GLOBALIZATION AND THE ROLE OF ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

Challenges and Opportunities

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Not too long ago, I received an invitation over e-mail to give a keynote address at an adult education conference in Istanbul. Communication between myself and conference organizers thousands of miles away was via e-mail as we worked out the details of my visit. I also went to the Internet for information about adult education and lifelong learning in Turkey and met with one of our graduate students from Turkey. While driving to my office shortly after accepting the invitation, I just happened on a National Public Radio interview with Turkish Nobel Prize author Orhan Pamuk and immediately bought his book *Istanbul* (through Amazon.com). And, on a lighter note, as I was leisurely reading the *International Herald Tribune* on an airplane to another part of the world, I came across a little article about "An Empire's Drink" or *boza*, available from vendors in Istanbul and definitely "worth trying." My experience has all the earmarks of globalization—the merging of technology, travel, education, and culture across and between borders.

The movement of people, services, goods, and ideas across national borders is, in fact, one of the characteristics of globalization. Historically, nation-states have always related to each other, but globalization "is new in the sense of the growing extensiveness of social networks involved, the intensity and speed of flows and interconnections within these networks, and the reach of its impact" (Glastra, Hake, & Schedler, 2004, p. 292). Globalization is more than movement across borders; globalization is an intensely complex phenomenon with both positive and negative characteristics. It is both a challenge and an opportunity for the field of adult education.

UNRAVELING THE PHENOMENON OF GLOBALIZATION

Often associated with the outsourcing of manufacturing to low-wage, labor-intensive developing countries, and with transnational companies that operate across and outside the control of nation-states, globalization is intricately interwoven with the market economy. What drives this market economy is the desire to make a profit. To make a profit, corporations need to create a market for their products. Thus, "corporations not only control the means of production—both economic and technological—but they

also control the means of spreading knowledge about their products as they seek to convince the public to purchase what they produce" (Jarvis, 2008, p. 20). Thus, the market economy involves more than production and distribution of goods; information and knowledge are equally brokered across the globe. Law offices in the United States are using legal consulting companies in India for what is now being called "knowledge processing outsourcing" or KPO (Baryln, 2008). Parents in the United States can have their children tutored after school in math and science by teachers sitting at a computer in India (Friedman, 2005). Even culture and education have become commodities in the globalized market economy: "In market terms, culture is an industry that involves producing and exchanging cultural goods and services for profit; education is an industry that involves producing and exchanging educational goods and services for profit" (Merriam, Courtenay, & Cervero, 2006, p. 2).

Globalization can thus be conceptualized as the movement of goods, services, and information across national boundaries and as a borderless marketplace shored up by what is being called the knowledge economy. This borderless marketplace is a shift from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s thinking in which the role of the nation-state was central to the process of economic development and modernization, especially in underdeveloped countries. Known as modernization theory,

> the proposed economic strategy was . . . to develop a "modern" sector based on industrialization and commercial agriculture by mobilizing the underemployed labour in the "traditional" rural sector. Development was seen essentially in terms of economic growth based on the expansion of the modern sector and the export of primary products. . . . The fundamental premise of modernization theory was that there is a single process of social evolution, the highest stage having been reached by the USA. (Youngman, 2000, p. 53)

In contrast to modernization theory, "the essence of globalization is . . . cross-border economic activity and the decreased significance of national boundaries. . . . The bottom line is capital's search for maximum returns on its investment" (Youngman, 2000, p. 95). Wealth is tied to those with knowledge and the educational systems that produce these knowledge workers.

Profit is sustained by the knowledge base that underlies it. This is a battle fought on the global stage as captured in a special edition of *Newsweek* (2006), on "The Knowledge Revolution: Why Victory Will Go to the Smartest Nations & Companies."

In a review of the research on globalization and education, Spring (2008) identifies three fallouts from the knowledge economy, each of which has implications for education. First is the global migration of workers from poorer to wealthier nations or in some situations within country from rural to urban areas. Part of China's learning society agenda, for example, is to enable migrants from rural areas to become integrated into urban city cultures. The learning city of Zhabei District in Shanghai sponsors a club for migrants to teach them Shanghai ways (Chang, 2009). A second fallout of the global knowledge economy is a move from a "brain drain" to "the developing phenomenon of 'brain circulation' where skilled and professional workers move between wealthy nations or return to their homelands after migrating to another country" (Spring, 2008, p. 341). Several countries are now offering enticing opportunities to encourage their educated workers to return home. The third factor Spring (2008) identifies is an increase in multicultural populations as workers move around the globe. Aside from stimulating multicultural education research, these movements result in "concerns about cultural and religious conflicts" and social cohesion (p. 342). Cultural integration brings down barriers among people at the same time that its homogenization of traditions and customs can lead to loss of identity.

The Downside of Globalization

The market economy dimension of globalization has its negative side. Globalization seems to benefit those countries that are already economically developed, while others "like Zambia are virtually excluded from the market" (Jarvis, 2004, p. 5). In fact, as Jarvis (2008) points out, "even in the first world, the poor continue to be excluded and get poorer" with, for example, "16.5% in the U.S. living in poverty and 17% of the population of the UK living below the low income threshold" (p. 18). As the gap between the growing rich and the very poor widens, the world is destabilized, creating factional and

ideological conflicts. The United States, with only 4% of the world's population, is "seen everywhere as the principal engine and principal beneficiary of global capitalism. We are also seen as 'almighty,' 'exploitative,' and 'able to control the world,'" (Chua, 2003, p. 16), emotions generating resentment, often with deadly consequences. People are resisting "the 'converging powers' of globalization, as exemplified in social and popular movements around the struggle for national, regional, ethnic, or religious identities" (Glastra et al., 2004, p. 293). Furthermore, "the instability of impoverished and water-stressed countries has ignited a swath of violence across the Horn of Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia," Sachs (2008) writes in a recent issue of TIME magazine. "What we call violent fundamentalism should be seen for what it really is: poverty, hunger, water scarcity and despair" (p. 38).

The intertwining of the market economy and the social and technological dimensions of globalization have marginalized certain groups of people and also brought attention to health and environmental issues on a scale never before realized. Throughout the world, certain groups of people live on the margins of society, without full access to the social and economic institutions and opportunities in the community. Gender, race or ethnicity, disability, age, and sexual orientation are some of the common bases for being denied rights and benefits that those in the mainstream take for granted. Indigenous groups, migrants, and refugees are other marginalized groups.

The situation for many marginalized groups has been exacerbated by uneven economic development tied to globalization. The market economy in China, for example, has created a well-to-do upper class able to buy cars and homes, while the rural poor barely subsist. As another example, migrants and immigrants often find themselves in training that "prepares them for occupations which the host population would not want to occupy themselves, and consequently serves to further marginalize [them]" (Medel-Anonuevo, 1997, p. 167). Gender intersects with most categories of marginalization. For example, "women make up 70 percent of the 1.3 billion absolutely poor, more than half the population of women over age fifteen worldwide are illiterate, and 75 percent of the refugees and internally displaced are women" (Merriam et al., 2006, p. 92).

Health and the environment are also coming to our attention because of and due to globalization. The HIV/AIDS pandemic, from which no part of the world is exempt, is a good example of the interaction of health and the environment. Reporting on the situation in Africa, Olive Shisana, the director of the South African research program on HIV/AIDS and Health points out that because of the withdrawal of those ill or dying from the workforce, "the economic status of individuals, families, and communities is reduced, exacerbating what is most likely an already impoverished situation. This leads to the mushrooming of informal urban settlements, contributing to environmental degradation" in the form of lower food production, deforestation, and water contamination (quoted in Merriam et al., 2006, p. 206). Sachs (2008) concurs, noting that in some locations in our interconnected global economy, "societies have outstripped the carrying capacity of the land, resulting in chronic hunger, environmental degradation and large-scale exodus of desperate populations; [We are] crowded into an interconnected society of global trade, migration, ideas and, yes, risk of pandemic diseases, terrorism, refugee movements and conflict" (p. 38).

The consequences of globalization are not all bleak, however. Communication technology has enabled the flow of information, ideas, and values. Our television news might be reporting on an event in another part of the world as it happens; dictators cannot hide; the Internet cannot effectively be shut down; all cell phones cannot be confiscated. People everywhere come to see that no single culture, country, or people is at the center of the universe. We are, in fact, an incredibly diverse world. If the demographics of the world were represented by a community of 100 people, there would be 61 Asians, 14 North and South Americans, 13 Africans, 12 Europeans, and 1 Australian; 70 would be non-White, and 30 would be White; 67 would be non-Christians, and 33 would be Christian. About 59% of the entire wealth of the community would be in the hands of only six people, and all six would be citizens of the United States. Finally, of relevance to educators is the fact that 25.5 of those over 15 years of age would be illiterate, only 7 would have a secondary education, and only 1 would have a college education; 72 of the 100 would struggle to live on U.S.$2 per day or less (http://www.miniature-earth.com). Globalization has connected

us with other parts of the planet on which we live and enlarged our horizons both to its problems and to its incredible diversity.

Learning in a Globalized World

Globalization has fostered two powerful trends of particular importance to the field of adult education—the infusion of non-Western perspectives into our thinking about learning and the emergence of lifelong learning as a unifying concept for our practice (for a discussion of the issues related to the use of the term "non-Western," see Merriam & Associates, 2007). Communication, travel, and immigration have had a positive impact on the field of adult education in that the historical hegemony of Western perspectives on what counts as knowledge, who "owns" knowledge, and how knowledge is constructed is being challenged. Non-Western perspectives on learning and knowing are entering our field's discourse through conferences, research in non-Western settings, journals (see, for example, the special issue of *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, devoted to different worldviews of adult learning in the workplace, 2006, Vol. 8, No. 3), and books such as *Non-Western Perspectives on Learning and Knowing*, which has chapters on Islam, American Indian, Hinduism, Maori, Buddhist, Latin American, and African indigenous knowledge, as well as Confucianism (Merriam & Associates, 2007). Most of these systems predate Western science by thousands of years and even today are held by the majority of the world's peoples. Globalization has led to our examining the heretofore privileged position of Western assumptions about learning and knowing, assumptions that value the *individual* learner over the collective and that promote *autonomy* and *independence* of thought and action over community and interdependence. In adult learning theory, for example, andragogy, self-directed learning, and much of the literature on transformational learning position self-direction, independence, rational discourse, and reflective thought as pinnacles of adult learning.

What we are beginning to learn from our exposure to non-Western perspectives is that learning in other cultures is a communal activity; learning is the responsibility of all members of the community because it is through this learning that the community itself can develop. Furthermore, one defines him- or herself in terms of the community, and interdependency is valued over independency. Acquired knowledge is communal. For example, from an Islamic perspective, "if there is no medical doctor to serve a community, then it is obligatory upon the community to send one or more of its members for medical training, and failure to do so will result in each member sharing the community sin" (Kamis & Muhammad, 2007, p. 28).

Another shift in our understanding of learning and knowing influenced by exposure to non-Western perspectives is that learning is more than a cognitive activity; learning also involves the body, emotions, and the spirit. In 2005, a catastrophic tsunami killed hundreds of thousands of Southeast Asians. Off the coast of Thailand, a group of nomads known as the Moken village sea gypsies survived. Why? Because they "knew" it was coming; they "felt" it (Freiler, 2008). This is embodied learning. Learning that occurs in the community, in the experience, is holistic—it has not only a cognitive but physical, emotional, and sometimes spiritual dimensions. The Hindu tradition of yoga, for example, employs the mind, body, and spirit in concert to work toward enlightenment. In most traditions, balance is sought among these dimensions. Native Americans assume that if a person has a disease (dis-ease), it means that the person's spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental functions are out of balance (Hart, 1996).

Learning in non-Western societies is a lifelong journey. Western discourse around lifelong learning is relatively recent, having evolved from the more institutionalized and vocational ideology of lifelong education. Avoseh (2001) speaks to the interaction between the community and lifelong learning in traditional African society: Learning is "a lifelong process that could not be separated from the rest of the life's activities" (p. 482), and "anyone who fails to learn . . . is regarded as *oku eniyan* (the living dead)" (p. 483). Not only is learning lifelong, it is primarily nonformal (i.e., sponsored by community groups, not formal educational institutions) and informal, embedded in everyday life. Although certainly the majority of lifelong learning is informal even in Western settings, the difference is that most Westerners do not recognize nor value learning that occurs outside classroom walls.

This notion, firmly lodged in non-Western societies, that learning is a lifelong activity converges with the second outcome/fallout of

globalization and the information economy, that of lifelong learning. According to Uggla (2008), lifelong learning is "the new life narrative," which "is constituted as a process of constant learning. And every person is expected to refigure his/her life in accordance with this narrative identity" (p. 215). Lifelong learning is not a new concept, having been articulated by early writers in adult education (such as Lindeman, 1926) and by UNESCO's 1972 report, *Learning to Be* (Faure et al.). However, this was a somewhat humanist version of lifelong education; the change in emphasis to *learning* is in direct response to globalization and the need for workers to constantly learn to keep pace with a changing global job market. Learning is something to be engaged in from preschool to postretirement, with a great emphasis on learning skills and practical knowledge that can transfer to the workplace. Learning is not only lifelong, but life-wide, encompassing all aspects of our life and all contexts (work, community, family). Learning is also very much the responsibility of the individual rather than the state (Jarvis, 2007). Lifelong learning acknowledges that learning can and does occur outside of formal educational institutions; indeed, much learning occurs informally or in community settings. Green (2006) captures how the "most globalized of educational discourses" is challenging traditional educational thinking:

> As technological change drives up the employer demand for skills, and as individuals increasingly compete for career-enhancing certificates, so governments have to find new ways to meet the demand. Lifelong learning is an ingenious solution, made possible in part by the new learning technologies. By declaring learning a lifelong and "lifewide" process— occurring everywhere from the school to the home, the workplace and the community— governments are able both to respond to individual demands for more diverse learning opportunities which mesh with their modern lifestyles, and to shift the costs, which they can no longer bear, onto employers, individuals and their families and communities. . . . We have been used to thinking about education in terms of schools and colleges and other institutions. In years to come these may well cease to be the main locus of learning activity. . . . We will have to start to think more about informal learning, workplace learning, and learning in the community and home. (p. 41)

But this notion of lifelong learning is more comprehensive than just preparing for work; it includes other facets of human development that are captured by the 1996 UNESCO report, *Learning: The Treasure Within* (Delors, 1996). This report lays out the implications for education in a globalized world, which must "simultaneously provide maps of a complex world in constant turmoil and the compass that will enable people to find their way in it" (p. 85). To do this, education needs to address four fundamental types of learning or pillars of knowledge:

> *Learning to know*, that is acquiring the instruments of understanding; *learning to do*, so as to be able to act creatively on one's environment; *learning to live together*, so as to participate and co-operate with other people in all human activities; and *learning to be*, an essential progression which proceeds from the previous three. (Delors, 1996, p. 86)

More recently UNESCO's Institute for Lifelong Learning has added a fifth pillar, *learning to change*. This fifth pillar can be found in the Literacy Decade (2003–2012) document in a section on "Learning Through Life in Different Cultural Contexts" (http://portal.unesco.org/education).

To summarize, we are all affected by globalization, by living in a world of instant communication, travel, and the movement of people, services, goods, and ideas across national borders. There are both positives and negatives associated with this phenomenon. Those nations or segments of society that are not part of the global economy are poorer and more marginalized than ever before. However, this interconnectedness on various levels is showing us the diversity of the world and hopefully turning our attention to some of the major issues on the planet today. Globalization has also informed educational theory and practice. Of particular relevance to adult education is the challenging of Western epistemological hegemony by other systems of knowing and learning and the emergence of lifelong learning as a response.

How Adult Education Can Respond

What can adult educators do to respond to the challenges of globalization? How can we maximize the benefits but at the same time ameliorate

the problems associated with globalization? Historically, adult education in the West has had a social action agenda; that is, adult education has been seen as a means of improving people's lives and the society in which they live. This mission has been eclipsed in some areas of practice by the rise of workplace learning. Billions of dollars each year are spent on training workers for today's global market. As Friedman (2005), author of *The World Is Flat*, writes, "There is only one message: You have to constantly upgrade your skills" (p. 237). We also need to make ourselves "untouchable" by preparing for jobs that cannot be outsourced. Furthermore, some feel we are moving toward a standardized global curriculum characterized by "two inseparable meditational tools, technology and English; proficiencies in these tools have been referred to as global literacy skills" (Tsui & Tellefson, 2007, p. 1). That globalization is dominated by the West is underscored by the fact that only 7.6% of the world's population speaks English (Spring, 2008).

But what of the social aspects of our practice? In 2004, lecturers, resource specialists, and 38 adult education scholars from the United States, Latin America, and Southern Africa gathered in Salzburg, Austria, for a week-long seminar on "Global Issues: The Roles and Responsibilities of Adult Education." From this event, the following responses emerged: Adult educators can (1) create space and listen to people's voices; (2) adopt a critical stance; (3) attend to policy; and (4) engage in collective learning and action (Merriam et al., 2006).

Create Space and Listen

Adult education cannot respond to the needs of its learners if we do not know what those needs are. As trained practitioners, we may feel we can guess what those needs are, but at best, it is only a guess. Understaffed programs, budgetary restrictions, and institutional regulations often get in the way of practitioners finding out what learners' real needs and concerns are. For those who do make space and listen, the rewards are great. Folkman (2006), for example, reports on an adult education program with the Hmong refugee community in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The three-stage program began with listening to the refugees' stories of coming to the United States, of trying to survive and adapt to our culture without losing

their own. In the second stage, a group dialogue was held with representatives from community-based agencies that served this population. In time, the group moved to the third stage, where solutions were sought to some of their issues; this led to organizing an action coalition across the community.

Creating space for learning to occur is also being promoted in the workplace. Research has shown that most of the learning in the workplace is informal and not through formal training programs, although billions of dollars a year are spent on training. Allowing employees to interact informally, rather than distracting from work getting done, actually increases problem-solving efficiency and work productivity (Rowden, 2007). So, no matter what our work setting as adult education practitioners, the challenge is to make space, physically and psychologically, for hearing the voices of our learners.

Adopt a Critical Stance

As mentioned above, the field of adult education has historically been concerned with improving the lives of individual learners, but also with bringing about a more equitable and democratic society. This goal cannot be met without becoming aware of inequities in one's society and the oppression and marginalization of groups as a result of unequal distribution of power and other resources. The status quo has to be scrutinized in order for a better society to be possible. Adult educators writing about globalization, for example, question whose interests it serves, who stands to gain by companies becoming transnational, and what the downside of global media is when ownership is in the hands of a few. Communications technology, a big part of what makes globalization possible, is also viewed with a critical eye—who has access to the Internet, how does information flow and through what media, and so on. Even the "bottom line" or profitability motive of corporate human resource development (HRD) is being critically scrutinized:

> The work to make HRD more socially responsible in a globalizing context demands that the performance-based assumptions of performativity discourse, credibility, and power be questioned. This challenge calls for both adult educators and HRD professionals to critically assess how HRD

knowledge is created and identify constructive measures that can be taken to provide a more balanced perspective for HRD research, theory, and practice. (Bierema, 2000, p. 286)

Linked to a critical stance on adult education is a more inclusive view of who is included in practice, what needs and interests different groups of people may have, how institutions and social forces have marginalized many, and how what we do as adult educators can address these inequities. Indeed, a critical stance is permeating much of the writing and theorizing in adult education in the West with regard to program development and the goals of adult education and adult learning. Brookfield (2000) writes that "a critically reflective pose increases our chance of taking informed actions in pursuit" of "a world organized according to the ideals of fairness and social justice" (p. 47).

Attend to Policy

Adult educators are busy people; they manage programs, teach, raise money, and in general have too little time and too few resources to meet the needs of adults whom they serve. But there are numerous situations where our practice could be more effective with more attention to policies established and implemented by governmental agencies. Even in societies like the United States, where education is decentralized and under the purview of individual states, the voices of adult educators are needed perhaps even more in the present climate of recession and looming "scarcity of resources and social inequities" (Quigley, 2000, p. 216). Through "being heard at the state and national policy-level and becoming part of social policy formation," social movements bring about change (Quigley, 2000, p. 216). Public policy with regard to women's rights, environmental education, and low-income adult learners are all important issues for adult educators, whether in the first world or in developing countries.

In preparation for the Sixth UNESCO International Conference on Adult Education (called CONFINTEA VI) held in Belém, Brazil, in December 2009, UNESCO requested that each government establish a national committee with representatives of all stakeholders, hold preparatory regional conferences to explore policy, and hold national conferences to validate the work of

national committees. Finally, each country submitted a national report on The Development and State of the Art of Adult Learning and Education. Also, from multiple data sources and these national reports, an overview of trends and challenges in adult learning and education was produced as input to CONFINTEA VI. This overview, called the Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE), played an important role at the conference. Furthermore, in an effort to include civil society representation at CONFINTEA VI, 500 people from 80 countries participated in the International Civil Society Forum held immediately before CONFINTEA VI. This preparation and the conference itself were incredible opportunities for adult educators, institutions, and organizations to come together and engage in national and international dialogue around policy formation.

Globalization has raised our awareness of these issues, and now we need to respond with policies that address these challenges. "Great social transformations," Sachs (2008) writes, "all began with public awareness and engagement. . . . Each of us has a role to play and a chance for leadership" (p. 40). He goes on to say that "there is no substitute for meeting and engaging with people across cultures, religions and regions to realize that we are all in this together." And most important of all, we need to "demand" that our politicians respond: "If the public leads, politicians will surely follow" (p. 40).

Engage in Collective Learning and Action

To effectively deal with the challenges of globalization and their impact on adult education, adult educators need to form partnerships and engage in collective learning and action. Developing partnerships was, in fact, one of the items in the Agenda for the Future forged at the UNESCO world conference on adult education in 1997 and recently reaffirmed at CONFINTEA VI. That agenda states,

The development of adult learning requires partnership between government departments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, employers and trade unions, universities and research centres, the media, civil and community-level associations, facilitators of adult learning and the adult learners themselves. (UNESCO, 1997, p. 9)

Partnerships have many advantages and few drawbacks. Sharing resources, whether they be physical or human and expertise can help carry out shared goals. The needs of low-income adult learners in higher education, for example, can be better addressed by partnering with business, both in terms of identifying the skills needed in today's workplace and in supporting students financially (Hansman, 2006).

Adult education's mission to bring about social change has always been fostered through collective learning and action. Whether tackling social justice issues, environmental issues, women's rights, poverty, health, or welfare, collective learning and action have long been recognized as more effective than individual approaches. At present, collective learning is being expressed through the formation of learning communities, both geographical and interest- or activity-based. Learning communities are being formed and studied throughout education: through online courses, in the workplace, and in the promotion of continuing professional education. Geographic learning communities are also on the rise. China, for example, encountering a growing gap between those benefiting from the market economy and the poor, has implemented a massive, country-wide learning cities program designed to bring about a harmonious society. Learning cities, districts, neighborhoods, streets, and families are designed to engage residents in collective learning. Japan, South Korea, Australia, and a number of European countries also have forms of the learning city, town, or village. These learning communities are part of several nations' lifelong learning or learning society policies.

Jarvis (2007) concludes that "this movement towards learning cities and learning regions might be described as a new social movement or, better, as part of the wider new social movement which is lifelong learning itself" (p. 117).

SUMMARY

"Adult education does not occur in a vacuum. What one needs or wants to learn, what opportunities are available, the manner in which one learns—all are to a large extent determined by the society in which one lives" (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 25). The society in which we now live is a globalized world where the movement of people, goods, culture, services, and ideas flows across national boundaries. Globalization, with its market-driven economy supported by information technologies, has solved some problems and created others. While we can instantly communicate with someone on the other side of the world and produce consumer goods ever more cheaply, there are people and nations excluded from the benefits of globalization. Such divisions only exacerbate the differences between rich and poor, creating ethnic hatred and global instability (Chua, 2003). Adult educators can respond to the challenges of globalization by creating space for the voices of our adult learners to be heard; by adopting a critical stance toward our values, goals, and practices; by attending to social policy that invariably affects our practice; and by fostering collective learning and action.

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