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CONTEMPORARY CONVERSATIONS AND MOVEMENTS IN ADULT EDUCATION: From knowledge democracy to the aesthetic turn

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Introduction

We have worked in the field of adult education in varying forms, all our lives. Before coming to the university as full-time academics we both worked for the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), the founding publisher of *Convergence*. Budd was the Secretary-General of the ICAE from 1979-1990, encouraging the UN to take up 1990 as International Literacy Year, and moving forward programmes on everything from participatory research to women's and worker's education. Since leaving the ICAE in the early 1990s, he has taught at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and the University of Victoria. He now holds a UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education with his friend and colleague Rajesh Tandon, President of Participatory Research in Asia. Darlene was Editor of the 1990 global *International Literacy Year Newsletter* and Coordinator of the Learning for Environmental Action (LEAP) programme for six years. She was Senior Researcher in the Transformative Learning Centre at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and for the past 20 years, has been a professor of adult education and leadership studies at the University of Victoria. Darlene is also the International Coordinator of FIRN, the Feminist Imaginary Research Network.

We have both benefited enormously from the rich international ideas and research shared through *Convergence*. Budd edited a special edition of *Convergence* in 1975 on participatory research. *Convergence* was the journal of choice for the early development of the participatory research movement. Darlene, co-edited two special editions on environmental adult education (1995) and community arts practices (2000).

In this article, we discuss some of the contemporary conversations and movements that we have been a part of and how we are contributing through these areas to the field of adult education. Budd focusses on knowledge democracy, community-based participatory research and social movement learning. Darlene shares new conceptualisations of aesthetics and gender justice and her research and pedagogical work in these two areas.

Knowledge democracy

Participatory research as a discourse first emerged in Tanzania in the late 60s and early 1970s. *Convergence* was a key means by which the discourse spread and deepened over the next years (Hall, 1975). I will speak to the contemporary developments in the theory and practice of participatory research in the next section, but I, Budd want to begin this brief discussion on knowledge democracy with why many of us were drawn to a critical approach to knowledge construction in Tanzania and during that period. I was working in the field of adult literacy and education at the Institute of Adult Education. Others such as Marja Liisa Swantz, an anthropologist was working with women in coastal areas near Dar es Salaam (Swantz 2016). Still others were working with Maasai cattle herders and farmers. What became clear to all of us was that those women, men, young and old who were living lives in their families and communities were knowledgeable. In fact, on issues of day to day living, the knowledge that they had was deeper, more nuanced and more sophisticated than the knowledge being produced by academics working in academic ways at the new University of Dar es Salaam. Our purpose in articulating a new approach to research was to give visibility and credibility to people with experiential knowledge. We wanted to recognize that the ways in which women and men create, validate and use knowledge was an important mode of knowledge production. It was a recognition of another way of knowing. We were not yet thinking about the full range of what this might imply for understanding the role of knowledge in society, but these were seeds at least for me.

Knowledge democracy as it has evolved is a discourse that has pulled together a number of knowledge discourses that have previously been treated as separate (Hall and Tandon 2017). It has arisen in part as a critique of the knowledge discourses of knowledge economy and knowledge society. Knowledge economy links the production of knowledge to the neoliberal form of global capital. Knowledge Society is an advance from a social justice perspective in that it positions the role of knowledge at the heart of citizenship and participation. But neither the concepts of knowledge economy or knowledge society question whose knowledge lies at the centre. Both

knowledge economy and knowledge society centre western Eurocentric knowledge to the exclusion of other knowledge systems. Knowledge democracy is an alternative way to understand the place of knowledge at the heart of society (Hall & Tandon 2014).

Knowledge democracy, as Hall and Tandon (2017) have been discussing and defining it, is related to the ideas of decolonising knowledge and is based on several principles. First is the recognition of existence multiple epistemologies, epistemologies which extend beyond the Western Eurocentric knowledge system to Indigenous knowledges and other ancient place-based knowledge as articulated by de Sousa Santos (2007), Fricker (2007) and Williams. But it also includes recognition of the specialized knowledge of excluded persons the homeless, injection drug users, persons labelled as different, non-binary sexualities and more. Second is recognition that the creation, representation, and sharing of knowledge must move beyond the more common academic modes of production based on journal articles, conferences and books for academic audiences. Creative approaches to knowledge production and sharing as elaborated by Clover and others have been found to be very effective (2007, 2020). The third principle of knowledge democracy is recognition that the knowledge of the excluded, knowledge named and created by them is a critical component in movements for social justice. Gaventa and Cornwall's work on knowledge and power has been influential (2006). The rights of communities to control their own knowledge is a fourth principle. Drawn largely from discussions in Canada about the rights of Indigenous communities to own and control their own knowledge (FNIGC) there are implications about the right to share knowledge with all marginalized communities. The final principle is about access to academic knowledge. Taking into account attention to Indigenous and other rights to decide what is to be shared, academics whose research is often funded by public funding agencies are encouraged to publish in journals and publishing companies who by-pass the market publishers with their exploitative practices and fees in favour of free downloadable publishing (Chan, 2011).

Community-based participatory research

The International Participatory Research Network was created under the umbrella of the International Council for Adult Education in 1978. Rajesh Tandon, a new PhD from India became the coordinator and facilitated the network until 1992. The participatory research movement, while global in coverage was driven primarily by activist intellectuals from the global South. Rajesh Tandon from India, Orlando Fals Borda from Colombia, Paulo Freire and Carlos Rodrigues Brandao from Brazil, Yusuf Kassam and Marjorie

Mbillinyi from Canada/Tanzania, Anisur Rahman of Bangladesh, Franciso Vio Grossi of Chile (Hall, 2005). But who took up the discourse? During the 1980s and 90s two groups were seen to take up the PR message. First were the social movements for democracy in places such as The Philippines, Chile, Brazil and India. Putting the knowledge and vision of the excluded was at the heart of these movements. The other sector that took PR to use was the international development community which adapted principles of PR by persons like Robert Chambers (1979) and others to urge NGOs and funding agencies to locate their programmes more closely to the knowledge and perspectives of the intended beneficiaries of the funding.

It was not until the early 21st Century that universities in the global North began to take this approach to research more seriously. In Canada, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council created a funding category called Community University Research Alliances which required proposals to be submitted by a joint community-university partnership. In England the University of Brighton created the Community University Partnership Programme. In Spain, CREA was created at the University of Barcelona and in 2006, the University of Victoria created the Office of Community-Based Research. In the USA Michigan State University, Portland State University, the University of Minnesota and others created similar institutional structures to support community-university research partnerships. The Living Knowledge Network of European Science Shops was created in 2006 with science shops across Europe.

In 2008 following the 2006 Living Knowledge Network meeting in Paris, the Global Alliance for Engaged Research (GACER) was launched by Tandon and Hall. GACER attracted widespread global attention as a space for sharing engaged scholarship, community-based scholarship, community-university research partnerships and such. In 2009 UNESCO held its World Conference on Higher Education after which the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education was created led by Tandon and Hall. Our UNESCO Chair has undertaken two major global studies: A study on community-university research partnerships looking higher education and national policies (Hall et al, 2015) and a study of where people are learning to do community-based research (Tandon et al, 2016). What we learned through these two studies is that young people both in community settings and universities had a hard time finding a place to learn. From the myriad of words used to describe the diverse approaches to knowledge production both by and with community we have landed on the term community-based participatory research, but we acknowledge that similar practices are called by many other names.

Rajesh Tandon and I have given our attention to the support of a new generation of young participatory researchers through the creation of the Knowledge for Change Global Consortium in Community-Based Research (K4C). The K4C was launched in 2017 and through a Mentor Training Programme provides a training of trainers' opportunity for community-university partnerships to create their own K4C Hubs where young community workers and university students will be trained. There are currently 23 Hubs in 16 countries of the global South and the excluded North. (Lepore et al 2020). The philosophical underpinning of the K4C is to provide opportunities to learn about values based, egalitarian and action orientated approaches to working with communities to improve their own lives and the lives of their children. Our approach is not neutral. It is a preferential option for the marginalized and excluded.

Social movement learning

With convoys of lorries representing people in opposition to vaccines, and every other form of collective health and social measures that limit their individual rights -- the so-called 'movement for freedom' -- clogging the streets of Canadian cities and at major border crossings it is difficult to begin a discussion on social movements. However, it is important for us to remind ourselves that the social movements that have informed our thinking in adult education over the years have been movements of the marginalized or excluded, movements of and for 'social and collective justice and change such as Anti-Apartheid, women's, Indigenous Rights, environmental and Occupy movements.

I have thought about and written a lot about learning within social justice movements of our times. Influenced by scholars such as Eyeman and Jamison (1991) I have tried to pull together a way of understanding the critical role that learning plays in our understanding of the impact of social movements. What I have found is that social movements do not generally succeed in their stated short-term goals of a shift in legislation or major policies. And yet social movements have a powerful impact on the way at which we understand relations of power in the context of gender, race, sexuality, class, location in the world and more. I have suggested that learning in social movements can be seen as happening in three major ways. Firstly, those involved directly in movements learn practical skills of social media and communications, governmental relations, public speaking and research skills. Secondly those involved in movements learn at an accelerated pace from the informal interaction of sharing stories, skills and strategies with each other. And in

movements with less resources, the informal learning space is the most important. Finally, and this is the power of social movement learning is that society in general learns by the actions of the social movements without having to be directly engaged in the operations of the movements themselves. We learn as non-Indigenous people about the meaning of Indigenous resurgence, from the homeless of the challenges they face, from the climate activists about planetary strife. Learning is most certainly happening in the social movements of the right, the movements of white supremacists and hyper nationalists in many parts of the world. What this means to me is that attending to the learning agenda in the social justice movements that are supported by so many of us in the field of adult education is that much more important. As the late Martin Luther King once said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but bends towards justice".

The 'aesthetic turn'

A radical shift in social organisation requires a shift in consciousness which requires a shift in pedagogical practice. Over the past three decades in particular, the academic field of adult education has begun to make this shift, taking what Wildermeesch (2019) calls 'an aesthetic turn' in the form of a growing "interest in the relationship between [adult] education and aesthetics" (p. 117; see also Clover, 2010). There are two key strands to the aesthetic turn in which I have been involved. The first is a use of mediums ranging from theatre to textiles, masks to photography, documentary films to graphic novels, painting to poetry, graffiti to animated videos, storytelling to music, zines to large-scale exhibitions, installations to interactive mapping as research and pedagogical strategies (e.g., Butterwick & Roy, 2018; Clover et al, 2021; Clover & Stalker, 2007; Grummell & Finnegan, 2020; Yang & Lipson Lawrence, 2017). Central to arts-based work is a belief in the power of the imagination, what Mohanty (2012) calls the "most subversive thing a people can have" (p. ix). Art and imagination do not necessarily change the world, but they have the potential to rupture the codes and categories of how the world is seen which enables people to imagine the world not only as it truly is but how it might also be. I have contributed to this aesthetic turn in adult education in one way through analyses of fabric craft projects and how they enable people to sit comfortable in complexity, to hold divergent and competing views at once and by doing so, render the contradictions of dominant society most visible.

The second sense of aesthetics for Wildermeesch is "much wider in scope" (p. 1) encompassing practices of perception or seeing. Seeing and perception are always political, it is always about power because it is about what we are able see, allowed, or made to see. For feminists seeing and perception are critically

pedagogical because people tend "to see what they are being taught to see and to remain blind to what they are being taught to ignore" (Cramer & Witcomb, 2018, p. 18). Equally importantly, conversations in feminist circles focus on the 'unseen', what Criado Perez (2019) calls the 'absent presence'. This is the exclusion or misrepresentation of women and other marginalised populations. Much work in adult education goes to illuminating or rendering visible women's diverse stories, perspectives, contributions and experiences, based on the fact that until the excluded are able to represent themselves as they wish to be seen and storied, they will remain subject to the narrative and visualising prowess of the powerful. This brings me to another element of aesthetics - the issue of representation. Representation is not just how we show, tell and imagine the world and ourselves but whose and what worlds get to be represented and whose lives, stories and contributions do not. Like seeing and perception, the practice of representation is never neutral; it too is always about power.

My interest in seeing, perception and representation has taken me in two directions. The first is into the world of museums. Although museums have only recently become a focus of adult education, these ubiquitous institutions are pedagogical masters of seeing and telling through their varied practices of representation. My research has focused on how these institutions contribute to gender inequality. Based on my forays into hundreds of these institutions around the world, I developed a pedagogical and analytical tool I call the 'feminist museum hack' (Clover, 2020). Using a series of questions students are able to interrogate their sleight of hand representations, rendering visible what they are actually showing and telling and thus educating us to believe (and to remain ignorant of) about men and women. The second direction is into curation. I recently curated a large-scale exhibition of the activist, resistance stories and cultural practices of women who, to borrow from Cixous (1976), put themselves into Canadian history "by [their] own movement" (p. 875) (e.g., Clover, 2021). I also curated a virtual exhibition which capture visually conversations during a three day on the feminist imaginary.

Gender justice

Around the world, feminist adult educators maintain and are stepping up a focus on women. While the United Nations recognizes this form of inequality as an "unfinished business in every single country of the world" (p. 1), the Generation Equality Forum (2021) report describes gender discrimination as the most enduring and "defining inequality of our time" (n/p). Worldwide, "the powers that be are still predominantly male...the millennia old status hierarchy between men/male and women/female persists everywhere and

patriarchal patterns of gender oppression remain more resilient than any of us suspected" (Vintges, 2018, p. 165). A recent study by Shameen (2021) illuminates a disturbing "global patriarchal backlash [of] rising fundamentalist and fascist agendas" (p. 2). She has round that the "forces of extremism, cultural imperialism, ideological colonization...and the (re)imposition of patriarchal heteronormative family values...are shaping the parameters of public discourse and consciousness" (p. 10). Through policy, rights are curbed; through the power of social media, messages of misogyny, intolerance and 'white' masculine supremacy invade the homes and lives of millions across the globe (p. 10). In addition, there is rise in the vilification of "feminism as the primary threat to public morality" (p. 10). The vacant masks in Figure 1 below were made during a women and domestic violence workshop at the Women's Museum Argentina. This installation visually represents but a few of the women murdered by their partners during 2020, the first year of the coronavirus global shutdown.

***Figure 1**: Mask installation, Museo de la mujer, Argentina*

I have been writing on feminist adult education for many years, but a more recent contribution was publication of the first co-edited volume of its kind on women and adult education in Canada (Clover, et al, 2016).

Entering more recently into the field of adult education, but growing, are expanded discourses of gender, based in the understanding that

> *gender is never just about gender. It…rubs up against other social signifiers in indecent ways…just as the critical examination of whiteness within structures of racial inequality enables us to see how the norm is as constructed a social product as the racialized*

> *Other (and how the norm depends on the Other to give it meaning and coherency) asking questions about both normative, trans [and other (non)genders] …facilitate a richer critical analysis of the gender systems as a whole (Scott-Dixon, 2006, p. 19)*

And these questions are now being asked. Feminist adult education is proving to be a toolbox of ideas and strategies that can be applied equally to struggles of gay, queer, two spirited, trans and non-binary peoples (Kirkgaesser, in press). My own work in this area has been to focus on women's and gender museums. For these institutions, the perception of what and how gender means matters; how we see, talk (or do not talk) about and act out gender matters. I am exploring how these institutions use their practices of representation, to return to the aesthetic, to encourage a deeper knowledge of the importance of gender, to render visible and challenge the gender structures of power and the epistemologies and representations of mastery that have placed heterosexual men at the centre of the world's story. I am finding that these theirs's is pedagogy of radical imagination and as such, a new source of power and hope in the world.

Figure 2: *Who am I? Kvindemuseet, Denmark*

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Contemporary conversations and movements in adult education: From knowledge democracy to the aesthetic turn

Budd L Hall and Darlene E Clover

Abstract

In this article, two key figures in the history of the International Council for Adult Education, one being the Secretary General, discuss some of the contemporary conversations and movements that we have been a part of and how we are contributing

through these areas to the field of adult education. Budd focusses on knowledge democracy, community-based participatory research and social movement learning. Darlene shares new conceptualisations of aesthetics and gender justice and her research and pedagogical work in these two areas.

Key words

Feminist adult education, aesthetic practices, environmental adult education, knowledge democracy, social movement learning, participatory research

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Conversations et mouvements contemporains dans l'éducation des adultes : De la démocratie du savoir au tournant esthétique

Résumé

Dans cet article, deux personnes clés de l'histoire du Conseil international pour l'éducation des adultes, dont l'un fut secrétaire général, échangent sur les débats et les mouvements contemporains auxquels nous avons participé et sur comment nous y contribuons par le biais des domaines de l'éducation des adultes. Budd se concentre sur la démocratie du savoir, la recherche participative dans les communautés et l'apprentissage des mouvements sociaux. Darlene partage de nouvelles conceptualisations de l'esthétique et de la justice de genre, ainsi que de ses recherches et de son travail pédagogique dans ces deux domaines.

Mots clés

Éducation féministe, pratiques esthétiques, éducation environnementale des adultes, démocratie de la connaissance, apprentissage des mouvements sociaux, recherche participative.

Conversaciones y movimientos contemporáneos en la educación de adultos: De la democracia del conocimiento al giro estético

Resumen

En este artículo, dos figuras clave en la historia del Consejo Internacional de Educación de Adultos, una de ellas el Secretario General, dialogan acerca de algunas de las conversaciones y movimientos contemporáneos de los que hemos formado parte y cómo estamos contribuyendo a través de estas áreas al campo de la educación de adultos. Budd se centra en la democracia del conocimiento, la investigación participativa basada en la comunidad y el aprendizaje de los movimientos sociales. Darlene comparte las nuevas conceptualizaciones de la estética y la justicia de género, así como su investigación y trabajo pedagógico en estas dos áreas.

Palabras clave
Educación de adultos feminista, prácticas estéticas, educación de adultos medio - ambiental, democracia del conocimiento, aprendizaje de los movimientos sociales, investigación participativa