This chapter examines the changing nature of adult education in the age of transnational migration and proposes recognitive adult education as an inclusive model that acknowledges and affirms cultural difference and diversity as positive and desirable assets.

The Changing Nature of Adult Education in the Age of Transnational Migration: Toward a Model of Recognitive Adult Education

Shibao Guo

Migration is a broad term used to describe the movement of populations from one place to another. Often used interchangeably with migration, immigration refers to the permanent movement of people from one country to another. Where migration most often refers to the movement of populations between nation–states, internal migration is used to describe movements of population within a nation–state. For example, it is claimed that in recent decades China has experienced the largest internal migration in human history. Besides “internal migration” and “international migration,” the relatively recent term transnational migration describes the multiple and circular migration across transnational spaces of migrants who maintain close contact with their countries of origin. With the development of modern transportation and advanced communication technologies, migration has shifted from international to transnational, as “multiple, circular and return migrations, rather than a singular great journey from one sedentary space to another, occur across transnational spaces” (Lie, 1995, p. 304). In this view, migrants can no longer be characterized as “uprooted” people who are expected to make a sharp and definitive break from their homelands (Glick Schiller, Basch, & Szanton Blanc, 1995). Instead, their daily lives depend on “multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state” (p. 48).

As a result of transnational migration, many countries are becoming increasingly ethnoculturally diverse. As newcomers, adult immigrants need educational programs to help them navigate complex paths to citizenship, and to upgrade their language, knowledge, and skills to fully participate in the host society. As our populations grow more diverse, it is imperative for adult
education to continue its long-standing commitment to social inclusion by working toward a more inclusive adult education squarely focused on the benefit of marginalized adult learners (e.g., workers, farmers, women, racialized minorities). In this regard, it is not clear to what extent adult education has upheld its progressive roots in creating socially just and inclusive education environments for adult immigrants. This chapter examines the changing nature of adult education in the age of transnational migration. The discussion that follows is organized into four parts. It begins with an overview of the contextual information related to transnational migration and moves on to an analysis of theoretical debates. The third part examines the impact of transnational migration on adult education and how adult education has responded. The chapter ends with a discussion of its implications for adult education.

Mapping Transnational Migration

This section maps the landscape of transnational migration, including its scope, magnitude, and trends. Owing to divergence in national contexts as well as differences between and within migrant groups, it is difficult to capture its complexities. Migration takes many forms depending on, among other factors, whether the moving subject is a manual worker, a highly qualified specialist, an entrepreneur, a refugee, or if the impetus for migration is family reunification. The fact that migrants enter their destinations via diverse channels leads us to apply a range of labels to them, e.g., temporary workers, permanent immigrants, or asylum seekers. At present, however, it is not clear exactly how many transnational migrants there are. Global inequality means that transnational migration tends to be from less developed nations to the advanced industrial countries, toward OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) member nations. In order to draw some conclusions on the magnitude of contemporary transnational migration, it is useful to look at the OECD’s comprehensive annual report on recent developments in migration in its member countries. According to recent OECD Annual Reports (OECD 2008, 2013), some of the salient features of today’s transnational migration trends in OECD countries include the following. First, migration of both permanent and temporary immigrants from outside the OECD to OECD countries continues to increase, from an average of 790,000 persons per year between 1956 and 1976, 1.24 million per year during 1977–1990, and 2.65 million per year from 1991 to 2003. Numbers in 2010 reached almost 4 million. Temporary migration is also increasing but at a slower pace than permanent-type migration, sitting at about 2 million in 2010. Furthermore, asylum seeking in OECD countries rose by more than one fifth in 2011 partially due to the “Arab Spring,” exceeding 400,000 for the first time since 2003. On average, immigration accounted for 40% of total population growth over the period 2001–2011 in OECD countries whose populations are still growing.

Second, migrants from Eastern Europe and Asia continue to dominate. In 2011, China (10%), Romania (6%), Poland (5.3%), India (4.7%), the
Philippines (3.1%), and Mexico (3.1%) provided one third of total migrants into OECD countries. Migration to European countries continues to be characterized by free circulation within the European Economic Area (EEA), which rose by 15% in 2011 and is now four times more common relative to migration from elsewhere. Third, the migration of highly skilled workers has increased during the past 2 decades. Many OECD countries have adopted point-based systems for the selection of high-skilled candidates, assigning scores in the areas on their education, skills, and resources. Fourth, depending on the destination country and the period of time considered, 20% to 50% of immigrants leave the host country within 5 years of their arrival, either to return home or to move to a third country (OECD, 2008). Migrants move again for four major reasons, including failure to integrate in the host country, individuals’ desire to return to their home countries, achievement of a savings objective, or the opening of employment opportunities in their home countries (OECD, 2008). The 2013 report indicates that flows out of southern European countries most affected by the economic crisis (e.g., Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain) accelerated by 45% from 2009 to 2011 (OECD, 2013). Many countries continue to seek ways of encouraging skilled members of these diaspora to return.

As a result of transnational migration, the foreign-born population of OECD countries as a whole reached 12.5% of the total population in 2011, representing an increase by about 30 million persons over 10 years (2001–2011). Among the top immigrant-receiving countries, 26.8% of Australia’s citizens were foreign born, followed by Canada at 20.6%, Germany at 13%, the United States at 12.9%, and the United Kingdom at 11.5% (OECD, 2013). It is predicted that the populations of other OECD member states will increasingly resemble these countries in the coming years with respect to both prevalence and diversity.

**Theorizing Transnational Migration**

In articulating transnational migration, Lie (1995) argues that “the idea of transnationalism challenges the rigid, territorial nationalism that defines the modern nation-state” (p. 304). According to Lie, “transnationalism” makes it possible for imagined diaspora communities to subvert old conceptions of unidirectional migrant passage and replace them with understandings centered on images of unending sojourn across different lands. It seems clear that the concept of transnationalism provides the necessary theoretical underpinning for transnational migration, which is the focus of this section.

Transnationalism is not a new concept per se. According to Kivisto (2001), the earliest articulation of transnationalism was by cultural anthropologists (i.e., Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Christina Szanton Blanc). In its debut in the early 1990s it offered a novel analytical approach to understanding contemporary migration. Sociologist Alejandro Portes is most responsible for popularizing and expanding the use of transnationalism (Portes, 1999, 2003; Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, 1999). Portes et al. (1999) propose...
three criteria for identifying a transnational phenomenon: the process involves a significant proportion of persons in the relevant universe; the activities of interest possess certain stability and resilience over time; and the content of these activities is not captured by some preexisting concept. When analyzing transnationalism, individuals and their support networks are regarded as the proper units of analysis. According to Portes et al., a study that begins with the history and activities of individuals is “the most efficient way of learning about the institutional underpinnings of transnationalism and its structural effects” (p. 220). Unlike early transnationalism, which was often limited to elites, contemporary grassroots transnational activities have developed in reaction to government policies—and to the condition of dependent capitalism foisted on weaker countries—to circumvent the permanent subordination of immigrants and their families. At the grassroots level, Portes (1999) points out elsewhere, transnationalism offers an economic alternative to immigrants’ low-wage dead-end employment situation, gives them political voice, and allows them to reaffirm their own self-worth.

Transitional activities can be organized into three types: economic, political, and sociocultural (Portes et al., 1999). The main goals of each type are different. To be more specific, transnational economic entrepreneurs are interested in mobilizing their contacts across borders in search of suppliers, capital, and markets; transnational political activities aim to foster political power and influence in sending or receiving countries; and sociocultural transnationalism is oriented toward the reinforcement of a national identity abroad or the collective enjoyment of cultural events and goods. Another useful distinction is made between transnationalism “from above” and “from below,” initiated respectively by powerful states and corporations, and by grassroots immigrants and their home country counterparts. In commenting on the fear that transnational activities will slow down the process of assimilation in immigrant host nations, Portes (1999) maintains that transnational activities can actually facilitate successful adaptation by providing opportunities for economic mobility and for a vital and purposeful group life. He also points out that the overall bearing of transnational activities on sending countries is positive, both economically and politically. Migrant remittances and business investments promote economic growth, and political activism is most likely to align with the forces of change in promoting democracy and reducing corruption and violation of human rights at home. Portes (2003) further argues that transnationalism provides “an alternative path of socioeconomic and political adaptation to the host society not envisioned by traditional models of assimilation” (p. 887).

Researching Transnational Migration and Adult Education

Despite the long tradition of adult education in serving marginalized groups, until recently there has been a lack of interest among adult educators in issues related to transnational migration (Alfred & Guo, 2012). Transnational migration did not draw the attention of the international adult education
community until the new millennium when Canadian scholars (Mojab, Ng, & Mirchandani, 2000) organized the first roundtable focused on the concept at the joint AERC (Adult Education Research Conference) and CASAE (Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education) conference in Vancouver. Since then we have witnessed an emerging critical scholarship in studies related to transnational migration and adult education focusing on the following topics: devaluation of immigrants’ prior learning and work experience, marginalization of immigrant women, volunteering and informal learning, and community-based adult education.

Devaluation of Immigrants’ Foreign Credentials. Deskilling and devaluation of immigrants’ prior learning and work experience is one of most important issues studied by international adult educators. Despite many countries’ preference for highly skilled immigrants and the fact that immigrants bring significant human capital resources to the host country, many well-educated immigrants encounter difficulties in integrating into the host society due to a lack of recognition of prior learning and work experience (Andersson & Fejes, 2010; Brandi, 2001; Guo, 2009, 2013; Morrice, 2013; Shan, 2009a, 2009b; Wagner & Childs, 2006). In Australia, where recruitment addresses specific skills gaps and labor market shortages, skilled migrants, particularly those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, face an ironic situation. Those whose skills are most needed encounter special difficulties in gaining access to these professions (Wagner & Childs, 2006). As Wagner and Childs observe, immigrant optometrists become taxi drivers, social workers become hospital cleaners, teachers become clerical assistants, and environmental engineers stack supermarket shelves. Unfortunately, this experience is not unique to Australia. Italy’s “brain gain” has become a “brain waste” (Brandi, 2001). Brandi reports that more than 40% of Rome’s skilled migrants, particularly these from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, work in low-skill jobs. Immigrants in Canada face similar challenges. Guo (2013) uses the triple glass effect to illustrate the multiple layers of structural barriers facing immigrant professionals in Canada as a result of devaluation of their prior learning and work experiences, including a glass gate, a glass door, and a glass ceiling. A glass gate denies immigrants’ entrance to guarded professional communities, and a glass door blocks immigrants’ access to professional employment at high-wage firms. Finally, a glass ceiling prevents immigrants from moving into management positions because of their ethnic and cultural differences. Highly educated refugees in Sweden and the United Kingdom encounter similar barriers (Andersson & Fejes, 2010; Morrice, 2013).

Lack of access to the professional occupations for which immigrants have prior learning and work experience leads to unemployment and underemployment, poor economic performance, and downward social mobility. In tracing its root causes, Guo (2009) attributed the devaluation phenomenon to epistemological misperceptions of difference and knowledge and an objectivist ontology and liberal universalism. The deficit model of difference leads to conflation of “difference” and “deficiency,” as well as a belief that the knowledge
of immigrant professionals, particularly those from developing countries, is incompatible and inferior, and, hence, invalid. Knowledge has been racialized and materialized on the basis of ethnic and national origin. Furthermore, our commitment to an objectivist ontology and liberal universalism exacerbates the complexity of this process. Guo’s study demonstrates that by applying a one-size-fits-all criterion to the measurement of immigrants’ credentials and experience, liberal universalism denies immigrants opportunities to be successful in the new society. It also reveals that discourses of “professional standards” and “excellence” have been used as a cloak to restrict competition and legitimize existing power relations. Once heralded by adult educators as potentially the most radical innovation since the introduction of mass formal education, it seems evident that prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) has become a serious barrier to adult learning rather than a facilitator. The difficulties immigrant professionals face in being recognized in the host society suggest that PLAR procedures have been deployed as technologies of power and a system of governing in discounting and devaluing immigrants’ prior learning and work experience, thus reducing adult education to a system of exclusion and a mode of social control (Andersson & Guo, 2009).

Marginalization of Immigrant Women. The situation of immigrant women is worse still. A number of studies demonstrate that immigrant women face multiple barriers in adapting to the host society, particularly in accessing the labor market, owing to disadvantages attributed to gender, class, and race (Gibb & Hamdon, 2010; Maitra & Shan, 2007; Mojab, 1999; Ng, 1999; Shan, 2009a, 2009b). Feminist scholars argue that, in the labor force, the category of “immigrant women” serves to commodify these women to employers (Mojab, 1999; Ng, 1999). Their existing lower class positions are reinforced when they provide cheap, docile labor to the state under exploitive conditions, often permeated with racism and sexism. Maitra and Shan (2007) showed how highly skilled professional immigrant women learn to reorient and reshape their skills, experiences, and aspirations in order to secure employment in ways that can be both conformative and transgressive. In a study with immigrant women in Toronto, Shan (2009b) found that the women resort to retraining and reeducation as a means to improve their employment prospects. She uses the credential and certificate regime to explain the social process and practices that attribute differential values to credentials and certificates produced in different places. Some women also resort to strategic tolerance, mobilize their prior knowledge and expertise, and become agents of change (Shan, 2009a). Shan further argues that the legitimate space presupposed in situated learning was an entitlement that the women had to earn in Canada. Crucially, adult educators took up these issues and examined how gender, class, and race interacted to shape the experience of immigrant women, particularly women of color.

Volunteering and Informal Learning. Volunteering has been identified by many researchers as a powerful source of informal learning (Guo, 2014; Sawchuk, 2008; Slade & Schugurensky, 2010). Immigrants volunteer for a
range of reasons, from altruism to learning new skills for career advancement. Through volunteering, immigrants learn the necessary language, skills, and knowledge required of new citizens for successful integration into the host society. Immigrants consider informal learning from the volunteer experience to be more significant than formal, job-related training. One of the most valued areas of learning through this process is communication skills. As alluded to earlier, one of the most prominent issues facing immigrants is unemployment and underemployment. In this context, volunteering has been adopted by many immigrants as a strategy to gain local work experience and improve their access to the labor market (Slade & Schugurensky, 2010). Volunteering and informal learning are seen as important stepping stones for the integration of immigrants in helping them navigate the complex paths to citizenship. Unlike traditional forms of volunteering, which are freely chosen, the decision of immigrants to volunteer is often the result of labor market pressures. In this sense, Slade and Schugurensky (2010) argue, for immigrants volunteering is more coerced than an expression of individual freedom. Furthermore, volunteering helps immigrants build a community and a sense of belonging. Immigrants participate in volunteer activities to fulfill their social responsibilities as active citizens to take collective action in providing mutual support to newcomers, helping them overcome barriers in settlement and adaptation in the new society (Guo, 2014). In this sense, volunteering becomes an important site for the kind of social action and emancipatory learning that Foley (1999) speaks of.

**Community-Based Adult Education.** A number of studies investigate the potential for community organizations to act as spaces and places of adult education for recent immigrants (Guo, 2006; Guo & Guo, 2011; Jackson, 2010; Kim, 2010). A common issue faced in serving immigrants lies in the “sameness” approach, which treats all adult learners as having the same learning needs and backgrounds, thus negating and denigrating immigrant learners’ rich sociocultural diversity and complexity (Guo, 2010). As a consequence, many adult immigrant learners feel alienated and excluded. Because mainstream adult education organizations fail to provide immigrants with education programs that are culturally and linguistically accessible and appropriate, community-based adult education has become an alternative in providing inclusive and equitable programs to adult immigrants. In Canada, ethnocultural organizations play an important role in promoting adult and lifelong education (Guo, 2006; Guo & Guo, 2011). They are effective and responsive in providing culturally and linguistically accessible and appropriate educational programs to adult immigrants, including language education, employment programs, business development and training, counseling services, and community development. Their programs have helped immigrants ease the process of settlement and adaptation. More important, they have created homes and communities to which immigrants feel they belong. Elsewhere, Jackson (2010) in the United Kingdom and Kim (2010) in South Korea report similar findings. In particular, they emphasize the importance of the social spaces
these organizations have created, which enable immigrants to network with each other to affirm identities and develop relational capital and an enhanced sense of belonging. As transitional institutions, they have acted as stepping stones for immigrants to integrate into mainstream society and as mediators between individual immigrant and receiving states. They also demonstrate that communities are important sites for emancipatory learning and social action (Cunningham, 2000).

**Conclusion: Toward a Model of Recognitive Adult Education**

The discussion in this chapter highlights the changing landscape of adult education characterized by cross-disciplinary and multidisciplinary orientations and activities focusing on the complexity of immigrant experiences. The four themes that emerge from this analysis demonstrate that the changing diversity resulting from transnational migration poses both challenges and new opportunities for further development in adult education. In the process of building inclusive adult education, we have witnessed two prominent challenges confronting adult educators in our daily practice: the “difference as deficit” perspective, which views difference as deficiency, and the “sameness” approach, which assumes that all learners have the same background and learning needs. Despite adult education’s long-standing commitment to social justice, this analysis demonstrates that the field has played a dual role in responding to transnational migration and cultural diversity as both enabler and constrainer. Immigrant women’s marginalized experiences and the devaluation of immigrants’ prior learning and work experience suggest that adult education has created a system of exclusion and a model of social control. In this sense, adult education has failed to respond positively to the changing needs of adult immigrants and failed to embrace cultural diversity and difference that recent immigrant learners bring to adult education settings. On the other hand, community-based, informal learning indicates that adult education has created important spaces for emancipatory learning and social action. In this view, adult education remains an enabler.

To reclaim the radical roots of adult education for social inclusion, I propose **recognitive adult education** as a paradigm shift in building inclusive and socially just educational environments. Recognitive adult education is in alignment with the principles of recognitive justice, which provide an expanded understanding of social justice insisting that we must not only rethink what we mean by social justice but also acknowledge the place of social and cultural groups within this space (Fraser, 2000, 2008, 2009; Gale & Densmore, 2000; Guo, 2010). Recognitive justice advocates three necessary conditions for social justice: the fostering of respect for different social groups through their self-identification, opportunities for self-development and self-expression, and the participation of groups in decision making through group representation (Gale & Densmore, 2000). Because a society without intragroup differences is neither possible nor desirable, recognizing the validity of social and cultural
groups is essential for their identity, sense of worth, and self-esteem (Fraser, 2000, 2008, 2009; Honneth, 2008). Fraser explains that claims for recognition have become the “paradigmatic form of political conflict” since the late 20th century (Fraser, 2008, p. 188). Treating recognition as a matter of social status, she argues that the struggle for recognition means “examining institutionalized patterns of cultural value for the effects on the relative standing of social actors” (Fraser, 2000, p. 113). To be misrecognised, according to Fraser, is to be denied the status of a full partner in social interaction, which constitutes a form of institutionalized subordination and a serious violation of justice. In this view, redressing misrecognition should aim at overcoming subordination, replacing institutionalized value patterns that impede parity of participation with ones that foster it. To achieve this goal, Fraser suggests developing a critical theory of recognition that can coherently combine two analytically distinct kinds of remedy; redistribution and recognition, which are fundamental to achieving the justice of representation that ensures equal political voice (Fraser, 2009).

This notion of recognitive justice informs the notion of recognitive adult education, offering a broadened perspective on migration that recognizes its transnational flows and concomitant diasporic allegiances and affiliations. It seeks to balance freedom of mobility with protection, recognition, and membership. Recognitive adult education rejects the deficit model of adult education that seeks to assimilate migrants to the dominant social, cultural, and educational norms of the host society. It proposes instead to build an inclusive education that acknowledges and affirms cultural difference and diversity as positive and desirable assets. These assets are seen as a means of ensuring the participation of individuals from socially and culturally differentiated groups in social, political, and educational institutions. It challenges Eurocentric perspectives, standards, and values and accepts currently marginalized knowledges as valid and valuable expressions of the human experience. This framework will inform policymakers, researchers, and practitioners in developing inclusive policies and initiatives in the area of adult education, immigrant settlement and integration, work, and learning in order to embrace people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

References


**Shibao Guo** is an associate professor in adult learning at the University of Calgary and currently serves as the president of the Canadian Ethnic Studies Association and as a coeditor of Canadian Ethnic Studies.