

Resource Reviews

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ADULT EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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Youngman, F (2000) *The Political Economy of Adult Education and Development*, London: Zed Books.

One of the first texts in the series *Global Perspectives on Adult Education and Training* Youngman's book provides a considered introduction to the initiative. Stressing the role of adult education in the process of development, the themes that are carried throughout this text include the standard rubrics of Development Education - developing civil society, social inequality, aid, and post-colonial perspectives. The thread that unites the various aspects of adult education and development for Youngman is the way in which political economy shapes progress. The text surveys a range of activities from adult literacy, non-formal education, vocational training and adult education within the context of national regeneration in the global South. It assesses the issues brought to bear by the various theories of development - modernisation, dependency, neoliberal and populist - and analyses the problems of identifying education with development. Working from this basis there is the reassertion of the view that development and education go hand in hand. Appreciating this as a core focus for socio-economic and indeed political transformation the discussion sets out to link adult education provision with democratic institutions, the eradication of poverty, empowerment and the targeted application of science and technology.

As a platform to begin the debate on these aspects of development, Youngman cites the conclusion of the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education in Hamburg in 1997, which stated that:

“Adult education... is a powerful concept for fostering ecologically sustainable development, for promoting democracy, justice, gender equity, and scientific, social and economic development, and for building a world in which violent conflict is replaced by dialogue and a culture based on justice.”

In presenting this principle the text then sets out to address corresponding issues within the parameters of the state’s relationship to adult education. It poses the key question around development as a means of betterment or as a means of enhancing the political economy of a region, and addresses the structural and historical precedents under which education policy makers operate. In doing this, the dialogue introduces the idea that learning and development are integral to the transformation of a country, but warns that market driven education, training a workforce into employment, can have divergent influences on the overall processes of development.

The question ultimately is about the type of development states in the South desire and how the education systems adapt to this design. In a way Youngman anticipates the nature of globalisation and enlightens a defence of a paradigm of learning that enriches in a more holistic way beyond the restrictions of a market inclined educational economy. The book concludes with the idea that development theory and adult educational practice should coalesce in a more discerning manner, with societal enhancement being the primary rationale for education policy making. One of the stated aims of the book is to provide ‘adult educators with conceptual tools for analysing the contextual factors which influence the nature of adult education policies and programmes in the countries of the South’. Youngman succeeds.

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