

### Adult Education Philosophies: Liberal (Arts) Orientation

The time-old purpose behind the education from a liberal philosophy is based on the enlightenment philosophy that uses adult education to broaden the mind, develop intellectual powers and wisdom, and to provide a well-rounded education. It stresses academic excellence, traditions and critical thinking (Zinn, 2007) and fosters virtues such as justice, fortitude, temperance and prudence (Lange, 2006).

Underlying this philosophy is the notion that learning is a source of joy (Quigley, 1996). Historically, liberal adult education philosophy was at a historical height in the age of enlightenment in the eighteenth century through key proponents such as Russia's Catherine the Great (Troyant, 1994) and the French and American revolutions of that epoch (Lange, 2006).

When I think of liberalism as a philosophy in practice, I think of lecture halls in Universities where hundreds of knowledge-seeking eager students scramble to take notes on a topic expounded on by a credentialed expert (Zinn, 2007), who above all emphasizes rationality and systematic study of a subject area (Lange, 2006; Tisdell & Taylor, 2001). It is an expedient method of teaching/learning that entails that the learner, viewed as a seeker of knowledge and traditional wisdom (Quigley, 1996), soak up what is taught and learns to subvert emotions in favour of rational thought (Tisdell & Taylor, 2001).

It is a philosophy that has been critiqued because it does not acknowledge inequities in learning related to race, gender or class (Tisdell & Taylor, 2001) and for its reliance on certain 'universal truths', which are in fact those of white, affluent, Western males (Lange, 2006). Liberal education philosophy eschews other types of knowing such

as emotional, spiritual and somatic. Key figures in this philosophy include Aristotle, Plato, Rousseau, Piaget, Adler, Houle, and Hirsch.