RECOGNITION AND ANALYSIS OF THE EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF YAZD PROVINCE ADULT EDUCATION INSTRUCTORS

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ABSTRACT

Based on empirical evidence, it is established that there is a positive relationship between people’s beliefs, values and attitudes and their decisions and daily activities. Thus when adult education instructors engage in educational activities, their beliefs about life and education as well as their educational philosophy or tendency affect their decisions. This state of affairs is obtains despite the fact that the instructor’s philosophy of education, like their philosophy of life, might be subconscious or only partially conscious. Since any attempt at reforming educational practice requires a deep understanding of the educational philosophy governing that practice, this research was designed with the aim of bringing out and analyzing the educational philosophies of Yazd province literacy campaign instructors on the basis of which reform suggestions can be offered. The research method used in this study was of descriptive/survey type. The population (universe) of the study comprised of 410 instructors working in 10 different cities of Yazd province in 2006-2007. Via the census method, all the members of the population received a copy of the Philosophy of Adult Education Inventory (PAEI) questionnaire, and 322 questionnaires were returned. The collected data were analyzed using the analysis of variance with repeated measures. The results indicated that there are significant differences among the scores of instructors subscribing to different philosophies of education. It was also found out that the instructor’s intellectual and emotional inclinations leaned mostly toward progressivism and behaviourism, with traditional liberalism ranking lowest in these regards. Factors such as educational degrees, city of residence and their interactions showed no effect regarding instructor’s choice of educational philosophy. Finally a set of suggestions were developed both to improve the performance of the instructors and also to promote efficiency of organization involved in adult education in Iran.

KEYWORDS

Adult education, Andragogy, Educational philosophy, Philosophy of adult education

INTRODUCTION

The area of educational philosophy has been of concern to adult educators ever since the founding of the American Association for Adult Education in 1926. Two pivotal works appeared that very year: Eduard Lindeman's "The Meaning of Adult Education" and Everett Dean Martin’s "The Meaning of a Liberal Education". Lindeman’s work has become a source material for what is still called the progressive education, and the other one, by Martin (1926), provided material for what is often still referred to as the liberal tradition. Ten years later Lyman Bryson(1936) authored the first adult education textbook, simply called "Adult Education" in which he articulated 5 functions of practice (occupational, relational, liberal, political, remedial). At this time a classification of philosophies was not provided but these 5 functions already resembled future philosophical orientations. In 1967, Bergevin acknowledged that varying philosophies of adult education existed but did not specifically
identify them (Day & Amstutz, 2003). To Bergevin (1967), this is a big claim to assume that only one philosophical foundation of adult education is all-inclusive enough to be counted as the only underlying philosophy of adult education. Later in 1973, Apps presented some guidelines for the educators to develop one working (personal) philosophy for themselves. He suggested the instructors to identify and classify their educational beliefs in to 5 categories: beliefs about the learner, the overall purpose of adult education, content or subject matter, learning process and beliefs about the role of the adult educator. Among the alternative approaches in developing a personal philosophy in pedagogy and andragogy is the values clarification approach. The major proponents of this approach (Raths et al., 1966) believed that the process of clarifying values is likely to reduce confusion, increase clarity and direction, and lead to more consistent behavior and decision making (cited by Zinn, 1990). Another approach in developing a personal philosophy is Philip Smith’s (1956) dimensions of philosophic mindedness that recognize 3 related dimensions of comprehensiveness, penetration and flexibility. In a comparable trend, Elias and Merriam in "Philosophical Foundations of Adult Education" (1980) generally categorized adult education in to 6 thought systems: liberal, behaviorism, progressive, humanism, radical and analytic. Lorraine Zinn developed her "philosophy of Adult Education Inventory"(PAEI) based on the first 5 categories of this classification. Hiemstra (2001) refers to 7 philosophical systems in adult education (Idealism, Realism, Progressivism, Liberalism, Behaviorism, Humanism, and Radicalism) but he suggests eclecticism as a way of dealing with all these various systems. Eclecticism is not a philosophical system, but rather it’s a synthesizing and personal interpretation of various systems for the instructors to draw out the best components according to the context. Spergeon & Moore (1994) believed that eclectic preference can be viewed as a reflection of the diversity and pluralism in the American culture. On the other hand, Day & Amstutz (2003) have attempted to derive out and elaborate on 7 core values from the different philosophies. They believe that these 7 values are: cultural custodianship, useful knowledge, spiritual connectedness, personal existence, individual/group growth, social reconstruction and scientific scholarship.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

As Zinn’s PAEI questionnaire has been used in this study, therefore its 5 educational philosophies will be defined in the following:

Liberalism (traditional/classic)

The purpose of this philosophy is to develop intellectual powers and it’s highly influenced by idealism and realism. This philosophy is content-centred and views the teacher as the expert in a teacher-centred system. Liberals such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle believed that theoretical education is more valuable than vocational training. Therefore, for the liberals, the curriculum should include timeless virtues and rational issues. In this respect, James Don Hill introduces the "time-proof curriculum". Perennialism and Essentialism are related to this philosophy. Dialectic teaching method (Socratic method) is also derived from this philosophy.
**Behaviourism**

This school is highly influenced by positivism. It emphasizes the importance of the environment on shaping the correct behaviour. The purpose of this philosophy is change or modification of behaviour. What changed behaviourism from a psychological school to a philosophical one, was skinner`s shift of interest to social issues. He tried to find out the relationship between operant conditioning and social ideology (Zuriff, 2002). This shift of interest is apparent in his two books "Walden Two" and "Beyond Freedom and Dignity", where he introduces his ideas about necessity of behaviour technology (social engineering). Behaviour technology emphasizes control and manipulation of the stimulus rather than the growth of the mentality of humans for achieving the social demands. Furthermore, this philosophy views the teacher as a manager, controller, predictor or a guide.

**Progressivism**

According to Dewey, a major proponent of this philosophy, "A good theory is most practical of all things. Theory without practice is idle speculation, practice without theory is random groping". Dewey emphasizes "educational experience". Therefore, needs, interests, experiences and motivations of the learners must be attended to in a way that can cause their growth. He believed that learners should learn problem-solving and democracy. This philosophy is influenced by pragmatism.

**Humanism**

Humanistic philosophy of adult education is highly influenced by existentialism and humanistic psychology. The 4 pivotal concepts from the set of assumptions underlying this humanistic psychology (especially Maslow) are: the idea of a self, capable of growth, responsible for what one becomes, and capable of influencing social progress. According to Zadra (1999) human beings are unique and their basic rights are the same anywhere, no matter what society or culture they live in. In this philosophy teacher is a facilitator. The key underlying concepts are: freedom and autonomy, trust, active cooperation and participation, and self-directed learning. Knowles is a famous proponent of this philosophy.

**Radicalism (Social Reconstruction)**

This philosophy promotes social, political and economic change through education. Teacher is perceived as the coordinator who is an equal partner to the learner in the learning process. Merriam & Brockett (1997) identify 4 concepts as central to this philosophy: collaborative learning, knowledge creation, power & praxis. Counts, Brameld, Freire, Illich and Mezirow are the major proponents of this philosophy. They believed that education should aware and empower adult learners to transform current situation.
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Among the researchers who have used Zinns’ questionnaire, McKenzie (1985) compared responses of 22 trainers in business and industry, 48 religious adult educators, and 32 beginning graduate students in adult education. He sought to determine the possible relationship between philosophical orientations of adult educators and their experiences as educators in different adult education contexts. He noted some interesting differences that seemed to be related to the different contexts in which the respondents functioned as adult educators. In his study, he found significant differences in all 5 philosophical orientations by comparing these three groups. Significant differences were found in liberal and progressive orientations between these groups of students and certain assumptions about these orientations were apparent in both groups’ thinking. The group of graduate students scored higher in the progressive orientation because of their teaching experience which had given them an advantage in teaching practical skills like problem solving. The group of undergraduates scored higher in liberal orientation because of their lack of experience. On the other hand, religious educators scored high in the humanist and radical orientations. Finally, McKenzie claims that the progressive orientation seemed to be the most common underlying philosophy among adult educators. He attributes this to progressivism’s flexibility in offering commonality with the other orientations. In another study, DeCoux et al. (1992) identified educational philosophies of 111 graduate students of adult education by PAEI. The overall sample was predominantly progressive. Liberal orientation had the lowest mean while progressive had the highest. Also, Spurgeon & Moore (1994) explored the educational philosophies of training and development professors, leaders and practitioners by PAEI. They concluded that the most predominant philosophies for the professors and leaders were progressivism. The second most preferred philosophy for both groups was behaviourism. On the other hand, practitioners preferred behaviourism more than progressivism. Radicalism was the least preferred philosophy in all 3 groups. Later, Williams (1999) investigated educational philosophies of 217 extension agents in the 6 program areas by PAEI. His research revealed that the progressive philosophy was preferred by all groups. Boone et al. (2001) also used PAEI to study educational philosophies of agricultural education teachers in 3 states in the USA. They found that while 67.8% of the educators in the tri-state identified with the progressive philosophy, none of the respondents identified with the liberal philosophy. Also 21.2% of educators identified with the behaviourist philosophy. Finally and more recently, Lehman (2003) sought to analyze the concepts of "espoused theory" and "theory-in-use" among 13 North American adult educators. His study showed that the dominant espoused theory and theory-in-use between the participants again was progressive.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to recognize and analyze the educational philosophy of the adult education instructors in Yazd province of Iran. To this end, 4 research questions were advanced:

1. What is the educational philosophy of Yazd province adult education instructors?
2. What is the effect of adult educators’ educational degrees on their tendency towards educational philosophies?
3. What is the effect of adult educators’ city of residence on their tendency towards educational philosophies?
4. What is the interaction effect of educational degrees and city of residence on adult educators’ tendency towards educational philosophies?

Descriptive/survey type method was used in this study. The population of the study comprised of 410 instructors working in 10 different towns of Yazd province in 2006-2007. Via the census method, all the members of the population received a copy of PAEI questionnaire, 322 questionnaires were returned (78.5%). The PAEI consisted of 75 statements rated on a 7 point Likert-type scale. Total scores can range from 15 to 105 for each of the five philosophies and a score of 15-25 indicates that the educator strongly disagrees with a philosophy. A score of 95-105 indicates that the educator strongly agrees with a philosophy. Reliability coefficient was measured by Cronbach’s alpha. The overall reliability of the instrument was high (about 0.92). Subscales reliability were between 0.68 to 0.76. The collected data was analyzed using analysis of variance with repeated measures in SPSS package.

FINDINGS

The analysis of the descriptive statistics showed that progressivism gained the highest mean (85.94) and that behaviourism was the second (83.05). On the other hand, liberal philosophy gained the lowest mean (77.54). The means of humanism and radicalism were 80.33 and 81.63 respectively. Further, correlational relationships between the 5 philosophies were examined and it was shown that all of the philosophies were significantly correlated (P<0.01). Similar results were achieved in Boone et al (2001). Analysis of variance with repeated measures was used for the 4 research questions. For the first question, the results reveal that there is a significant difference between the educators’ scores in their inclinations towards different philosophies. The results of the second and third questions show that educational degree and city of residence do not have any effects on adult educators’ tendency towards educational philosophies. In addition, the results of the interaction effect between educational degree and city of residence also don’t have any effect on adult educators’ tendency towards educational philosophies. In the next stage, Bonferroni test was used for pair wise comparisons and it was revealed that all of the educators’ scores in their tendencies towards different philosophies show significant differences. Only the differences between liberalism and behaviourism, behaviourism and radicalism, and humanism and radicalism were not significant. Summarizingly, adult educators in Yazd province show to be more inclined towards progressivism and behaviourism, and least towards liberalism.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of this study are consistent with McKenzie (1985), DeCoux et al. (1992), Spergeon and Moore (1994), Williams (1999), Boone et al. (2001) and Lehman (2003), revealing the most inclination towards progressivism and behaviourism among adult educators. Also in this study, just in line with DeCoux et al. (1992) and Boone et al. (2001), the lowest inclination was towards liberalism. These results can be justified on the grounds that liberalism in education is characterized by different features, For example, its emphasis upon "transfer of knowledge" which is different from what nowadays is believed as "knowledge creation". In addition, the big gap that exists between theory and vocation in this philosophy and its major criticism that it overemphasizes elitism which is in contrast with
current "Education for All" (EFA) approach. Adult educators’ educational philosophies are reflected in their practice and experiences also can reciprocally influence on gradual reflection or development of their personal philosophies. Simply put, there is a reciprocal relationship between theory and practice, and practice should be based on theory. In the words of Ellias and Merriam: "Theory without practice leads to an empty idealism, and action without philosophical reflection leads to mindless activism (cited by White and Brockett, 1987). However, Mckenzie (1985) observed that many adult educators merely accept patterns of practice and corresponding theoretical assumptions without testing these patterns critically. It is not altogether uncommon for some adult educators to be enthusiastic about techniques, procedures, instrumental aids, and fads while at the same time avoiding a critical examination of the philosophical ground of practice. Therefore, it should be noted that a clear-cut image one’s philosophy of education is one of the most important necessities for a successful education system and even a successful life on the whole. Hence an attempt to raise educators’ consciousness about their philosophical system can empower them to earn the necessary skills to modify their behaviours. In fact, the educators can start the process of improving their educational behaviour, in an active, spontaneous, internal and self-confident manner, after achieving a better self-consciousness.

REFERENCES


