What is change-oriented adult education - and why do we need it?

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#FutureLabAE

What should adult education do?

1. Help to keep the current situation (status quo) and support adults to adapt and live their current lives?
2. Develop peacefully the society, communities, organizations and individuals?
3. Change – if necessary, in a more radical way – the society, communities, organizations and individuals?

Of course, it should depend on how “good” the society, community, organization, individual is...

“Good” → option 1.
“Quite OK” → option 2.
“Bad” → option 3.

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POLITICAL OPTIONS FOR ADULT EDUCATION (Picon 1991)

‘From our historical experience we have learned that the actors involved in adult education do not have a neutral posture. They have ideologies and fundamental interests which they are attempting to legitimize [...] these actors are guided by and support one of the following basic political options:

1. **Maintenance and conservation** of the traditional ordering of the society, however unjust and unequal it may be;
2. **Reform to improve the system** and make the necessary adjustments for more equity;
3. **Structural transformation** leading to a new national order, whether by progressive steps or radical changes through revolutionary processes.’

In policy documents education is commonly seen as a **reactive tool**, helping adults to **adapt** in changes (option 1):

**Existing policy documents**
- “… improve everyone’s capacity and ability to cope with life” (LLL-policy, Estonia)
- “… an increased burden is imposed on individuals to adapt their skills in order to remain prepared for future changes” (Council of the European Union (2001), Council Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies)

**Alternative: change-oriented policy…**
- “… improve everyone’s capacity and ability to change their life - and develop the society”
- “… an increased burden is imposed on individuals to develop their skills in order to anticipate and even manage changes and their future”

**Education** is seen to have a sustaining role in the society, focusing on maintaining status quo and adaptation and survival of individuals in the current system (social control).
Examples: Alternative options how adult education could be used to develop democracy

1. **Maintenance and conservation** of the traditional ordering of the society
   - Example: courses which make individuals more active voters (→ justification for politicians to stay in power)

2. **Reform** to improve the system
   - Example: courses where adults learn to recognize populistic rhetoric's and fake news, and act as more reflective voters (→ perhaps better politicians selected)
   - Historical example: Nordic *folkbildning* system since 19th Century (to educate the common people so that they can become active citizens of the democratic, parliamentary system) → Nordic democratic welfare states

3. **Structural transformation**
   - Example: social movements where adults become active citizens and learn how to contribute to development of more democratic society ("transformative citizenship"; Banks 2017) (→ undemocratic system changed to more democratic one)
   - Historical example:
     - **Civil rights movement in the USA** in 1950-60's (Highlander Folk High School; Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King);
     - **Current example**: *Belarus* civic movement for democratic elections
PAULO FREIRE
PEDAGOGY of the OPPRESSED

Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos
With an Introduction by Donald M. Macedo

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Definition of change-oriented adult education

Change-oriented adult education encompasses an approach, philosophy and set of teaching and learning methods that seek to create individual and/or social change. Learners can also move beyond individual transformation to a collective empowerment based on critical awareness, new ways of thinking, and active participation. This model facilitates a process of conscious realization for learners as they work together taking action, including potential acts of resistance, towards a more democratic, equal and ethical world.

Need to organize change-oriented AE can be based on...

- experienced or observed social problems (here: problems caused by digitalization)
- political systems which are undemocratic (for example, USA in 1950’s) or open to dangers of populism (Brexit?)
- poverty, austerity policies, economic and gender inequalities
- destructive ways of behaving and thinking (hate speech, lack of media literacy skills, climate change denial, conspiracy theories..)
- or on political objectives; not necessarily “good”
  - for example, the “civic education program” in Nazi Germany

A fundamental question is, how and by whom the need for change (peaceful or radical) is defined.
Organized by whom?

• The “ruling” groups and people are not likely to promote radical changes through education, and focus therefore mainly on
  – Option 1 (general education, training for jobs, basic civic education, “transmission of culture”)
  – Option 2 (peaceful development of individuals, organization or society)

• Option 3 is organized mainly outside the official education system and often organized by individuals themselves
  – “renewal from the margins”, “do-it-yourself learning spaces” (Kirchgaesser 2019b)

Require learning and teaching methods which...

• Facilitate dialogue between people who have different world views, and critical reflection
  → Helps to become aware of own and other people’s attitudes, beliefs, values, and (meaning) perspectives
  → Challenge the existing conceptions and attitudes
  → Help seeing things in alternative ways
  → Encourage to do things differently
  → Lead to concrete action and shared responsibility
Examples of “change-oriented” learning methods

- **Serious games** (Connolly, Boyle, MacArthur, Hainey & Boyle 2012)
- **Social sculpture** ([https://www.artistsofsociety.com](https://www.artistsofsociety.com))
- **Fishbowl** (a collaborative, dialogical alternative for panels; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fishbowl_(conversation)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fishbowl_(conversation))
- **Photovoice** (Akther & Dirckinck-Holmfeld 2018)
- **Participatory action research** (PAR; Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon 2013)
- **Liberative walks** (Raisio & Ehrström 2017)
- **Change laboratory** (Sannino & Engeström 2017)
- Teaching methods that can be applied to develop *transformative citizenship skills* (Banks 2017, 372 – 374)
  - Culturally Responsive and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy
  - Civic Action Programs (participatory action research, service learning etc)
- See also this toolbox: [https://www.collaboratiohelvetica.ch/toolbox](https://www.collaboratiohelvetica.ch/toolbox)