Although Chinese Taipei has adopted lifelong learning as an educational goal, adult literacy education programs have not been based on their tenets. Lifelong learning is a deliberate process that emphasizes the autonomy of learners and a breadth of learning throughout the life span. The two adult literacy programs in Chinese Taipei, Supplementary Education Program (SEP) and Adult Basic Education Program (ABEP), focus on listening, speaking, reading, writing, and numeracy abilities and are offered by elementary teachers in elementary schools. Rather than incorporate elements of lifelong learning, however, these programs are static, conservative, narrowly applied, and isolated. They tend to focus on basic speaking, reading, and writing skills and only superficially address practical issues related to functional literacy. In addition, the notion of literacy for empowerment is completely absent, with practitioners still counting the number of words that students should learn as the criteria for literacy education. To realize the potential for adult literacy training and provide a supportive platform for lifelong learning opportunities, Chinese Taipei should expand the role of ABEP, improve the flexibility of SEP, encourage other institutions to provide literacy training, and improve teacher training programs. Contains 32 references. (BCY)
Lifelong Learning and Basic Literacy: Adult Literacy Education in Chinese Taipei

Ching-jung Ho

In: Lifelong Learning: Policies, Practices, and Programs
Lifelong Learning and Basic Literacy: Adult Literacy Education in Chinese Taipei

by Ching-jung Ho

Lifelong learning is a deliberate process; it must emphasize learners' autonomy and life-wide learning as well as learning throughout the lifespan. This paper argues that a paradigm for understanding and evaluating adult literacy comes directly from within the lifelong learning context. In essence, adult literacy education, as a primary subset of lifelong learning, should emulate the best and strongest characteristics associated with lifelong learning. In Chinese Taipei, with respect to adult literacy programs, this is not the case. Even though the accomplishments of adult literacy programming have been documented, in fact, adult literacy programs are static, conservative, narrowly applied and isolated. The solution is to adopt, through specific strategies, an integrated, flexible, broad-based approach to the development and delivery of adult literacy programming; to, in effect, make it part and parcel, the first plank if you will, of lifelong learning.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, lifelong learning has become an agreeable, almost seductive, goal in Chinese Taipei, advocated, encouraged and endorsed by a host of ministries, government departments, councils and agencies. The Ministry of Education has just proposed a policy titled the “Middle Term Plan for the Development of Adult Education towards Lifelong Learning” (Ministry of Education, 1996), and the Council for Culture Planning and Development, Executive Yuan, has connected lifelong learning with community reform, as an essential means for developing and transforming Chinese Taipei society (Chen, 1996). Even the President, Teng-hui Lee, has incorporated in many of his speeches, directly and indirectly, the importance of building a "learning society".

Rhetoric aside, do our educational policies and practices at all levels reflect the active, dynamic, integrated and seamless principles that are typically associated with the best aspects of lifelong learning? Or are there unfulfilled promises and limitations associated with the actual implementation of lifelong learning in our educational policies and practices? In order to move beyond the slogans and take a serious, reflective and measured view of lifelong learning in Chinese Taipei, this paper addresses the following: (a) How should the concepts associated with lifelong learning be used as the basis for adult literacy education policies and practices in
LIFELONG LEARNING AND BASIC LITERACY

ADULT LITERACY EDUCATION

A review of the literature supports the conclusion that literacy is an abstract term. It changes with time, and has no agreed upon common definition (see Campbell, Kirsch & Kolstad, 1992; Cervero, 1985; Fingeret, 1992; Hunter & Harman, 1979; Imel & Grieve, 1985; Jarvis, 1990; Levine, 1986). According to An International Dictionary of Adult and Continuing Education, literacy has at least three common definitions (see Jarvis, 1990, p. 204). For example, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines a functional literate person as one who has acquired the knowledge and skills in reading and writing which enable that person to engage effectively in all activities in which literacy is normally assumed to be required within that specific culture or group. Other definitions

and learning may be limited to the primary experiences of life.

More specifically, "deliberate" learning (see Tough, 1971) is a significant component of lifelong learning and, as Knapper & Cropley (1985, p. 20) noted, has a multiplicity of characteristics. For example, deliberate learning is intentional, and learners are aware that they are learning. It has definite and specific goals, and is not directed at vague generalizations such as developing the mind. The goals provide the rationale that motivates the learner, as compared with other factors such as "boredom". Further, the learner intends to retain what has been learned for a significant period of time.

From a broader and more inclusive perspective, Cropley & Knapper (1983, p. 17), describe lifelong learning as lasting for the whole lifetime of the learner; leading to the orderly acquisition, renewal, upgrading or completion of knowledge, skills and attitudes; fostering and depending for its existence on people's increasing ability and motivation to engage in learning, much of the time without dependence upon traditional schools or school-like institutions; and depending on the contribution of all available educational influences including formal, non-formal and informal.

Effective lifelong learners need to be self-directed learners. Knapper and Cropley (1985) describe effective learners as being aware of the relationship between learning and real life, cognizant of the need for learning throughout the lifespan, motivated to learn throughout the lifespan, and in possession of a self-concept supportive of lifelong learning. Specific skills for lifelong learning include the ability to set personal objectives in a realistic way; the ability to apply knowledge already possessed; the ability to evaluate one's own learning; the ability to locate information; the ability to use different learning strategies and learn in different settings; the ability to use learning aids, such as libraries or the media; and the ability to use and interpret materials from different subject areas. Above all, lifelong learning must emphasize learners' autonomy and learning life-wide (a wide breadth of learning, not simply length of learning) as well as throughout the lifespan. These are basic principles for lifelong learning of all stripes, including adult literacy education. The question addressed in the following sections of this paper is to what degree these characteristics and skills are supported in the delivery of one component of the lifelong learning continuum, namely, adult literacy education.

1Definitions of adult basic education and adult literacy education are not the same; however, they are used interchangeably in Chinese Taipei. In this article, the term "adult literacy education" encompasses "adult basic education".
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Lifelong learning is an approach to education which emphasizes the liberating nature of knowledge. As Freire (1970, p. 205) suggested, literacy is not simply a mechanism for adjustment in order to "fit" or "survive". As Scrivner (1984) pointed out, literacy has at least two other principal functions: first, it furnishes power; and second, it contributes to a "state of grace". Literacy as power emphasizes the liberating nature of knowledge. As Freire (1970, p. 205) suggested, literacy is truly an act of knowing, through which a person is able to look critically at the culture which has shaped him, and to move toward reflection and positive action upon his world. Literacy as a state of grace is perhaps best appreciated and understood as the tendency in many societies to endow literacy with exceptional virtues. Examples can be seen in Chinese sayings such as "beauties are in books", "gold is hidden in books" and "bookish traditions are superior to everything".

The power and grace functions of literacy are not contradictory and, as this researcher (Ho, 1995a, p. 63) has noted, "the kind of education which [Chinese Taipei] presently lacks is how to help individuals with life adjustment and then how to empower them to participate in cultural creation." In this context, learning for literacy becomes a broad lifelong learning endeavour, and particularly so within the functional literacy context where the needs of the individual are continually changing. (In concrete terms, it is interesting to consider how dramatically levels of computer literacy have changed in the past twenty years.)

The purpose of adult literacy education cannot be limited to helping people obtain conventional reading, writing, mathematical, and the somewhat newer addi-

tion, computing abilities. Literacy must be a mechanism for empowerment, unleashing creative and inquisitive energy. This means that structures and programming to support adult literacy in Chinese Taipei must be centred on a holistic view of lifelong learning and giving power to people (see Ho, 1995a, p. 63). In effect, the characteristics of effective lifelong learning need to be embedded within literacy education, and the target groups for literacy education need to be defined quite broadly.

ADULT LITERACY – PROGRAMS AND POLICIES

As mentioned earlier, there are two adult literacy programs in Chinese Taipei: SEP and ABEP. The former was established on the basis of the Supplementary Education Act of 1976, and can be traced to the idea of using supplementary education to compensate for the shortage of the provisions of formal education that existed since the late Ching Dynasty (Ke, 1993, p. 491). (The Supplementary Education Act was revised in 1982, yet the basic rationale for SEP has not been changed.) The goals of the Supplementary Education Act are as follows: "to complement citizens' life knowledge [and] raise educational levels; to teach practical skills [and] increase productive competence; [and] to cultivate healthy citizens [and] promote the development of the society" (Ministry of Education, 1976). According to the fourth item of the Act, SEP includes both elementary and junior high school levels, and was established for people who are beyond the fundamental school age of 15 (Ministry of Education, 1976). Elementary SEP is divided into two sub-levels: six months to one year at the Junior Level, and one and one half years to two years at the Senior Level. Graduates from elementary schools' SEP are seen to be equivalent to graduates from elementary schools (Grade 1 through Grade 6). At the junior high school level, the length of SEP is no less than three years, and graduates from this level are equivalent to graduates from junior high schools (Grade 7 through Grade 9) (Ministry of Education, 1976). Graduates from both the elementary school or junior high school level of SEP receive certificates following completion of their studies.

In 1990, statistics showed that there were about 1,340,000 illiterate people in Chinese Taipei (Ministry of Education, 1991c). At that same time, Western notions of "adult basic education" and "functional literacy" as well as adult education had been introduced into Chinese Taipei (Ho, 1996). As a result, the Government started to review policies pertaining to adult literacy education, and it was found that the elementary level SEP, the only adult literacy education program, contained many shortcomings (Ministry of Education, 1991c). For example, with its long history of being subordinate to fundamental education, SEP did not even have its own facilities, including desks and chairs for students. Also, SEP was not large enough to meet the demands for literacy education. As a result of this review, improvements were made to SEP, and as well ABEP was initiated through the Working Project of Adult Education Plan of 1990 and the Hsin-min (New People) Project: A Five-Year Plan of Adult Basic Education of 1991. Officially, ABEP is considered to be equivalent to the Junior Level of the supplementary program of elementary education and is connected to the Senior Level of SEP in elementary schools.

The purpose of adult literacy education in Chinese Taipei is to "cultivate the lis-
LIFELONG LEARNING classes in subsequent years, telling, speaking, reading, writing and numeracy abilities of those who have been unable to attend schools in order to complement their basic life knowledge and skills and raise their educational levels (Ho, 1996, p. 19). Both SEP and ABEP are offered through elementary schools in the evening and are taught by elementary school teachers. However, SEP is a regular program based on law and funded through local governments, whereas ABEP is a specially designed program by the Ministry of Education and is not registered as an academic course at local universities. ABEP teachers are encouraged to prepare some of the teaching materials themselves because of a lack of existing texts. As previously mentioned, concepts associated with functional literacy as well as adult education have been accepted in Chinese Taipei since 1990, and as a result, practical aspects have been used as a basis for the development of ABEP learning materials (see Ho, 1996, pp. 19-20).

There are some policy issues associated with these programs. First, literacy education is considered a form of adult basic education. In Chinese Taipei, however, this is demonstrated that, for example, by the design of a popular television program for older adults (Ho et al., 1995). When operationalized, this narrow view of the illiterates titled "Every Day is Study Day." Its songs and lessons are clearly designed for older adults, as the program targets those who are old enough to understand but dropped out before completing their basic education.

Another issue is that ABEP teachers, most of the teachers delivering adult literacy courses, are not trained in adult education. As a result, the attrition rate is as high as 43% (Ho et al., 1995). ABEP teachers have little or no training specific to teaching adults, and schools with no questions or doubts. The content and teaching style of ABEP are very hazy and obscure cases. As a result, other learning opportunities and compensation for earlier lost learning opportunities. These learners are very human being their approach to learning, assuming the role of teacher, and accepting the responsibility of teaching.

Conventional and restrictive practices for adult literacy education are also seen in adult education. For example, the Ministry of Education has created a policy that encourages institutions to get subsidies. However, these institutions are required to cooperate with publically funded schools in order to get subsidies. SEP is not only unsuitable for adult learners, but may also be unusable for the target age group, as the curriculum is designed for traditional school-based learning.

Finally, there are some policy issues associated with these programs. First, literacy education is considered as a form of adult basic education. In Chinese Taipei, literacy education is widely believed that, if illiterates do exist in this country, they are older adults. This is demonstrated that, for example, by the design of a popular television program for older adults (Ho et al., 1995). When operationalized, this narrow view of the illiterates titled "Every Day is Study Day." Its songs and lessons are clearly designed for older adults, as the program targets those who are old enough to understand but dropped out before completing their basic education.

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language and mathematical skills difficult. Younger learners, on the other hand, differ in their attitudes and performance. More often, they come to SEP and ABEP for certificates in order to better their lot in life by achieving basic literacy levels and then moving on to other studies.

Even though the policies and programs used to support adult literacy education in Chinese Taipei have drawbacks, accomplishments have been documented. For example, Ho et al. (1995) identified the following as achievements of the current system: (a) it helps selected learners acquire basic Mandarin; (b) it broadens the learners' vision of society and improves attitudes and temperament; (c) it promotes and actually increases grandparent to child and parent to child communications; (d) it increases the quality of leisure time in the learners' lives; (e) it provides learners with a sense of self-satisfaction; and (f) it establishes a bridge between schools and communities. This study also found that some learners view literacy as a means to awaken their interest in self, life, and learning even though that was not the original intention of the policies.

LIMITATIONS OF ADULT LITERACY EDUCATION

The above mentioned programs and practices carry implicit but generally unstated views with regard to the meanings of literacy, learning, education, and lifelong learning as these pertain to the broader society. Inappropriately, literacy classes for the most part focus narrowly and directly on basic speaking, reading, writing, and numeracy skills. Even though the term "functional literacy" has been used in Chinese Taipei for many years, the implications described earlier in the paper are, from a policy and curriculum development perspective, only superficially in evidence if at all. For example, training that deals with some of the practical problems associated with day-to-day living, such as paying bills and completing application forms, are incorporated into literacy curriculum. However, as described by Heath (1986), higher level and, ultimately, more meaningful applications such as social-interaction activities, news-related contexts, memory-supportive frameworks, and substitutes for oral messages are not embedded in adult literacy education. The notion of literacy for empowerment is completely absent, and practitioners still count the number of words that students should learn as the criteria for literacy education. As a result, literacy is isolated from the socio-cultural context. This static view of literacy ensures that it remains apart and separate from the lifelong learning context.

Literacy education in Chinese Taipei is narrowly defined and operationalized as school education or formal education at a primary level. This is documented by the actual policies as well as the learners' needs, attitudes and levels. Although ABEP and SEP do attract learners, they only deal with the small subset who are willing to come to schools and study in a conservative and non-adaptive environment. Unjustifiably, illiterates who are unwilling or unable to survive in the formal school context have no options. This creates what Mezirow, Darkenwald and Knox (1975) referred to as the "creaming effect". The original intention may have been egalitarian, but the effect is quite different.

As previously mentioned, in Chinese Taipei it is common for learning to be associated with the development of a state of grace. Also, people generally link learning most directly to formal education and schooling. These thoughts, in turn, further influence people's attitudes toward adult literacy education. It can also be concluded that adult literacy education is not a broad topical issue, in part because the elementary school entrance rate in Chinese Taipei exceeds 99%. This creates a general perception that there is no serious illiteracy problem and that illiteracy tends to be first and foremost an issue for the least developed economies. It is widely believed that, if illiterates do exist in Chinese Taipei, they are older adults who did not, and perhaps did not find it necessary to, complete their fundamental education in the elementary school system. In fact, as described in this paper, illiteracy in Chinese Taipei is not effectively addressed by the current programs and policies (see Ho, 1995b).

Responding to adult literacy needs through the formal school system mitigates against the development of learner-based lifelong learning tools as described by Knapper and Crockley (1985) and noted earlier in this paper. In Chinese Taipei, schools have a long history of being instruments for controlling knowledge. Examinations, for example, have been institutionalized to the degree that they overpower the educational system, becoming the end instead of the means. In this context, formal schooling stands as the symbol for the official, standardized approach for literacy training and rates. The way literacy is currently taught and institutionalized completely ignores the notion that it can be a tool for participation, power and for the development of fundamental skills - self direction as a key example - that provide the basic sustenance for full and active participation in the lifelong learning process.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to realize the potential for adult literacy training, and at the same time provide an accommodating and supportive platform for the transition to the full range of lifelong learning opportunities, there needs to be change in the definitions, goals, platforms and policies regarding literacy, learning and lifelong learning in Chinese Taipei.

Learning needs to be viewed as a process whereby meaning and purpose is constructed throughout one's lifetime. Through learning, the depth and breadth of life is enlarged and enhanced, making learning life-wide as well as lifelong. Literacy is the most fundamental tool for awakening individuals' interests in self, life, and learning. True learning for literacy should, as Mezirow (1991) stated, help learners transform their perspectives about life. Thus, literacy and learning should not be confined to basic writing, reading, and calculating skills. Instead, literacy needs to be a vehicle whereby empowerment is the legitimate end. At the same time, learners need to learn how to learn, and they need to become self-directed learners, something that doesn't happen within the current more formal and narrow setting. Also, learners also need to assume responsibility for their own learning.

With regard to policy, it is important to include avenues and opportunities for all groups in need of basic adult literacy programming, including drop-outs, foreign labourers, and older illiterates. Also, different levels, different contexts, and different providers need to be available and drawn into the mix. Adult literacy education
beyond schools and reach out to communities as well as families. This is particularly important in that it will draw people who have negative attitudes towards schools, and encourage them to attend. Also, it helps break stereotypes about schools, education and the student-teacher relationship, and in turn renews and broadens the public’s view of learning. Community-based and family-directed literacy programs are essential, and there is much to learn from English as a Second Language Programming used in the United States and other countries (see Fingeret, 1984; Nickse, 1990). Most importantly, adult literacy students need to become active, self-directed, autonomous learners if they are to continue down the lifelong learning continuum.

In summary, the Ministry of Education needs to achieve a number of objectives. These include: redefining and expanding the role of ABEP; amplifying the SEP functions making the programming delivery and design more flexible; encouraging a host of institutions to provide adult literacy education; re-inventing and emphasizing teacher training programs; developing new approaches for teaching and skill training; revising learning materials, and encouraging studies and experiments to evaluate and enhance teaching methods and materials; and, most importantly, linking adult basic literacy to a wide range of lifelong learning activities and opportunities. This latter point is what will draw adult basic literacy programming out of its narrow and confining shell and into the broader learning context rightfully associated with responsible holistic participation in the society at large. Redefined, restructured and revamped adult basic literacy programming and practices will do much for groups that are currently excluded from the opportunities associated with full participation in a learning society, and in the end the entire community will benefit from increased cohesion and economic potential.

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