

### Adult Education Philosophies: Progressive Orientation

Progressive philosophy of adult education has a world view that society is constantly progressing towards its own betterment (Lange, 2006). It is closely related to Darwinism, and relies heavily on the authority of science to prove the value of a concept or idea through experimentation and application (Lange, 2006). The original underlying ideals of this philosophy included universal public education as an answer to ameliorating society and curing the ills associated with socially disruptive rapid urbanisation and industrialisation of the nineteenth century (Lange, 2006). In the twentieth century, John Dewey, an adherent to the principles of progressive education, purported that scientific and social literacy were critical to a strong democracy and thoughtful, responsible citizens (Lange, 2006).

In practice, progressive education is what I picture occurring in community and cooperative settings. The learner is central and is valued for their interests, needs and experiences that become part of the learning process through active inquiry, collaboration and practical learning (Zinn, 2007). It is believed that adults can learn by doing (Quigley, 1996). According to Rousseau, the learner's natural human curiosity is tapped into in teaching/learning (Lange, 2006). With this philosophy, the teacher is a guide or a coach who supports responsible participation in society and provides problem-solving skills (Zinn, 2007). The teacher organizes the learning process using needs-based and prior learning assessments and provides real-life applications and guides the learners in collaborative problem-solving (Zinn, 2007). This philosophy has been criticized in its applications for K-12 education for its intense "activity-centered" learning and the lack of a clear role for the teacher. More germane to adult education is the criticism that the

promotion of societal progress is defined by Western ideals, and may ignore political and economic power relations (Lange, 2006). Key thought leaders in this philosophy are Rousseau, Dewey, Tyler, Whitehead, and Lindeman.