

Rachel Tokatli (ed.), *Lifelong Learning in Israel*, The Ministry of Education and Culture, Adult Education Division, Jerusalem, 1989, 256 pp.

This book explores the wide variety of educational programmes in Israel. The vantage point from which both the editor and the contributors approach adult education is that of practice. The writers are personally involved in the various programmes (as initiators or teachers) and provide a collection of case studies based on their own roles within these programmes. These activities encompass everything including basic literacy, 'second chance' (pre-academic) programmes and popular education. The book provides a comprehensive account of the educational activities for diverse ethnic groups, veteran and recent immigrants, Ethiopians and Israeli Arabs. It also illuminates on adult education programmes within the Kibbutz Movement, the Labour Movement and the Israeli Army, stressing the unique functions of adult education within these frameworks.

The book is divided into three sections: the first is devoted to discussing values and their significance in adult education programmes; the second section deals with literacy and basic education mainly in the Tehila project which is a major literacy programme in Israel. Tehila in Hebrew means "glory" and is also the acronym for Special Educational Programme for the Adult Learner. Tokatli, the Editor, who was the Head of the programme since its inception, describes vividly the challenges in developing and maintaining the project. The third section explores special programmes in popular education. Each chapter is forwarded by a general introduction to the specific topic which also situates the writer within the programme. The section on values consists of two chapters: the first discusses the nature of lifelong learning in Judaism by tracing historically the roots of learning in both past and contemporary Jewish traditions.

The second chapter debates "the right to educate adults." While other writers do touch on some of the theoretical issues, this chapter presents a general perspective which problematises the ethical aspects involved in educating adults. According to Cohen, the writer, adult education involves the transmission of knowledge and values: "We assume, and perhaps rightly so, that the new values and cultural patterns, as well as the knowledge and skills acquired by adult learners, will help them lead more fulfilling lives and enjoy greater control of the world around them" (p. 35).

He points to the need to "recognise" and "respect" the adult learner's values and norms. However, he argues that "as educators we have a **duty** to present to the adult learner the values, norms and beliefs which we consider true and most appropriate for the time and place in which we live" (pp. 37 - 38). While Cohen

is rightly aware of the existing class differences between adult learners and their teachers, which create an unbalanced learning situation, the question is whether this understanding leads to the imposition of ideas and beliefs related to the dominant culture. In other words, to what extent does knowledge construction within the classroom account for the learner's everyday life experiences and is a product of the learner's input? This issue becomes even more significant in Israeli society since, as an immigrant society, Israel struggled with the absorption of Jews coming from developing countries (Orientals or Mizrachim) with very limited formal education. Hence, ethnicity was constituted as a stratifying factor in Israeli society and, therefore, the absorption process was perceived as a national goal. This led to the adoption of two main principles: "Ingathering of the Exiles" and "Absorption of Immigrants." The former represented the notion of a Melting Pot on the common basis of belonging to the Jewish people, while the "Absorption of Immigrants" policy was conceived as a complete re-education of the newcomer (Cohen, 1985: 324).

A review of the diverse programmes regarding the functions of adult education suggests a general expectation on behalf of the learner to adapt and acquire the norms and culture of the existing society in order to integrate fully (see Preface, p.7; Tokatli, p. 119). This is particularly illustrated in a chapter on Hebrew for immigrant teachers (Polani, p. 241) where it is argued that "hankalat ha-lashon" (literally, 'bequeathal of the language') implies far more than the transmission of necessary linguistic skills and connotes the ties among past, present and future generations. Hankhalat ha-lashon implies a full cultural, social and economic absorption process whose objective is a sense of involvement and belonging and the eradication of the distinction between 'we' and 'them' (ibid). The Israeli Army has developed educational programmes which can be seen as yet another example: these programmes are designed first, to help soldiers from disadvantaged backgrounds to function better during their service in the army, since discharge can block social and economic integration (p. 210). In addition to that, 'second chance' programmes are designed to benefit soldiers by advancing their level of education, so that they can "function as productive citizens" (p. 213). In this respect, the writer claims, we can see the army "as an instrument of the state for solving social problems" (p.206).

Thus, adult education, in its various manifestations, can be seen as a mechanism which reinforces social integration through acculturation. The general approach seems to be in line with the traditional 'top-to-bottom' model of knowledge transmission, where the learner is a passive recipient of prescribed educational materials (Mayo, 1991). Yet, several writers emphasize that there is an attempt to adapt the curriculum to the world of adult learners, their experiences and interests (Rosen, p. 79; Guttman, p. 85). Generally, the Editor indicates that

"In writing and adapting learning material... the guidelines were methodological, educational, and disciplinary considerations on the one hand, and relevance to the students' world – their joys, worries, fears and hopes, on the other" (Tokatli, p. 49). Still, what is missing is a discussion of the ways in which the learners' world is incorporated within the studies, *how* the fears, hopes and events from adult learners' lives are woven in the curriculum. Furthermore, it is important to understand the extent to which the learning process is transformed as a result of students' contributions.

The only example that demonstrates a more dialogical, participatory approach is provided by Adorian who writes about teaching holidays and describes how it is worked in class: "students are given the opportunity to participate by telling their personal stories. They thus become active partners in structuring the lesson" (p.98). Apart from this, there is no reference in the book to processes through which learners can incorporate their world in the studies. We learn that students in the Tehila programme take part in outreach programmes for new students and organise social events (p.53), but these are extra curricular activities. It has been argued by adult education theorists that "critical education has to integrate the students and the teachers into a mutual creation and re-creation of knowledge" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 8). Motivating students to learn through a discussion of their authentic experiences may lead to a critical reflection on the learners' social reality. It could constitute an attempt at transforming this reality. One way of doing this would be the creation of meaningful texts out of the learners' recorded conversations, which is a feature of modern adult literacy programmes (see Mayo, 1991, p.27). A chapter, focusing solely on Arab learners' reflections on their circumstances in the "pre and post" Tehila programme (p. 113), illustrates how Tehila helped them realise their social situation, and may serve as the beginning of a transformative learning process.

A significant aspect of the book is the space offered by various writers to learners' voices and reactions with regard to the learning programmes in which they participate. By integrating students' views, the reader gains valuable insight as to the impact of the learning process on the adult learners' lives. Thus, we learn of images of darkness and light used to describe the learners' feelings towards the written word. But, more importantly, we see how learning and knowing affects their lives, when they can take part in synagogue services and actively participate in reading parts of the Haggadah, during Passover night, which "represents a radical transformation for most women who, for years have been completely passive in the process of reading and explaining the Haggadah" (p.103). Another case in point can be seen in computer learning which was greeted by some educators with skepticism but proved to be vital to adult learners who felt a sense of belonging to a new era, the twentieth century: "I brag at home that I'm learning

with the computer" (p. 93). A related finding, which again comes through students' reactions, concerns student participation in the classroom. As the writer argues, adult learners frequently avoid answering the teacher's questions. At the computer, however, they became most enthusiastic and active (p. 86-87). Hence, learners' reflections seem to be essential in the assessment of educational programmes and in understanding their significance for adult learners' lives.

While student voices are critical to the understanding of adult education programmes and their impact on the learning process, it is also important to delineate a general profile of the adult learner in Israel. The reader could infer that most of the learners are women of Asian-African origin but the book does not provide percentage rates of the learners' level of education when entering Tehila. Neither does it indicate the rates of students continuing to higher levels in the project nor dropout rates. It would have been helpful to have more information on literacy rates among Israeli Jews and Arabs, data which specifically relates to learners in the Tehila programme. Such information could lead to the development of a comparative view concerning the literacy situation in Israel and other countries.

Finally, the editor's use of the afterword should be noted. Instead of summarising previous chapters, Tokali uses the space for reviewing other adult education settings which were not discussed throughout the book. This addition provides further insights into the variety of educational programmes designed for adults in Israel.

References

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