

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND

**PARTICIPATORY ACTION LEARNING:
AN APPROACH TO GENERATIVE CURRICULUM
DEVELOPMENT OF PARENTING EDUCATION
PROGRAMMES**

A Dissertation submitted by

Win Aung, B. Ed., M.A. (Ed.)

In partial fulfillment of the award of

Doctor of Education

2009

People's participation in social and political transformation is the central issue of our time. This can only be achieved through the establishment of societies which place human worth above power and liberation above control. In this paradigm, development requires democracy, the genuine empowerment of the people. When this is achieved, culture and development will coalesce an environment in which all are valued and every kind of human potential can be realized.

Aung San Suu Kyi

*Winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize
from Burma (Myanmar)*

ABSTRACT

The study explores an approach where professionals work with people in the communities for the development of a parenting education programme for mothers to enhance their early childhood care practices. The focus of the study is the process of generative curriculum development, applying participatory and dialogic pedagogical principles and practices which facilitate empowering and emancipatory learning in the parenting education programmes. Accordingly, the literature review is concerned with two areas: the first is on the concept and practices of early childhood care and development with some highlights on parenting education; and the second on the theory and practice of empowering and emancipatory adult education with reference to the Generative Curriculum Development approach to blend local knowledge and academic/professional knowledge on early childhood care and development.

Since the focus of the research is the process for change in child care practices of the mothers as well as the pedagogic practices of the adult educators, participatory action research was considered an appropriate research methodology and participatory action learning as a learning approach. There were two action learning circles involved in the research: the parenting education action learning circle and the pedagogic action learning circle. Parenting action learning circles dealt with enhancement of early childhood care practices of mothers while the pedagogic action learning circle explored more effective pedagogic practices of parenting educators. Data were collected from both circles and data analysis was done in a continuous and progressive manner, along with the repeated cycles of participatory action learning using the constant comparative method based on the grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The findings have indicated that the Generative Curriculum Development process appeared to be a practicable model for participatory development of an education programme while contributing to the progressive understanding of praxis-based pedagogy (Freire, 1970, 1995; Shor, 1992; Vella, 1994) and

advancement in related pedagogical principles and practices for empowering and emancipatory education for social change. The research experience has also shown that people have an impressive wealth of knowledge and immense potential to advance their knowledge if the opportunity is provided. It was evident that in order to realise this potential the adult educators had to make an ideological shift from depositing knowledge into the learners towards empowering them to build their competence and confidence in creating their own knowledge. The analysis, on the other hand, enabled a number of recommendations in relation to development programming in general, and adult education and early childhood care in particular. It is envisioned that these recommendations will enable the development partners in the country to promote greater and genuine participation for empowerment of the people to bring about change.

CERTIFICATION OF DISSERTATION

I certify that the ideas, results, analyses and conclusions reported in this dissertation are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.

Signature of Candidate

Date

ENDORSEMENT

Signature of Supervisor

Date

Signature of Supervisor

Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My doctoral journey has taken an unusually long time for various reasons but my immediate and extended family have all shown their understanding and faith in what I have been doing. I would like to express my heart-felt thanks to them for their strong faith in me and support of my study. Particularly, I owe a lot to my wife, Pyone, for her sacrifices during my ten year doctoral journey. She has been supportive to my commitment in life-long learning. Thank you, Pyone, for being you.

I am deeply indebted to my colleagues from the Ministry of Education and the partner Non Governmental Organization (NGO) as they have enthusiastically and voluntarily joined me in conducting this study as co-researchers and co-learners in spite of their enormous work responsibilities. I also would like to express my sincere thanks to my colleagues from my office who have provided invaluable comments and suggestions during both the research process and the analytical writing stage of the dissertation. Particularly I am very grateful to my “critical friend”, Linda Jenkinson, for her insightful comments and provocative questions when developing the draft.

Similarly, I would like to express my deep appreciation to my supervisors, Dr. Dorothy Andrews and Dr. Jon Austin for their patience, understanding and encouragement as well as invaluable guidance and advice in my study in the USQ. There are many other people at USQ to whom I would like to express my earnest thanks for their assistance and guidance in my study for the Doctor of Education degree there. Particularly, my sincere gratefulness goes to the Faculty of Education for awarding the Scholarship for my enrolment in Semesters One and Two of 2009. Without that assistance, it would be extremely difficult for me to continue the study and complete this dissertation.

Last but not least, I want to thank the individuals from the communities, particularly the mothers from the Mothers’ Circles who participated in the study. Without their contributions, this dissertation will not be possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	iii
Certification of Dissertation.....	v
Acknowledgement.....	vi
List of Figures.....	xi
List of Tables.....	xii
Glossary of Terms.....	xiii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH STUDY	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY.....	1
1.3 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY.....	4
1.4 THE RESEARCHER IN THE RESEARCH.....	8
1.5 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY.....	9
1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY.....	12
1.7 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND QUESTIONS	15
1.7 COMPONENTS OF THE STUDY.....	16
1.9 OVERVIEW.....	19
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW - EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT; AND EMPOWERING ADULT EDUCATION.....	22
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	22
2.2 EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT.....	23
2.2.1 Global commitments for young children.....	25
2.2.2 Importance of early years.....	28
2.2.3 Early childhood care framework.....	31
2.2.4 Culture and context in early childhood care for development.....	35
2.2.5 The role of parents in early childhood and the need for parenting education	39
2.3 EMPOWERING ADULT EDUCATION	43
2.3.1 Adult education in development programming context	44
2.3.2 Empowering and emancipatory adult education	46
2.3.3 Praxis: repeated cycle of action and reflection.....	49
2.3.4 Power relationship in empowering and emancipatory education	50
2.3.5 Emancipatory education and active learning methodologies	52
2.3.6 Generative curriculum development	55
2.4 CONCLUSION	58
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCESS.....	62
3.1 INTRODUCTION.....	62
3.2 DETERMINING METHODOLOGY	62
3.3 ACTION RESEARCH.....	66
3.4 ACTION LEARNING.....	69
3.5 RESEARCH PROCESS.....	73
3.5.1 Research sites	73

3.5.2	Research participants	74
3.5.3	Research phases	76
3.6	DATA COLLECTION METHODS	77
3.6.1	Participatory Learning and Action (PLA)	78
3.6.2	Reflective journals.....	82
3.6.3	Observations.....	83
3.6.4	Focus group discussions and interviews.....	84
3.7	DATA ANALYSIS	86
3.7.1	Analysis of data on child care practices	87
3.7.2	Analysis of data on pedagogical practices	90
3.8	VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY.....	94
3.9	ETHICAL ISSUES	97
3.10	CONCLUSION	98

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH EXPERIENCES: WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES FOR GENERATIVE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT ON PARENTING EDUCATION..... 100

4.1	INTRODUCTION.....	100
4.2	PHASE ONE: EXPLORING COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES ON EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT	101
4.2.1	Community context	102
4.2.2	Perceptions, beliefs, and expectations of parents and communities regarding children's development.....	107
4.2.3	Childcare practices and patterns.....	115
4.2.4	Coping with child care problems and challenges	125
4.2.5	Key issues that emerged.....	128
4.3	PHASE TWO: PLANNING AND DEVELOPING A PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE	131
4.3.1	Themes and topics for the parenting education programme.....	132
4.3.2	Content and language.....	134
4.3.3	Pedagogical approach for conducting parenting education sessions	137
4.4	PHASE THREE: MERGING COMMUNITY WISDOM AND PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN PARENTING ACTION LEARNING CIRCLES.....	138
4.4.1	Setting the ground for learning.....	139
4.4.2	The learning process	140
4.4.3	Taking action for change.....	151
4.5	CONCLUSION	153

CHAPTER FIVE: PRAXIS IN THE ADULT EDUCATION ACTION LEARNING CIRCLES – REFLECTIONS ON PEDAGOGIC PRACTICES..... 155

5.1	INTRODUCTION.....	155
5.2	ADULT EDUCATORS AS LEARNERS IN THE GENERATIVE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT PROCESS	155
5.2.1	Reflections on What was Learned from the Communities.....	157

5.2.2	Reflections on the Factors Facilitating Learning from the Communities	161
5.3	FACILITATING LEARNING IN EDUCATION FOR EMPOWERMENT AND EMANCIPATION	165
5.3.1	Creating conducive learning environment	166
5.3.2	Structuring learning activities	169
5.3.3	Using authentic contents and materials	174
5.3.4	Exercising authority and delegating responsibility.....	176
5.3.5	Creating a "third idiom" for all.....	179
5.4	PROMOTING PARTICIPATORY ACTION FOR CHANGE IN ADDRESSING CHILD CARE ISSUES	182
5.4.1	Emancipatory learning: prerequisite for genuine participation..	182
5.4.2	Empowering mothers for participatory action for change	185
5.5	CHALLENGES IN EMANCIPATORY AND EMPOWERING EDUCATION FOR MOTHERS.....	187
5.6	CONCLUSION	191
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS		193
6.1	INTRODUCTION	193
6.2	REFLECTIONS ON THE GENERATIVE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT MODEL.....	194
6.3	WORKING WITH PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES ON THEIR CHILD CARE ISSUES	198
6.3.1	Recognising existing strengths and challenges	199
6.3.2	Building confidence and competence among the caregivers/ mothers.....	203
6.3.3	Generating solutions, alternatives and choices.....	206
6.4	PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES IN EMPOWERING AND EMANCIPATORY EDUCATION	208
6.4.1	Development of the curriculum for the parenting education programme	208
6.4.2	Delivery process of the parenting education programme.....	211
6.4.3	The role of learners in empowering education	214
6.4.4	Characteristics and quality of empowering adult educators	216
6.5	EMPOWERING PEOPLE TO GENUINELY AND MEANINGFULLY PARTICIPATE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PARENTING EDUCATION PROGRAMME	218
6.5.1	Emancipation	218
6.5.2	Empowerment.....	221
6.5.3	Participation.	225
6.6	CONCLUSION	229
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....		232
7.1	INTRODUCTION	232
7.2	THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS	233

7.3	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS.....	235
7.3.1	Contributions to the understanding of Freirean pedagogical theory.....	235
7.3.2	Contributions to the advancement of pedagogical practices ...	238
7.4	GENERAL IMPLICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION, ADULT EDUCATION AND PARENTING EDUCATION IN BURMA (MYANMAR).....	240
7.4.1	Early childhood care and development.....	240
7.4.2	Professional development in adult education in Myanmar (Burma).....	242
7.4.3	Participatory approach to development programmes.....	243
7.5	LIMITATION OF THE STUDY.....	245
7.6	IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	247
7.7	GENERAL CONCLUSION.....	249
	REFERENCES.....	251
	APPENDICES.....	264

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1.1: ECCD Network Project Activities in the Communities.....	7
FIGURE 1.2: Dynamics and Relationships among Research Participants..	17
FIGURE 2.1: Emerging View of Nutrition, Health and Psycho-social Wellbeing.....	29
FIGURE 2.2: Early Childhood Care Model	34
FIGURE 2.3: Developmental Niche Framework	37
FIGURE 3.1: Reflection Types	77
FIGURE 3.2: Flow Diagram for the Analysis of Findings from Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) Exercises	89
FIGURE 4.1: A Community Map Drawn by a Mothers Group.....	103
FIGURE 4.2: Milestones of Child Development Identified by a Group of Mothers.....	109
FIGURE 4.3: Daily Routines of a Working Mother's Household and Child Care Activities	118
FIGURE 4.4: Venn Diagram: Resources to Solve Child Care Problems in the Community.....	127

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 3.1: Empowerment Potentials and Critical Research Methodologies	64
TABLE 3.2: Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) tools.....	80
TABLE 3.3: Examples of Coding	92
TABLE 4.1: Wealth Ranking by Participants in a Community.....	105
TABLE 4.2: Community Perception on Children's Needs in Early Childhood.....	111
TABLE 4.3: Problems and Challenges for Child Caring Identified by a Mothers Group	126
TABLE 4.4: Key Issues on Child Care Identified during the PLA Exercises	129

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

critical democratic dialogue a communicative interaction between the educator and learners as well as among learners to reflect together on the meaning of their knowledge, experiences and actions. This term is used to put emphasis on the critical and democratic nature of the interaction, contrasting it from the mere conversation/discussion among participants.

generative curriculum development a curriculum development process in which curriculum objectives, content, materials and methodologies are grounded in learners' own knowledge and experiences, and generated by themselves.

informal learning the way people learn things in their every-day life, without predetermined, and pre-structured learning objectives, procedures, materials and methodologies, and formal facilitation.

informal education provision of education without any specifically structured learning programmes; e.g., educating people through media.

naturalistic learning a form of learning organized in such a way that people engage in the learning process as closely as possible to how they learn naturally in every-day life.

Participatory Action Learning (PAL) an approach to generate experiential and collaborative learning among participants through

repeated cycles of action, reflection and reaction upon the issues of their concerns and interests.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) a form of collective and collaborative self-reflective enquiry undertaken by a group of people in a repeated spiral cycles of action and observation, critical reflection, and reaction to improve their own social and educational practices, as well as to enhance their understanding about these practices.

Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) a qualitative research methodology, which derives from the rapid assessment methods such as Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Rapid Assessment Procedures (RAP), involving communities from the outset through the entire process of research, and helps them analyze their own situation and make decisions regarding actions to solve their problems.