has appeared in a recent issue – we attempt to maintain a balance among subject matter and regions of the world.
- An article may be about a particular country, programme or activity, but the interpretation, description and analysis should be of interest and generally applicable to the work of colleagues in other countries. Papers written for another purpose (e.g., a local audience, a course of study, part of a thesis) are usually unsuitable.
- Put yourself in the position of a colleague in another part of the world and ask: Does this article include what I would wish to know about another country or programme? Is the context clear? Have unfamiliar abbreviations, references or concepts been used?
- Heavily statistical research reports are not accepted. Interpret data, results and conclusions in terms of practical application and lessons learned.
- Since CONVERGENCE is open access, no payment is made to authors of articles or book reviews. Reviewers may keep the book that they review.

Style and Presentation

CONVERGENCE follows The Chicago Manual of Style (latest editions) for formatting references and notes; consult the most recent issue if you do not have access to this manual.

Writing should be informal, without jargon or convoluted sentences.

Keep footnotes and references to a minimum. Tables and graphs are considered only when they depict essential information that cannot be described adequately in the text. US and UK spelling accepted for texts in English. Numbers ten and under are spelt out; 11 and over use numerals.

Review Process and Response from the Editor: Articles are sent out to international reviewers; please expect a delay of three to six months for a response.

Requirements Submission: Authors are asked to transmit their articles in ASCII format via e-mail attachment. Length: Feature articles should be no longer than 5000 words; information reports up to 800 words; book reviews, 600–1000 words. Abstract: Upon acceptance, an abstract of 150–200 words is requested for translation into other languages. It should summarise clearly the points of the article. Book reviews, conference reports, other reviews and obituaries do not require an abstract. Author's information: Include the title, position, place of work and a background explaining your affiliation with the subject or country you are writing about. Include your address, telephone number and e-mail address. For more information, contact: CONVERGENCE Editor, Professor Peter Mayo, Professor, UNESCO Chair in Global Adult Education, Department of Arts, Open Communities & Adult Education, Faculty of Education, University of Malta, Msida MSD2080, Malta. Tel. (prefix 356) 99845476, email: peter.mayo@um.edu.mt.

CONVERGENCE BOOK REVIEW GUIDELINES

General Directions

Book reviews are an important source of information for adult educators in that they provide a valuable synopsis and summary of important recent texts in the field. Book reviews must provide a concise summary of the contents of the book and must address whether or not the book is a valuable contribution to the field. As such, reviews should evaluate the usefulness of the book and mention who would find the book useful.

We strongly recommend the review is introduced by a brief introduction to the text, with reference to its stated objectives, layout and chapter structure, etc. It is also recommended that reviews discuss the extent to which the text:

- a) Is comparable (or not) to other works in the genre, with examples of where this is particularly evident;
- b) Testifies to efforts that positively exploit and disseminate the state-of-art; primary / secondary research findings etc.; give voice / opportunity to 'silenced' / 'marginalised' authors, etc.
- c) Resonates with the work programme / agenda of our journal *Convergence: An International Journal of Adult Education*. More info on this is

available in the [editorial of the first issue of the relaunched version of the journal](#), also summarised below:

"articles... should help lift spirits in a disturbing time. Readers need little reminding that we face multipolar imperialisms bringing us potentially close to a Third World War. We are still reeling from a global pandemic and witnessing wider environmental degradation. Climate change is wreaking and will continue to wreak havoc especially in the Geographical Global South leading to constant mass migration flows. It is against this ominous global scenario that this journal is being resuscitated. The call for socially engaged adult educators strikes me as being ever so urgent" (Mayo, 2022, p. 3);

and

d) What would be the specific research interests of readers / adult education specialists / practitioners that the text can support? (e.g., 3-4 examples of specific research interests and/or specific nomenclatures / levels of scholars / specialists / practitioners that the text can support).

The timeline for completion of a review will be negotiated between the book review editor and the reviewer. While most book reviews are solicited by the editor, *CONVERGENCE* does accept unsolicited book reviews. The editor reserves the right to reject reviews.

Style

Reviews should be written in a manner that is accessible to a general readership rather than to an academic audience. Footnotes and references must be kept to a minimum. For writing in English, *CONVERGENCE* accepts UK and US spellings. Numbers ten and under are spelt out; 11 and over use numerals. Include the title, author, place of publication, publisher and number of pages with your review.

Requirements

Length: Reviews should not be longer than 600–1000 words (about two to four pages).

Submission: Emailed submission is preferred (maria.brown@um.edu.mt), however, one copy may be mailed if email is not possible. The review should be typed doublespaced. MS Word format is preferred.

Author's Information: Include your institutional affiliation and its national location with the review. Also include your address, telephone number, and your email address.

For more information, contact: *CONVERGENCE* Book Reviews Editor, Dr. Maria Brown, Department of Arts, Open Communities & Adult Education, Faculty of Education, University of Malta, Msida MSD2080, Malta, email: maria.brown@um.edu.mt