

Making Learning Climate Convivial: Implications for Environmental Adult Education

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Abstract

Conservation of the environment occupies the front burner in all development agenda. Institutions, governments and communities engage participants in discovering, preserving and beautification of natural resources in their homesteads and ecosystems. For adult learners, learning must be designed to go beyond rudimentary learning, to include nature study and conservation. This paper, therefore, examines the necessity for integrating aspects of environmental education in the programme of learning for adults. It is therefore established that integrating environmental activities into the adult learning experience will have a snow-ball effect on the environmental awareness and action of the other segments of the population (children, youth and the old).

Keywords: Learning Climate, Convivial, Implications, Environmental, Adult Education

Introduction

Adult learning is a multi-variated and multi-faced enterprise. It is a helping activity embodied in self-directed and reflective learning (Ezimah, 2009). Environmental adult education is directed towards bringing about change and initiating action. Such projects go beyond creating understanding and awareness. They aim at developing skills, creating a sense of commitment and stimulating individual and collective action. Environmental education has the potential to bring about action at individual, community and governmental levels (UNESCO, 1999). Adult learning should be integrated with deep ecology, with critical literacy, considering environmental literacy integral to functional literacy, where being competent as a citizen would involve recognizing the state of environmental system and being prepared to address problems within them.

Literacy for the adult must go beyond the acquisition of the rudimentary skills of reading, writing and numeracy (3Rs) to integrate life-long learning about environmental issues. This process will make adults literate concerning environmental issues, and not just about arousing consciousness about these issues. It must prepare adults to think about the difficult decisions they have to make concerning environmental stewardship, and to work together to improve, and try to solve environmental problems.

Non-formal environmental education programs should be designed with well-articulated goals and objectives that state how the program will contribute to the development of environmental literacy. These are designed to address identified environmental, educational

and community needs and to produce responsive and responsible benefits that address the identified needs.

Emmelin (1976) recognizes environmental adult education as a more effective way to solve environmental problems. He argues that formal and non—formal programs are possible venues for environmental adult education. Environmental adult education is considered key to achieving sustainable development that is possible through transformation in the way we think and live both individually and collectively. In doing so, we must break habits and abandon norms as the environment becomes running theme throughout our lives. Environmental adult education works to achieve this transformation (Haugen, 2010; Clover, 1995).

The Heuristic Nature of Adult Learning

Adult learning is a helping activity in which the adult educator is a co-investigator. On the contrary, many facilitators tend to approach the teaching-learning relationship as though the learners were children or youth (Boyd, 1966 cited in Clegg, 1970). Characteristically, the adult learner unlike the child or adolescent can approach subject-matter directly without having an adult in a set of intervening roles between the learner and the subject-matter.

The characteristic difference according to Clegg (1970) between the adult and the child, has placed the educator in a position of a helper or resource person. The adult learner would therefore proceed at his own pace defining his own learning objectives – the emphasis being on the process of learning, that is, learning by discovery, and by complete involvement. The self-learning learner is actively involved in his own tasks, and he is also responsible for his own acts. However, the knowledge and skill that each individual acquires may be different from that acquired by others. Given this objective difference, the adult educator would relate to the learner's needs and problems through the helping process. This way, the adult educator would exert influence on the individual learner through the helping-learning process by providing printed or human support.

Heuristics defined by Webster's Dictionary as having to discover or reveal; applied to arguments and methods of demonstration which are persuasive rather than logically compelling, or which lead a person to find out for himself, lends itself readily to environmental adult education as a process for adult learning. This process as an out-door activity "obscures the boundaries between formal learning and leisure, and conveys the novel idea that study need not be the pain it was in school and that learning was always meant to be fun" (Ezimah, 2009:8).

When adult learning centres become nature centres, adults can engage in environmental action or direct participation in issues to enhance environmental conservation. Environmental adult education is recognized as a more effective way to solve environmental problems (Haugen, 2010). It is, therefore, noted that educative practices depend on commitment and action. This kind of process must focus on transformation seen as "a total phenomenon including cognitive, emotional as well as action dimensions" (Emmelin, 1976). This is the key to sustainable development. As Yarmol—Franko (1989:4) asserts:

We are reminded that the key to achieving sustainable development is the transformation in the way we think and live, both individually and collectively. We must break habits and throw away norms as the environment becomes a running theme throughout our lives. Environmental education works to achieve this transformation.

Thus this perspective has laid the framework that environmental adult education be an experiential and dialogical process—a perspective that promotes the dialogue education model developed by Paulo Freire.

Giving Adult Learning an Environmental Focus

Environmental education is a permanent process in which individuals gain awareness of their environment and acquire the knowledge, values, skills, experiences, and also the determination which will enable them to act individually and collectively to solve present and future environmental problems as well as to meet their needs without compromising those of future generations. Environmental Adult Education (EAE) should disseminate knowledge about the direct and indirect physical and related social impact of the environment. It should also transmit knowledge on the interaction between local activities and their effects which have national and international repercussions (UNESCO, 1997).

Adult education centers should be centers of nature study. Consequently, linking environmental and social issues and locating environmental problems within the context of adult learning centers and daily action, are important challenges for adult environmental education. Current environmental effort is experimenting with different ways to bring about change and initiate action. Such efforts go beyond creating understanding and awareness. They aim at developing skills, creating a sense of commitment and stimulating individual and collective action. Environmental education has the potential to bring about action at individual, community and governmental levels. Adult learning is a central tool in the process of raising environmental awareness and promoting environmentally supportive action.

The integration of the environment into the program of learning for adults can provide a range of new opportunities for environmental education which is more relevant to learners' concerns and for environmental right action. More importantly, the occupational needs of the adult learners, for instance, nomadic education for Fisher folk and herdsmen are veritable means for disseminating environmental education and training programs for their activities which impact directly on the environment.

Environmental topics can also be an important component of community education programs. Such programs can provide frame linking environmental issues with social and political problems of the community (UNESCO, 1999). The integration of the environment according to UNESCO, into general and vocational education can provide a range of new opportunities for an environmental education which is more relevant to adult learners' needs. This is particularly important for developing countries which are today experiencing serious environmental problems that directly affect people's lives. In developed countries, environmental adult education entails dealing with the crisis of modern production systems and their consequences for employment. Environmental adult education should be aimed at promoting a critical examination of environmental problems rather than transmission of knowledge.

Where it is possible, learning centres can be transformed into nature study areas with plants and trees replacing concrete walls. Surrounded with nature, adult learners acquire an environmental orientation where they may be involved in environmental activities such as afforestation and develop attitudes of care and reverence for the environment. Hence centres become 'learning walls' for the environment.

Environmental Education Activities for Adults

New models of environmental adult education go beyond creating understanding and awareness. The aim is to build skills, a sense of commitment and responsibility, and ultimately to stimulate individual and collective action (Clover, 1997). Environmental education, in the light of Agenda 21, encourages local participation and builds a network in which the actors are men, women, indigenous peoples, the young and old, and are equally respected. Environmental education draws from the knowledge of indigenous peoples who are closest to the land.

Environmental education activities for adults should focus on Indigenous knowledge, change of attitudes on production and consumption, and women's role as environmental educators, connecting with their children and passing on an understanding of the natural processes which take place around them.

Some of the environmental education activities and games for adults in the checklist of Wilderdon Store (2009) may include:

- Finding little ways to learn about nature and exploring them regularly e.g., visiting a special place, looking after an animal, a meditative walk, tending a garden;
- Sensual Awareness Inventory: Participants identify what experiences give them pleasure through each of their five senses, then share and discuss this with the group;
- Secret Smells: Use different smells from nature (e.g., flowers, leaves) – to know who can guess them right?;
- Favourite Place in Nature: Write a description, draw or picture a place to someone else – saying what makes it special?;
- Tree Planting: A guide to planting with participants in a learning setting;
- What Has Changed in 150 Years?: Brainstorm as many things that have changed as you can. Groups are asked to read their lists out to the whole group, discuss the main themes, the surprises, etc. (Also see what life was like a long time ago comparatively) etc.

When environmental adult education activities become integrated into the learning programmes of adults in some of the ways illustrated above, environmental sustainability becomes a matter of course.

Seeing the Environment through the Adult Eye: New Directions to Sustainability

Contrary to long held view that children are the environmental educators of their parents, environmental adult education changes this perspective in a new direction. Environmental adult education sees the adults as the main users of the environment (Damere, and Milner-Gulland, 2013; N'Gaba-Waye, 1997).

Environmental adult education brings an ecological perspective studies of adult learning by concretizing the inter-connections between peoples' experiences of environmental deterioration and recognition of the destructive powers of the global economy (Hill and Clover, 2003). It is often expressed that 'this is an adult world' and the social, economic and political frameworks of life are predetermined and sustained by the changing values of man. By this definition, man becomes a socio-political and economic maestro in the environmental dramatic personae.

It is, therefore, a matter of fact that to the extent to which man is the agent of the forces that upset the environment and of those that preserve it, he is an environmental educator. It is the experience of man that provides all the educational resources for preservation of the

environment. In this connection, research results confirm that parents are often seen as the primary socializing agents influencing the attitude and development of their children (Jennings and Niemi, 1981). It has also been established that children who are regularly exposed to environmental information and discussions about societal problems will augment the role model function of the parents (Schonpflug, 2001). Conceptualized in this way, solutions to the environmental problems lie in the continuous education of adults with whom lies the social responsibility of transferring knowledge to the children.

Adults are the repository of indigenous knowledge built around the peoples way of life including their environment. This knowledge is passed from generation to generation, usually by word of mouth and cultural rituals, and has been the basis for agriculture, food preparation, health care, education, conservation and a wide range of other activities that sustain societies in many parts of the world.

Today, the environment is being lost, depleted and degraded together with valuable knowledge about ways of living sustainably. Environmental adult education is a current effort at integrating indigenous knowledge into education of adults which transverse younger population and cultures. Providing such indigenous based environmental education to the adults is a guarantee that secures the future survival of man and his environment.

Conclusion

The world environmental agenda will remain a mirage if education at all levels for environmental action is provided to the exclusion of the adult population. The adult's experience puts him at a vantage position to explore the frontiers of environmental activities at the local and international planes. The world of adult learning provides an opportunity for understanding, investigating and undertaking activities which promote sustainability.

Making nature study part of the adult learning activity is in two-fold perspective – first, it is to deepen ecological learning among the population and second, it is to enliven the learning environment which takes away the drudgery associated with learning. This is what keeps environmentalism in focus and leverage the rest of society.

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