

**CHALLENGING UNDERSTANDINGS OF ADULT
LEARNING WITH SOUTHERN THEORY: RECOGNIZING
EVERYDAY LEARNING THROUGH A CRITICAL
ENGAGEMENT WITH NORTHERN THEORIES**

Eryn Thomas

University of New England, Australia

ABSTRACT This article is an example of doing Southern Theory through a critical engagement with Northern theories around learning, adult learning, adult education and related fields that help to exclude and erase non-dominant forms of learning such as everyday learning from theory, practice and policy. Adult education and learning play conflicting roles both supporting the maintenance of social inequality and at the same time working to challenge this and promote equitable access to resources and opportunities for marginalised groups around the globe. The field is however often dominated and shaped by predominantly Northern based adult learning and related theories that help to privilege mostly formal learning over other forms of learning, including everyday learning through what Connell (2007) calls erasure. This article focuses on a research project that investigated everyday learning and relied on a critical examination and active modification of key aspects of a selection of relevant Northern theories. This critical engagement produced a “patch-worked” theoretical framework that, I propose is more capable of recognising and responding to the localised everyday learning and knowledge from the research participant’s lives than the original Northern adult learning theories. It is argued here that such critical engagements with Northern theories are required to highlight their implicit localisations and challenge reifying tendencies. Furthermore it is suggested that such critical engagements can allow once limited theories to be put to more effective use in localised contexts to help address localised needs globally.

KEYWORDS Adult education; Adult learning; Everyday learning; Southern Theory

Introduction

The linked fields of adult education and learning are active in diverse contexts around the globe. As will be shown below, these fields have and continue to play at times contradictory roles in the maintenance of social inequality within and between countries, as well as challenging these inequalities and supporting marginalised people, learning and knowledges. The policies and practices of adult education in different contexts are however also shaped and influenced by theories of adult learning. While there is a long history, especially within postcolonial nations, of popular and radical adult education that aims to empower marginalised people, adult education practices and policies around the world are also dominated by what Connell (2007) calls “Northern” theories of adult education from Europe, the UK, Northern America and Australia for instance. These Northern theories predominantly focus on and favour particular types of learning that occur in some (northern) and formal contexts and effectively help to ignore and devalue the rest of the learning that takes place in people’s lives everywhere else.

This article is a Southern Theory based examination of a research project into everyday learning that was forced into a critical examination of these mostly Northern theories. This examination was required to develop a theoretical framework that was capable of recognising and then working with the learning that was being uncovered from the research participant’s stories. The article will firstly discuss the complex roles of adult education and learning in both the North and the South and then highlight the erasing tendencies of many of these dominant Northern theories of adult education. The article then moves to overviewing the research project itself. Firstly the article will examine the methodological need to critically engage with and then modify a specific selection of Northern theories of adult learning and education to produce a patchworked (Sfard, 1998) theoretical framework. The article then proceeds to demonstrate the use of aspects of this developed framework. Excerpts from the research findings are used to illustrate the potential for such a framework to contribute to the ongoing development of Southern Theory based understandings of adult learning, in particular the capacity to better recognise, and therefore

include a wider range of localised everyday knowledges and learning in diverse contexts.

Southern Theory and Southern thinking: some challenges

This work is guided by key concepts from Connell's work, *Southern Theory* (2007), that challenges the privileging of knowledge produced in the global North and the marginalising of knowledge produced by those of the global South. Connell's work is part of a broader Southern paradigm within sociology and the social sciences that seeks to broaden the base of sociological knowledge making to include, recognise and utilise knowledges produced from the epistemological peripheries of the South, most often countries still experiencing the effects of European colonisation (for instance see Connell, 2007; Rosa, 2014; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012; and Selvadurai et al, 2013; Bhabra, 2014; and the compilation edited by Patel, 2010). For Chakrabarty (2000, p. 5), this privileging of 'Northern' knowledge can be seen with Indian social scientists engaging with the ideas of long dead Europeans as contemporaries, while only engaging with the ideas of long dead Indian thinkers, theorists and researchers as historical artefacts. This concern is echoed by Santos (2014) who argues that northern or western universalising concepts such as modernity are weapons that, according to Rosa have been used for "domination by forcefully refusing any possibility of coexistence with other forms of knowledge"(Rosa, 2014, p. 853). As Rosa continues, "social forms and formulas scattered across the globe have been left on the fringes or simply disregarded as significant experiences" (Rosa, 2014, p. 853). For Connell, the Northern based social sciences

(Picture the world as seen by men, by capitalists, by the educated and affluent. Most important, they picture the world as seen from the ... countries of Europe and North America – the global metropole" (Connell, 2007, p. vii).

In order to counter this privileging of universalising Northern or metropole based knowledge, one of the key goals of these Southern approaches is the decentralisation and diversification of knowledge production to include and recognise a range of knowledges and theories from the mostly colonised and subjugated parts of the world (Selvadurai et al, 2013). A fundamental aspect of this project is a focus on who

produces the knowledge and theory, and whose experiences and understandings are represented within this knowledge (for example see Connell, 2007; Santos, 2014; Mignolo, 2000; and Rosa, 2014). As will be discussed shortly, these issues are inherently connected with the theories, policies and practices of adult learning and education around the world.

Before shifting to discuss adult learning experiences and the impacts of Northern Theories on what can be recognised to be learning, there is a need to clarify how some key issues around Southern Theory are addressed and used within this article.

The north-south divide suggested by Connell (2007) and the wider Southern paradigm is constructed here as an epistemological and socio-political divide more than a geographical separation. This is due to two key reasons. On the one hand there is still significant debate about the attribution of boundaries of geographically southern countries such as Australia. For instance, Connell depicts Australia as being on the periphery, or within the South as a result of Australia being colonised by the English (2007, p. 85-86). Connell also argues that knowledge production process in Australia for instance match the dynamics of the production of social science knowledge in the South where local social scientists focus on work coming out of what she terms the “metropole” (2007, p. 217-8). This Southern location for countries like Australia becomes less clear when, however, one considers Selvadurai et al, who use an East/West split and associate the periphery more with developing nations who are still experiencing the repercussions of having been colonised. Mignolo (2011) extends this argument to

being part of the West takes you out of the Global South, even if you are as far south as Chile or Argentina. And of course, Australia and New Zealand (Mignolo, 2011, p. 184).

What emerges from these different perspectives is that these concepts of the North/South and the divide between them are less geographical than epistemological, political, economic, historical and social in nature, and that they are highly contestable and fluid. Additionally, it also becomes apparent that the North-South divide does not have to be mutually exclusive nor dichotomous when one embraces the concepts of the north in the south and the south in the north (Connell, 2007). A key concern within this is the question of who

produces knowledge in different locations. For Rosa this raises the issue of internalised colonisation within Southern Thinking (2014). While Connell argues for the recognition of knowledges and theories from the mostly colonised south, Rosa points out that “the majority of the social scientists (the dominant producers of theoretical knowledge) of the South have little or no contact with local or endogenous forms of social knowledge” (Rosa, 2014, p. 862). This article then recognises that power is not just divided between countries and regions, but also within them. These issues are significant in the examination of the uneven and often conflicting roles a range of adult education theories and practices play across and within both the South and the North.

Adult education around the globe

Adult education is a highly contested, often paradoxical and problematic field both for the global South as well as the global North in three main ways. Firstly, adult education has been and continues to be used as an instrument for emancipation *and* the maintenance of existing inequalities and oppressive relations in both the South and the North. Secondly, concepts of adult learning and education that emanate from the epistemological North mostly equate and therefore focus on and privilege learning within formal education. This narrow focus on formal learning excludes, negates and ignores other forms of learning and knowledges developed from other contexts. Thirdly, this over-focus on formal learning separates learning and knowledge from other areas of people’s lives including their communities and environments.

Historically, as well as currently, a range of proponents see adult education as an instrument of emancipation for marginalised and disenfranchised peoples in different parts of the world. For instance one of the key contributors to adult learning and education theories – Paulo Freire (for example see 1970, 1993) who worked with marginalised communities in South America is from the epistemological and political South as defined earlier. His work and ideas however have been adopted to achieve similar purposes by various researchers and practitioners around the world. More specifically, in countries from the socio-political South- most

of which have experienced European colonisation, adult education has been seen as a key strategy for challenging underdevelopment and other consequences of colonialism, for example Nyerere's focus on adult education in Tanzania (Mhina & Abdi, 2009).

Education has also been seen as an entry way into the dominant political and economic systems of power for indigenous communities, especially the leadership (Semali & Kincheloe, p. 7- 8). In addition, adult education that supports "people's rightful claim to indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing" is seen to be able to "deflect some of the historical realities attached to colonial induced, long term disturbances and destructions of people's ontologies, ecologies and overall life management systems" (Abdi & Kapoor, 2009, p. 10). Within the socio-political North, adult education also played an important role in supporting the development and emancipation of working class peoples for instance during industrialisation in the United Kingdom through the support of working class literacy development and the widespread dissemination of radical tracts (Merlyn, 2001).

At the same time however, adult education has also been and still is today used as an effective tool for the maintenance and reproduction of existing social, economic and political inequalities. On one level, Torres (2004) points out that there are essentially two separate systems for adult learning around the globe – the lifelong learning approach of universal adult learning engagement for rich countries and the reliance on adult basic education as the sole instrument for addressing adult illiteracy in poor countries. Jules elucidates how in the Caribbean this is the result of policies that focus on universal primary education and elitist secondary education leaving adult education as a very low priority (Jules, 2013, p. 360). Hickling-Hudson (2007) adds to this Caribbean perspective when she outlines the way that the different literacies and the purposes for which they are taught in adult learning programs work to reinforce social stratifications. Abdi and Kapoor (2009) further contribute to this argument with the acknowledgement that, especially in countries that suffered colonialism, adult education is still strongly connected with the use of education by colonial powers as a key tool of subjugation of native populations (p. 5). This is often continued today in some countries where the

education systems, including vocational education, are still dominated with content and values derived from the colonising country (Goura & Seltzer-Kelly, 2013). More generally, Kapoor connects modern day globalisation with both economic and cultural imperialism. He argues that globalisation is a derived if differentiated continuation of the earlier Northern colonialist subjugation of the rest of the world and implicates the operations of International Financial Institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank with continued oppression and dispossession of subaltern peoples (Kapoor, 2009). Kapoor (2009) also notes however that many of these subaltern peoples also stubbornly refuse to disappear, despite these continuing onslaughts.

In Northern contexts continuous adult education and training is also often used as a tool to primarily ensure workers are flexible and multi-skilled and are able to support increased productivity for their employers and countries (for instance see the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). While this lifelong learning may provide some mechanisms for social mobility and inclusion through better employment prospects, it can also be seen to entrench existing disadvantages in some countries like Australia where education is increasingly becoming a user-pays system, so that only individuals who can already afford extra training gain any potential benefit from the system.

Northern Theories of Adult Education and their impacts

As discussed above, understandings and the practices of adult education and learning are shaped by a range of theories and practices from around the globe. On the one hand, some researchers and practitioners, mostly from the South (including within geographically Northern countries) have attempted to use adult learning as a means of emancipation and support for disempowered and marginalised groups.

On the other hand however, adult learning and formal adult education practices around the world are dominated by theories from the epistemological North that overly focus on learning within formal institutions such as schools, colleges, universities and training institutions. This has led to a situation where learning is most often equated with formal education, and learning that does not occur in these few

contexts is ignored, devalued and excluded from practice, policy making and research, or to link to Connell's (2007) phrase, simply erased. Abdi (2012) argues that this has been used historically to support colonial subjugation by assuring the "supremacy of European languages and epistemologies" as well as "the horizontal inferiorization of African worldviews, epistemic locations, styles of expression and forms of description (2012, p. 2). In addition, Abdi points out that "the whole knowledge and learning traditions of oral societies were derided as backward, ineffective and unacceptable" (2012, p. 2). This sidelining of knowledges and learning from colonised peoples is still occurring today under what Santos describes as "abyssal thinking" that is characterised by the "impossibility of the co-presence" (Santos, 2014, p. 118) of other realities or knowledges such as "popular, lay, plebeian, peasant or indigenous knowledges" (p. 119). As Santos (2014) argues, these forms of knowledge "vanish as relevant or commensurate knowledges because they are beyond... the simple binaries of Western scientific thought" (p. 119).

This exclusion of other knowledges and learning by Northern theories of adult learning also occurs within Northern contexts. In these countries too, not only is this learning devalued, made invisible and excluded, but so too are the people who rely heavily upon it because they do not have access to learning through formal institutions. As argued in my research,

Firstly, only recognising and rewarding formal adult learning provides economic and social benefits to people who can successfully access and complete such formal learning, including being able to meet the increasing financial costs of the learning. However, for the groups of people who are already economically and socially marginalised, accessing formal adult learning is difficult, and the result of not accessing or completing formal adult learning is further social and economic disadvantage and marginalisation. (Thomas, 2014, p. 13-4).

In addition to excluding and devaluing learning from other contexts, these dominant and narrow Northern understandings of adult learning and education also contribute to the separation of learning from other areas of people's lives, including from their communities and local environments. As a function of colonial subjugation, this "imposition of alien colonial education and ways of knowing" has detached "native people...from precolonial educational

systems” that derived from and “reflected their histories, cultures, languages and actual needs” (Abdi, 2012, p. 2-3). This process of separation still continues in a number of countries today where Northern based education has little positive impact for people where it is taught out of context from local indigenous lives, as well as traditional knowledge, learning and value systems (e.g. Abdullah & Stringer, 1999, p 144). Furthermore, even for those from the North, this separation of learning from life contexts leads to the atomisation of people into specific discreet roles such as worker, learner, community member and family member that then fails to be able to recognise any multicontextual learning within and from people’s lives.

Overview of the research

Brief overview of the study

In between 2011 and 2012 data was collected from six people living in regional NSW using semi-structured interviews to capture snapshots of their everyday lived experiences. The research was the major part of a doctoral thesis undertaken at the nearby regional university. Specifically, the research set out to explore the learning that arose from and through these people’s everyday lives as a source of valuable and important learning. The term ‘important’ was used within the research to denote learning that has meaning and consequences for the people experiencing the learning. Used in this way, the term ‘important’ connects with Connell’s (2007) notion of “dirty theory” by recognising local definitions and contexts. At the same time the term’s usage actively undermines hegemonic Northern notions of knowledge and learning. As well as seeking to identify the learning that comes from people’s everyday lives, the research also looked for how learning from different aspects of people’s lives interacted, and what the impacts of everyday learning were for individuals, the people around them and broader society.

The people who participated in the research were already known to me in different ways and were invited to participate because I thought they would have interesting stories to tell about their lives. As a brief summary, here are some details about the six people interviewed: four were women and two were men; the youngest was in their thirties

and the eldest was in their sixties; two were born in a country other than Australia; one identified as Indigenous; two learnt English as a second or third language; three had experienced domestic and/or sexual violence; five had experienced or observed violence; two left secondary school illiterate; two worked at the university; two were farmers; and two were employed within community welfare programs.

The collected data was transcribed and then analysed in a range of different ways that was ongoing throughout the research process. As part of this process, each interview/transcript was developed into a chronological narrative that summarised key life events and drew out evidence of learning from those events.

These six constructed narratives were used to assist with my ongoing analysis. In addition the six narratives were also included in the final thesis as interludes between the theoretical chapters. This was my attempt at presenting each person's experiences and learning to the reader in as a holistic and complete way as possible before abstracting and dissecting them in the later analysis chapters.

This data was used alongside existing research – mostly from the UK, Europe, North America and Australia. However, the limitations of this literature meant that much of the research work was focused on trying to work out how to situate the data within the current approaches to adult learning, and in addition to try and forge closer connections between them. One of the outcomes of my thesis was the development and use of a patchworked or piecemeal theoretical framework of/for adult learning that is more capable of identifying, capturing, analysing and understanding learning from the research participant's everyday lives. This patchwork theoretical framework came together around four dimensions of adult learning that had emerged from both the data and the literature. These four dimensions were: recognising adult learning; the demarcation and segregation of adult learning; where learning occurs; and the outcomes of learning. The theories that were used and critically modified within the section on the recognition of adult learning will now be explored in greater depth.

Critical engagement with the Northern theories

Firstly, the work focussed on here draws on and brings together elements of existing research and theoretical frameworks, much of it from the Northern metropole. Some of this Northern theory was helpful to me, especially those aspects that were from a critical tradition. Predominantly, I took permission from Feminist Standpoint theorists such as Smith (1997, 2004) to not be a slave to existing theories and concepts, but instead, to start my investigation with the lives of everyday people. This is significant as the ideas of this group of connecting standpoint theories have fundamentally sought to question power relations within given contexts, give voice to often silenced standpoints and learn from, not just about, these non-dominant lives and perspectives (also see for instance: Harding, 2004).

Conversely however, much of the other mostly Northern literature, research and theory engaged with through the research acted to restrict understandings of adult learning, where it occurred, and what was produced from it. Instead of being directed by this mostly privileged knowledge, I have attempted to, as I show below, to engage with the literature critically and utilise aspects of it in new ways to develop a patchworked theoretical framework (Sfard, 1998) for adult everyday learning that is more capable of responding to and understanding the range of learning from the research participant's everyday lives.

Within the early stages of the literature review it became apparent that much of the literature focused on a range of specific areas of learning. These included the formal provision of education and training, as well as learning for and at work, and what learning was considered to be, for instance. As the data collection and analysis progressed, it became clear that most of the individual research contributions, models and approaches either did not address everyday learning, or were too narrow in their focus to adequately encompass it.

As a result of the limitations of the Northern literature, a major stage in the research work involved the critical examination of this dominant research around adult learning that included lifelong learning, informal learning, workplace learning and everyday learning. Instead of just reviewing and adopting this literature, a critical examination was used to

identify which aspects of it act to dismiss, ignore or exclude the everyday learning of the research participants. It was found that many of the approaches in the literature were restricted by a limited conceptualisation of learning (for example see Sternberg, 1989); or by a specific focus on a particular learning context such as formal learning or the workplace (for instance, see Eraut, 2000; Marsick, 2009; Marsick and Watkins, 1990, 2001; Conlon, 2004); or through normative based judgements about what could be considered to be worthwhile or valid learning (e.g. Smith, 1999, 2008). I will now discuss two examples of these limited approaches, and illustrate the ways that they did at times connect but more often did not connect with the participant's everyday learning and how these limits were responded to.

The first example of these limited research approaches is the work of Eraut (2000). Eraut compiled a complex and thorough typology of what he terms non-formal learning that spans across a range of learning from implicit learning, through to reactive learning and on to deliberative learning. For my work this began to provide a range for the recognition of different types of learning that few researchers except Schugurensky recognised. Schugurensky (2000) also developed a full and broad typology of informal learning that had similar ranges and roughly aligned with the categories of Eraut. There are however two key differences between the two typologies.

Firstly, Eraut includes a temporal element to his work that adds an extra dimension to understanding the connection between past, present and future experiences, expectations and learning. Secondly, while Eraut adds extra depth with the time factor, he also actively sets limits to the desired applicability of his work to learning within and about professional work and particular types of learning within that specific contextual frame. These include the recognition of learning that leads to "significant changes in capability or understanding" (Eraut, 1997, cited Eraut 2000, p. 12) and learning that is associated with "non-routine aspects of a new task or encounter" (Eraut, 2000, p. 12). Schugurensky (2000) on the other hand leaves his typology open to unspecified contexts, providing examples from different learning contexts to demonstrate his ideas. The constraints of these individual approaches can be seen with aspects of the stories from one of the research participants, Jaimie.

A major part of Jamie's life has involved bringing up children, and developing the knowledge and skills to do this well. As she says

I've had a career in children... Twenty years of children.

Jaimie's choice of words is important here. She is talking about how she learned to be a mother in her everyday life, from her early days looking after her younger siblings and onto having and bringing up her own children. Jaimie recognises that she learnt most of this informally as she went.

when it came down to having my first child, you kind of get thrown in the deep end because there's stuff that you don't learn at school.

and

I've gone on to have a lot of kids and I'm certainly different now with my last child than I was with my first. And I think that's through experience and understanding the difference, for example, between a baby's cry. That they cry for different reasons. And you can hear it. None of their cries sound the same. But that only comes through experience. And I didn't know that for my first, but when I went on to have my second child, you can pick the differences between the cries.

Jaimie is also talking about how, twenty years after having her first child she is now applying that informal everyday learning in paid employment supporting a range of people such as the young parents of new babies and teenage girls at risk of leaving school. This paid employment started with Jaimie in a teaching assistant role with no formal qualifications. Over time and with formal training and accreditation Jaimie has gone on to being a teacher in her own right, although on a casual, non-permanent basis.

Firstly, in this situation, using each typology on its own within the author's intended usage, neither typology would thoroughly capture the span and time dimensions of Jaimie's learning across her range of learning contexts. When modified and combined together however, Eraut's time dimension and Schugurensky's openness and breadth are able to establish a broad field of what can be recognised as learning across different types of learning in an unrestricted scope of contexts.

Secondly, Eraut's restrictions on what learning his model focused on is indicative of the restrictions created by the normative values and judgements used by many Northern authors in deciding what is to be considered valuable or worthwhile learning. Hager and Halliday (2009) take a similar

approach in their arguments about the role and nature of informal learning in professional work practice when they cite Beckett and Hager in talking about the need for learning of the “right kind” (Beckett & Hager, 2002, p. 114, cited in Hager & Halliday, 2009, p. 30).

The problem with these normative values of learning as they are applied in adult learning research, theory and practice is that they actively work to valorise some forms of approved learning while excluding and devaluing other forms of learning and knowing. As discussed above, this has had, and continues to have devastating effects for many people around the world. In Jaimie’s situation, the informally learnt knowledge and skills that she has been applying in her paid work would not have been recognised by many Northern models of adult learning because it occurred across a number of life learning contexts, not just in or for the workplace for example. In addition, Jaimie’s learning, especially as a young teenaged mother, would not have conformed to the various normative conditions of approved learning. In a wider context, this issue of the normative valuing of some types of learning is an example of Connell’s (2007) conceptualisation of how Northern theories act to erase other knowledges, learning and ways of knowing.

These examples of the type of restrictions that were encountered with the Northern theories demonstrate the critical nature of engagement with them throughout the research. Firstly I did not accept any suggestion of potential universalism within these theories. Each theory is applicable to specific contexts and frames of reference including specific types of learning within particular types of paid work that are most likely to be found in some parts of the world and not others. Secondly I ‘disobeyed’ some of these author’s intents and used their work in different ways to establish better connections with the localised contexts and knowledges of the participants. This refusal to reify Northern theories sits closely with Connell’s idea of “dirty theory” where “theorising ...is mixed up with specific situations” (2007, p. 207).

This interruption of hegemonic Northern theories and practices is also enacted through the structuring of the research thesis. Essentially, each participant’s interview/transcript was developed into a chronological narrative that summarised key life events for each person and

drew out evidence of learning from those events. These six constructed narratives were initially used to assist with better understanding the themes and issues emerging from the data. However, the six narratives were then also included in the final thesis as interludes between the early theoretical chapters. This was an attempt at presenting each person's experiences and learning to the reader in as a holistic and complete way as possible before abstracting and dissecting them in the later analysis chapters.

Including the developed six participant narratives into the thesis was an attempt to literally create space for and privilege the words and experiences of these people.. Firstly the staggered positioning of the narratives as interludes was aimed at disrupting the dominant theoretical flow within the thesis. Secondly, the privileging of the participant's experiences created an opportunity for the words of these people, many of whom had been silenced in different aspects of their lives, to speak back to and interact with the dominant theoretical understandings of learning. Thirdly, this practice can be connected to the idea of minimising the erasure and loss of these people's experiences through the process of academic writing (Thesen, 2013, p. 1), while also challenging the norms of gatekeeping practices (Blommaert, 2005, p. 77, cited in Thesen, p. 6) and "centring organisations" (Thesen, p. 6).

Additionally, in the words of the editors of this special edition—this approach acted towards "interrupt(ing), (disputing) and defy(ing) Northern 'methodological 'business as usual'" (Takayama, Heimans, Amazan & Maniam, Introduction, this edition). This disruption of dominant theoretical flows and the inclusion of often marginalised voices can be seen to support Southern paradigm goals of the recognition of knowledge produced on the periphery and challenge the dominance and hegemony of Northern approaches by creating and clearly showing that there are spaces for different understandings of adult learning within and amongst the powerful theories from the North.

Significance

One of the key outcomes of critically modifying the Northern adult learning theories outlined above was the development and use of a patch-worked theoretical framework that was

used alongside the collected data to analyse both the data *and* the existing Northern theories. This framework was, in the first instance, able to recognise the broad range of everyday learning experiences across multiple contexts and practices coming from the participant's stories that had previously been hidden. Secondly, the developed framework assisted in analysing and making meanings of those experiences in new ways, on the one hand helping to identify the roles that everyday learning can play in both supporting existing inequalities and oppression, as well as surviving and challenging them. On the other hand, as noted before the findings also helped to create space for these experiences to directly speak back to Northern theories. Below are some key examples of the significant findings of the research made available through the critical engagement with the Northern adult learning theories.

All of the participant's stories are localised and situated within life experiences

The instances of learning that were identified from the data in my research arose directly from the lived experiences of each of the participants. These included stories about learning how to be a mum, about being the migrant (or "wog") child in an Australian school and community; growing up amongst intergenerational trauma; living in the midst of interfaith community violence; how to get by without being able to fully read or write; and living while fighting cancer, to name just a few. This means that the areas of knowledge under discussion were produced by each of these people and is highly situated and connected to the various contexts within which they lead their lives. By choosing to focus on this level of learning, the research works at the level of "local being" as opposed to "concepts and categories claiming universality" (Smith, 1997, p. 114). From a Southern Theory perspective, this approach aligns with the work of Selvadurai et al, (2013) and Connell (2007) that argue that the influence of universalised Northern based theory and practice needs to be challenged by "localizing knowledge" (Selvadurai et al, 2013, p. 97). In Connell's words, this concept becomes "dirty theory" (2007, p. 207): theory that is grounded within local contexts, practices and knowledges.

Some of the participants have been marginalised

Out of the six people who contributed to this research, two can be clearly seen to have reasonably privileged positions within Australian society. Both of the participants are white men who are over 50 years of age. One holds a permanent senior position at a university while the other is the current owner of the family sheep farm. On the other hand however, every participant identified at least one experience of learning a subordinate social place within a localised context through abuse, violence or conflict. Several participants can be seen to have experienced being devalued and marginalised within these local contexts and broader Australian society for significant periods of their lives.

This process of learning one's place involved one participant learning her relatively low position in the localised hierarchy of the school playground. This was based on Carmen coming from a different ethnic background from the rest of the children and physically standing out from them with her darker skin colour. The following excerpt has Carmen discussing what she experienced being a migrant – what she colloquially calls a “wog”, during her primary school years, and details her attempts to stop the abuse by trying to assimilate and be more physically like the children around her.

I remember being the wog kid and it was horrible. You got bashed up for it. Wash the blackness off your skin. I used to take the scouring brush, the metal one... Try and wash the blackness of my skin til my skin bled. And it was just so hard. Like you had to be spat on regularly and stoned. People would throw stones at you. (Carmen)

Another participant, Rose, says that she learnt early on that her place as an Aboriginal woman was based around

...you find someone, you settle down, you have kids...

and

...he (can) do whatever he wants to you... (Rose)

Rose remembers that she accepted this because that is what she saw in the lives and families of the people around her –

...that's all I knew...

...that's what you see, you don't know anything different and you live like that. (Rose)

This level of learning her position within her family and social groupings was further reinforced by Rose learning that Aboriginal people were given less status than non-Aboriginal people from her shortened time at school where

...if you didn't show any potential within that classroom, us as Aboriginal people we were put in the back...and basically we were left to ourselves. The teacher never really tried because you go back into the 70s, going back into that era, and the only time that we were ever acknowledged is when the sports carnivals come...

So they brought the black kids from the back and then we went... we were the leaders, we led our school to victory, and then back in the back again. So I went right through without learning to read or write.

This final excerpt shows Rose's marginalisation within Australian society, and quite specifically the role that formal education institutions played in silencing her and pushing her and her knowledge to the edges. This is a strong symbolic representation of my argument of the role that formal adult education systems have also played in the devaluing and ignoring of people's everyday informal learning more generally.

The participant's everyday learning generated important social knowledge

These excerpts are also significant examples of important knowledge about society that was produced from these people's everyday lives and learning. At the level of the individual, these excerpts provide powerful stories about the experiences of people surviving violence and abuse in their personal lives. However, these experiences did not happen in social or historical vacuums, but in the contexts of broader social, economic, political and historical relations and processes. For instance, in Rose's story, it is clear that she has also developed a strong understanding of her wider social positioning as an Indigenous woman within Australian society, especially in relation to her experiences with formal education.

Within the research, analysis was partly underpinned by feminist standpoint theorists such as Smith (1997) and Harding (2004). This analysis showed that the processes of participants learning their places in the worlds around them are firmly rooted within broader social positioning processes

based on axes of inequality including gender, race and class. With this connection, Carmen's experiences of schoolyard bullying can also be seen as Carmen being socially positioned within broader Australian society through her everyday experiences based on race. As Smith argues, the life experiences of disenfranchised or otherwise marginalised people, including women, can be seen to cut "the sociological cake differently from the traditional concepts of state, capital, formal organization, mass media, discourse and so forth" (Smith, 1997, p. 115), thus providing unique and vital understandings about society.

Using Connell and Rosa it can also be seen that this everyday learning is an important source of knowledge about society. At its most fundamental level, this everyday learning is localised and situated knowledge, which, as argued above is a key concern of authors such as Connell (2007) and Selvadurai et al (2013). In addition, this form of knowledge production fits with Santos' "notion of the South (that) is explicitly associated with alternative forms of knowledge for the social sciences" (Rosa, 2014, p. 853).

Conclusions

This article has presented and discussed a research project as an illustrative example of doing Southern Theory through literally "undoing" (Heimans, personal communications, April 2016) and then redoing Northern theories of adult learning and education. It has been demonstrated that critical review and evaluation of the dominant literature can reveal the restrictive mechanisms that contribute to the erasure of knowledges and learning through limited focus and the use of normative judgements of what learning can be, for instance. This article has also illuminated the potential of critical modification and adaptation of these Northern theories to develop a more responsive theoretical framework that is more capable of recognising, and then working with diverse experiences of learning in a wide range of life contexts. Lastly the article has then shown that doing Southern Theory in this way is not based on a dichotomous choice between North and South, but an attempt to find ways to make Northern theory more capable of engaging with experiences and learning from

the South, and attempting to reposition these marginalised knowledges more centrally.

References

- Abdi, A. A. (2012). Decolonising Philosophies of Education: An Introduction. In A. A. Abdi (Ed.), *Decolonising Philosophies of Education*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Abdi, A. A. and Kapoor, D. (2009). Global Perspectives on Adult Education: An Introduction. In A. A. Abdi and D. Kapoor (Eds.), *Global Perspectives on Adult Education*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Abdullah, J. and Stringer, E. (1999). Indigenous Knowledge, Indigenous Learning, Indigenous Research. In L. M. Semali and J. L. Kincheloe (Eds.), *What is Indigenous Knowledge? Voices from the Academy*. New York and London: Falmer Press.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics, (2008). *Australian Social Trends 2008 Adult Learning*. Canberra ACT: ABS.
- Bhambra, G.K. (2014). *Connected Sociologies*. London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury
- Chakrabarty, D. (2000.). *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial thought and historical difference*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Comaroff, J. and Comoraff, J.L. (2012). Theory from the South: Or how Euro-America is evolving towards Africa. *Anthropological Forum: A journal of social anthropology and comparative sociology*, 22 (2), 113-131.
- Conlon, T. J. (2004). A review of informal learning literature, theory and implications for practice. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 28(2-4), 283 -295.
- Connell, R. (2007). *Southern Theory: The global dynamics of knowledge in social science*. Crows Nest, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin.
- Eraut, M. (2000). Non-formal learning, implicit learning and tacit knowledge in professional work. In F. Coffield (Ed.), *The Necessity of Informal Learning: The Polity Press*.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). New York: Continuum.
- Freire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the City*. New York: Continuum.
- Goura, T. and Seltzer-Kelly, D. L. (2013). Decolonizing Vocational Education in Togo: Postcolonial, Deweyan and Feminist Considerations. *Education and Culture*, 29(1), 46-63.
- Hager, P. and Halliday, J. (2009). *Recovering Informal Learning: Wisdom, Judgement and Community*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

- Harding, S. (2004). Introduction: Standpoint Theory as a Site of Political, Philosophic, and Scientific Debate. In Harding, S. (Ed). *The Feminist Standpoint Reader*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Hickling-Hudson, A. (2007). Beyond Schooling: The role of Adult and Community Education in Postcolonial change. In R. F. Arnove and C.A. Torres (Eds.), *Comparative Education: The dialectic of the global and the local* (3rd ed). Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth (U.K.): Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Jules, D. (2013). Adult Education policy in Micro-States: The Case of the Caribbean. In P. Mayo (Ed.), *Learning with adults: A reader*. Rotterdam, Boston, Taipei: Sense Publishers
- Kapoor, D. (2009). Globalization, Dispossession, and Subaltern Social Movement (SSM) Learning in the South. In A. A. Abdi and D. Kapoor (Eds.), *Global Perspectives on Adult Education*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Marsick, V. J. (2009). Toward a unifying framework to support informal learning theory, research and practice. [Guest Editorial]. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 21(No. 4), 266-275.
- Marsick, V. J. and Watkins, K. (1990). *Informal and Incidental Learning in the Workplace*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Marsick, V. J. and Watkins, K. E. (2001). Informal and Incidental Learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 89 (Spring), 25-35.
- Merlyn, T. (2001). The longest war: the two traditions of adult education. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 41(3), 297 - 313.
- Mhina, C. and Abdi, A. A. (2009). Mwalimu's Mission: Julius Nyerere as (Adult) educator and philosopher of community development. In A. A. Abdi and D. Kapoor (Eds.), *Global Perspectives on Adult Education* (pp. 53 -70). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mignolo, W. D. (2000). *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Mignolo, W. D. (2011). The Global South and World Dis/Order. *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 67(2), 165-188.
- Patel, S. (Ed.). (2010). *The ISA handbook of diverse sociological traditions*. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage.
- Rosa, M. C. (2014). Theories of the South: Limits and perspectives of an emergent movement in social sciences. *Current Sociology*, 62(6), 851-867. doi: 10.1177/0011392114522171
- Santos, B. (2014). *Justice Against Epistemicide*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Schugurensky, D. (2000). The forms of informal learning: Towards a

- conceptualization of the field *NALL Working Papers* (Vol. Working Paper 19): NALL.
- Selvadurai, S., Choy, E. A., Maros, M. and Abdullah, K. (2013). Shifting Discourses in Social Sciences: Nexus of Knowledge and Power. *Asian Social Science*, 9(7) 97-106. doi: 10.5539/ass.v9n7p97
- Semali, L. M. and Kincheloe, J. L. (1999). Introduction: What is Indigenous Knowledge and Why Should We Study It? In L. M. Semali and J. L. Kincheloe (Eds.), *What is Indigenous Knowledge? Voices from the Academy*. New York and London: Falmer Press.
- Sfard, A. (1998). On Two Metaphors for Learning and the Dangers of Choosing Just One. *Educational Researcher*, 27 (2), 4-13.
- Shizha, E. and Abdi, A. A. (2009). Globalization and Adult Education in the South. In A. A. Abdi and D. Kapoor (Eds.), *Global Perspectives on Adult Education*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Smith, D. E. (1997). From the Margins: Women's Standpoint as a Method of Inquiry in the Social Sciences. *Gender, Technology and Development*, 1(1), 113-135. doi: 10.1177/097185249700100106
- Smith, D. E. (2004). Women's Perspective as a Radical Critique of Sociology. In S. Harding (Ed.), *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Smith, M. K. (1999, 2008). *The encyclopaedia of informal education*. Retrieved from www.infed.org/biblio/inf-lrn.htm
- Sternberg, R. J. (1988). *The Triarchic Mind: A new theory of human intelligence*. New York: Penguin.
- Thesen, L. (2014). Introduction- Risk as Productive: Working with dilemmas in the writing of research. In L. Thesen and L. Cooper (eds) *Risk in Academic Writing: Postgraduate students, their teachers and the making of knowledge*. Bristol, Buffalo, Toronto: Multilingual Matters
- Torres, R. M. (2004). *Lifelong Learning in the South: Critical issues and opportunities for Adult Education*. Retrieved from http://www.sida.se/English/publications/Publication_database/publications-by-year1/2004/november/lifelong-learning-in-the-south-critical-issues-and-opportunities-for-adult-education/