“It is not Working for Them but with Them”: Adult Educators Roles With Community Groups in Transforming Communities

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Abstract: This paper reflects on Freire’s discourse on liberating education and adult educators’ educational roles with community groups in transforming communities. Mineral-rich communities in Ghana are in danger of losing water bodies, rich arable lands, and forest vegetation cover through “galamsey,” which refers to the gathering of rich mineral resources illegally for sale. Yet the fourth Industrial Revolution Age positions adult educators strategically in making learning the needed skill among community groups to improve communities. This qualitative study adopted a convenience sampling procedure to select and interview eight graduate students in a higher education institution (HEI) in Ghana. Data were analyzed using thematic and narrative approaches. The results indicate that adult educators’ educational roles are empowering, yet they should employ more dialogical, storytelling, and conversational approaches; and must listen to community members’ views on community development programs. The study concludes that adult educators drive community development programs via inclusiveness and networks to make communities sustainable.

Keywords: adult educators, community development, community groups, galamsey, Ghana

Introduction

Globally, adult educators work not only with individuals and institutions, but also with community groups to transform communities (Biney, 2022, 2023; Knowles et al., 2020; Knowles et al., 2020). The purpose of this study is to examine liberating education and adult educators’ educational roles in working with community groups to improve...
communities. Sousa (2021) asserts that the commitment to building communities to liberate and transform society is a driving force of adult education and practice. Similarly, Mayombe (2018) avers that adult education and training (AET) programs are tools in community development (CD) for the transformation of communities. But what is a community? In this study, a community refers to a place where people live together, work, and undertake programs in common. Yet, much of the improvements in CD programs are initiated by community groups and local leadership, often aided by adult educators (Biney, 2022). Community groups in this context include youth, “asafo” companies—group of people who work for the good of their community, and professional people.

Though CD is an intrinsic part of adult education (Sousa, 2021); working with community groups requires adult educators to serve as change agents (Brookfield, 1995). I argue that adult educators adopt participatory working approaches with community groups to aid community members to become conscientized and participate in community programs. Note et al. (2021) assert that the field of adult education refers to educating adults, hence adult educators’ work with community groups to improve communities. Yet, there is a gap in mineral-rich communities in Ghana, where community members are not galvanized to halt “galamsey” activities using liberating education. Meanwhile, galamsey is destroying forest vegetation cover and creating trans-boundary water pollution challenges. The Bia and Tano rivers, which flow from Ghana to Cote d’Ivoire into the Bia-Tano basin to provide water for consumption and agricultural purposes, are seriously polluted (Ackah, 2023).

The term galamsey connotes the “illegal process of gathering mineral resources, especially gold, for sale.” This is an age-old activity engaged in by young adults even in the 1960s (Biney, 2019); yet, the galamsey activities carried out in the communities’ were in the form of artisanal mining. The operators used simple tools like shovels and washing bows. The same cannot be said today, because young Ghanaian adults and their foreign partners use excavators and heavy earthmoving machines in their galamsey activities. These illegal mining activities lead to the pollution of major water bodies including the Pra, Ankobra, Tano, Bia, Birim, and Bonsa rivers. This galamsey has caused incalculable damage to cocoa farms and forest vegetation cover (Biney, 2023). The turbidity of the river Bonsa that supply water to Tarkwa, a mining community, is so high that the Bonsa treatment plant records low water levels (Boye, 2023). The damage caused by illegal mining activities seems bigger today than yester-years, and requires urgent community action.

This study attempts to explore the use of liberating education strategies to galvanize community groups to build capacities and become conscious of communities, and take purposeful action and make communities sustainable. The study also seeks to explain adult educators work with community groups. The mineral-rich communities in Ghana started experiencing serious destruction of water bodies for nearly twenty years now. Governments after governments designed programs, including alternative livelihood programs, community mining, reformation of the mining sector, and law enforcement agencies to clamp down on galamseyer, yet, galamsey persist in communities. Though some minimal progress, including improvement in turbidity level of some water bodies is made (Ghanaian Times, 2023), I argue that when community groups are conscientized, there will be improvement in communities.

Considering the interconnected problems galamsey pose to community members in terms of health, socioeconomic and environmental issues make it imperative that galamsey activities are halted. Griswold et al. (2022) affirm that environmental injustice is often an intersection of economic, social, and environmental disparities, and addressing the inequalities requires support for lifelong learning opportunities. I argue that the environmental calamity being experienced in
some mineral-rich communities in Ghana via galamsey activities has dire consequences for community members. The questions are: Why has the Government of Ghana not succeeded in halting galamsey? Why do young adults still engage in galamsey activities? These questions have to be answered if galamsey is to be halted in Ghana. I argue that adult educators should work with community groups to step up activism to address galamsey menace in communities.

Granted the argument that unemployment confronting young adults will make galamsey activities persist hold substance, yet, galamsey is illegal in Ghana. It is for this reason that the Government of Ghana introduced “community mining,” a legal alternative to galamsey, yet young adults cushioned by their funders in the cities continue to engage in an illegality. This challenge confronting communities in Ghana informed this study to showcase adult educators change agents role as they adopt liberating education strategy with community groups to create awareness and make communities sustainable. This paper seeks to ascertain the liberating education strategies adopted by adult educators working with community groups to empower them. It also sought information about adult educator’s educational roles in the communities, and inclusiveness and networks built to make communities sustainable.

**Literature Review**

The literature review considered three areas; liberating education, educational roles of adult educators, and inclusiveness and networks. These areas can aid adult educators appreciate groups learning to engender transformation in communities. Liberating education emphasizes awareness creation in people; and in this context, the environmental factors that keep people in the state of dependency and becoming free. As people learn in groups to assess the state of their community vis-à-vis the galamsey activities destroying water bodies and forest vegetation cover, they can take action to transform their communities by restoring the water bodies and reclaiming the disused pits. Adult educator’s educational roles bring about cognition among people as they learn to become empowered and take action to better communities (Freire, 2014). However, succeeding in this requires that adult educators build inclusiveness and networks as they adopt dialogical, conversational, and story-telling approaches in their work. This creates opportunities for the voiceless in the community to gain their voices and share experiences on the polluted water bodies and work in revitalizing communities sustainability for current and future generations yet unborn.

**Liberating Education**

Liberating education targets vulnerable, disadvantaged, and disempowered groups in communities (Freire, 2014). This study focuses attention on gold-rich communities in Ghana suffering from galamsey activities engaged in by young adults. In liberating education, adult educators work with groups to create awareness in community members to engender sustainability of communities. Dialogue is crucial in such a situation because it is fundamental to recognizing others and finding ways of working together (Evans et al., 2022). Freire (2014) opines that problem-posing education regards dialogue as indispensable to the art of cognition that unveils reality. Individual development and collective consciousness go hand in hand when exploited groups take learning seriously (Freire, 1998). Community groups learn to acquire knowledge which emerges through invention and re-invention and become creative and use ideas gained to transform communities (Freire, 2014). The critical awareness created among groups’ members empowers them to question issues related to polluted water bodies and take action to halt the galamseyers. As community groups act together to pursue authentic concerns bordering them after engaging in inquiry, the action they take can transform communities.
Adult Educators Educational Roles With Community Groups

Adult educators are facilitators of learning and a source of education and educational force in the community (Bowl, 2014). They work with community groups to keep the community informed about issues affecting its development and create opportunities for CD. They add richness to lives of people in communities via initiating programs with community groups and integrating adult education with community action. They do face frustrating situations in CD; yet, enthusiastic adult educators who undertake the process with the intention of helping communities, end up developing projects for the community, rather than with the community (Gajanayake & Gajanayake, 1993). Adult educators gather information about the community’s environment in which people live (Brookfield, 1995). They learn and work with community groups to experience their lives, developments, and guide them to initiate and discuss issues affecting their community, and act appropriately. Adult educators work democratically with community groups to take collective action via research, projects, and encourage community groups to explore their solutions (Brookfield, 1995).

Building Inclusiveness and Networks

Community issues are interconnected and require integrated solutions. Adult educators work with community groups to build inclusiveness and participate in development programs. In Ghana, some communities lack resources for all they need to do and need to reach out to organizations and other levels of government for cooperative ventures. More networks are to be built to achieve the goals adult educators set with the community groups; meaning, adult educators build links with groups who have similar interests. The Government of Ghana is using strategies to halt the galamseyers, yet not successfully. Adult educators can network with the local leadership and community groups to halt the galamseyers via building relationships to bring them into a central role in developing their communities.

Purpose of the Study

The study explores liberating education strategies adult educators adapt working with community groups to empower them to make communities sustainable. As adult educators’ work with community groups to learn, the synergies engendered could aid community groups to halt the illegal operations of galamseyers in communities. The galamsey activities have become an existential threat to local communities, and the Government of Ghana chose to resource the military to fight it. Meanwhile, community members suffer from polluted water bodies and degraded fertile lands from galamsey activities. Unsafe water consumption could increase typhoid burden. Exploring educational roles adult educators can deploy working with community groups, and adapting inclusiveness and networks could help in halting the galamsey activities in Ghana.

Methods

This study which I conducted in one of Ghana’s higher education institutions (HEIs) used a case study design. The intention was to garner views from graduate students knowledgeable in adult educators’ educational roles with community groups in employing liberating education strategies to make communities sustainable in Ghana. The study data came from eight graduate students reading adult education at one of Ghana’s HEIs. I argue that graduate students possess the requisite characteristics to participate in the study since as adult learners, they can figure out educational roles adult educators can institute as they work with community groups. The mineral-rich communities in Ghana are suffering from galamsey activities engaged in by young adults. Additionally, the galamsey issue is not only a Ghana issue, but has a repercussion on the
neighboring countries, including the Cote D’Ivoire, who use the Bia and Tano rivers in many activities. Qualitative study is appropriate for such a study where participants can share their experiences on strategies to halt galamsey activities in Ghana.

**Participants**

Study participants were graduate students pursuing Adult Education at one of Ghana’s HEIs. The participants were within the age ranges of 25–45 years and knowledgeable about galamsey activities in communities. They have watched footage of the effects of galamsey activities on both the traditional and social media platforms. Some of the participants have been to the mineral-rich communities to experience first-hand the destruction of galamsey operations on the environment and major water bodies. The participants are not into galamsey activities; but as students’ of adult education, they are expected to be knowledgeable about the power of liberating education in empowering groups. Through dialogue, awareness creation, and reflection on communities, the empowered community groups can take action to transform their communities. I used a qualitative design, and eight participants participated in the study. The participants were graduate students at the Department of Adult Education and Human Resource Studies (DAEHRS). They formed the unit of analysis of the study. I conducted the interview to access the “voice” of the students on adult educators work with community groups to make communities sustainable as they learn via liberating education strategies, including groups learning to become empowered and take action and halt galamsey in Ghana.

**Data Collection**

The participants were informed about the study by the researcher three weeks before the study was conducted. The participants agreed and participated in the study. The participants were brought together at the DAEHRS and interviewed using nine (9) open-ended questions. The questions sought to address the three objectives underlying the study: (1) liberating education strategies adult educators could adapt working with community groups; (2) adult educators’ educational roles in communities; and (3) inclusiveness and networks built to make mineral-rich communities sustainable. Each participant spent between 45 and 55 minutes to respond to the 9 open-ended type questions posed to them. This made it possible for me to probe further so as to describe and explain patterns and themes that emerged from the study from the participants’ perspectives. It enabled me and the participants to co-construct the narrative.

**Data Analysis**

Data garnered was analyzed using computer software called NUD.IST. I transcribed the responses, reviewed, and checked for accuracy and completeness. Results garnered were used as anecdotal evidence to triangulate the responses received. As a qualitative researcher, I took a cue from qualitative researchers, including Merriam and Grenier (2019) and Wohlfart (2020) regarding steps to take in analyzing the data gathered. Emphasis in this study is on the co-construction of meaning between the researcher and participants. I took an in-depth scrutiny of the data I gathered and built thematic framework made up of final themes after identifying general patterns. I used a data analysis grid which is a useful way of organizing qualitative data to facilitate report writing. All quotations are presented verbatim to present the true reflection of the voices of the participants.

**Results**

My analysis of adult educators’ adapting liberating education as a strategy to work with community groups in transforming communities revealed the power of dialogue, conversations, and story-telling as powerful facilitation approaches to pull community groups along in tackling problems facing them. Liberating education strategies are required to halt galamsey activities and its effects on health, environment,
Liberating Education Strategies

The following themes emerged from analyzing liberating education strategies adult educators adapt working with community groups: Employing dialogue in CD work, working with community groups, using visual and pictorial representations, and learning from communities.

Employing Dialogue in CD Work

Adult learners indicated that dialogue helps in identifying needs and assets of community members. This is because dialogue brings to fore the diversity of ideas and synergies community groups come along with, working with adult educators in designing strategies to halt galamsey activities in communities. Thus dialogue, conversations, and story-telling used by adult educators help in diagnosing strengths and weaknesses of community groups strategies to curtail galamsey activities and engender development programs in communities. Dialogue ensures inclusiveness in the decision-making process of community groups and adult educators toward action. An adult learner expressed it in this way:

Dialogue offers me the opportunity to share ideas and discuss with colleagues [the] prospects of community programs based on the fact that ‘no one head is a repository of all knowledge and wisdom.’ Everybody has knowledge and wisdom to share on development of our communities. And as people become focused on transforming their communities, they succeed on the basis of unity of purpose.

Working With Community Groups

Adult learners provided reasons why adult educators work with community groups. They stated that community groups often represent the best views, opinions, and assets of communities. They also reduce the cost of programs implemented in communities since they offer free labor and contribute ideas, knowledge, skills, and expertise in addressing community needs and problems. Community groups are assets to communities because some group members are professionals with diverse skills and knowledge to tap into for development. This observation resonates with Deggs and Miller (2011) assertion that the quality of life in a community is directly tied to the capital available to its citizenry. Adult learners added that adult educators work with community groups to galvanize community members to participate in programs. An adult learner had this to say:

Adult educators and community groups aid in conscientising community members on assets they can tap into in addressing problems confronting their communities. Thus, working together often decides the future of communities, as it creates opportunities for people to learn and become conscious of the conditions in their communities, and take action to remedy situations for better.

Using Visual and Pictorial Representations

The adult learners indicated that visual and pictorial representations adapted by adult educators conscientize community members on problems facing their communities and the need to take action. This is in line with Freire’s (2014) “generative” word method used to promote literacy education in Brazil and some parts of the globe. This facilitation by adult educators, adult learners admitted, aided community groups to reflect and take action in improving their communities. They added that this approach to facilitation helps in prioritization of community needs. An adult learner expressed it in this way:
Visual and pictorial representations adult educators adapt in their presentations with community groups provide to community members the true reflection of the community they find themselves in. That pushes community groups to take action to make their communities better. The mental picture painted by adult educators tends to ignite community members to take action to remedy their community for better.

**Learning From Communities**

Adult learners indicated that community groups learn from their communities via discussions and dialoguing for solutions to community problems. Adult learners added that learning from one’s community provides insight and development of human skills to leverage on lessons from previous works done to address present needs. An adult learner expressed it this way:

Learning from communities provides us [with] evidence to take action to improve on our communities. As an adult learner, the deplorable conditions being created by galamseyers in communities provide an avenue to take action to remedy our communities from destruction. This is because our water bodies and environment are in danger.

The participants demonstrate that it is good in CD work to mobilize community groups and tap into their ideas in implementing CD programs. Freire (2014) indicated that as adult educators, we have to respect the levels of understanding that people have about their reality because no one knows everything and no one is completely ignorant. Everybody matters in the decision-making and implementation of CD programs. Learning, therefore, is a key ingredient for community groups to free their communities from exploitation by greedy individuals. Employing liberating education leads to empowerment of people in the digital age where information is available from traditional and social media platforms. Community groups can learn to strategize to improve communities. The purpose of education is human liberation (Freire, 1971); hence, when people learn in groups, they can take initiatives to improve their lot and communities.

**Adult Educators Educational Roles**

These themes emerged from analyzing adult educators’ educational roles in communities: learning with community groups, and mobilizing and galvanizing community members.

**Learning With Community Groups**

Adult learners affirmed that adult educators’ facilitative roles often lead community groups to reflect and become aware of the state of their communities. They added that creative facilitation by adult educators empowers community groups to tackle problems confronting them via participation in programs. A participant indicated that “group learning is one key approach to tackling community problems because, group members learn to become conscientized and empowered to initiate development programs and work together to make their communities better.” This observation supports Freire’s (1970) assertion that education is co-learning, and the true knowledge of reality is conscientization, which Freire refers to as praxis—a union of reflection and action. As people learn, they become empowered and improve communities.

**Mobilizing and Galvanizing Community Members**

Adult learners indicated that adult educators focused attention on mobilizing and galvanizing community groups to participate in programs to promote ownership of programs. The participants added that as community groups own the programs, they build the culture of maintenance and sustainability into the programs. As community groups initiate and participate in programs, they reduce the cost of implementing programs and create harmony for
effective implementation of programs. This is a way an adult learner puts it:

Working in groups mostly creates positive synergy to get work done successfully than working alone. The point is that working as a group often leads to bootstrapping - achieving success step-by-step, and this brings about sustainability in communities programs.

The participants re-affirm the essence of group learning. This confirms Imel (1997) assertion that adult education can be promoted via group learning. This observation is obvious, because in group learning, people come up with ideas, and cross-fertilization of ideas is experienced. This aid community groups to work in unity and step up activism to halt the galamsey activities.

**Inclusiveness and Networks Built**

My analyses resulted in two themes from building inclusiveness and networks in adult educators' works with community groups: inclusiveness in CD work and building networks.

**Inclusiveness in CD Work**

Adult learners stated that adult educators stress inclusiveness in working with community groups in CD work to create equality among community members and reduce conflicts. This often leads to creating common value and attracts diverse ideas. They added that placing emphasis on inclusiveness leads to enhancing community engagement, innovation, and a sense of belonging to the community. An adult learner put it in this way:

Every segment of the community member(s) matters in CD work. Everybody’s ideas, knowledge, skills, expertise, financial contributions, and labor counts in CD work. After all, communities are made up of web of experts and their expertise is needed in CD work execution.

**Building Networks**

Adult learners indicated that building networks in CD work is crucial since no one community can do it all when it comes to programs that require huge capital outlay. More so, certain programs may require certain specialized skills to successfully execute them hence the need for building networks. An adult learner expressed it in this way:

Networking saves time and resources since it becomes easy to consult stakeholders or prominent members in the community or organizations operating in the catchment communities for assistance and support in executing a particular project or program in the community.

The participants affirm the fact that inclusiveness and networking in CD work is important, because it leads to avoidance of conflict(s) since everybody is encouraged to participate in the decision-making processes and implementation of programs in the community. The involvement of key stakeholders in CD work leads to efficient use of resources devoid of duplication and waste. This indicates that when adult educators and community groups strategize well, the effort of galamseyers can be thwarted to make communities in Ghana sustainable.

**Implications and Relevance for Adult Education and Community Development**

The results that emerged from the study have implications for practice to the broader CD and adult education. The results demonstrate that adult educators should work with community groups as change agents, ensuring that group learning is built among community groups. This can make community groups endeavor to make learning a lifelong venture and aid them to step up activism and transform communities. Educating for democratic social change in communities is crucial as Horton and Freire (1984) alluded to in their book: *We Make the Road by Walking*. This is because, people in
communities in Ghana should learn via liberating education to gain an intense passion for self-emancipation and improve communities.

Adult educators should also ensure that they synergize properly, reflect, and act in unison to engender sustainability of communities in Ghana. To be successful, adult educators should serve as change agents in CD work; because, Freire (2014) averred that liberating education basis itself on creativity and stimulates praxis upon reality. Thus, in inviting community groups in gold-rich communities to learn in groups to become authentic, adult educators should ensure that community groups jointly participate in the needs analysis of their communities. In so doing, they will participate in development programs and transform their communities.

Adult educators should adopt inclusive dialogue, critical conversations, and storytelling approaches as a facilitating strategy in CD work, because it serves as a means for emancipation (Evans et al., 2022; Mayo & Ranford, 2023). Education, then, becomes a force of liberation with social responsibility attached to it. Freire (1998) asserts that education for liberation is an act of learning and a method for the kind of transformative action that human beings should exercise over reality. This means that adult educators dialogue with community groups in devising liberating education strategies and take action to protect their communities from galamseyers. Thus, community groups become empowered first before they take action in programs; hence, understanding and knowledge comes before effective change is realized. Education precedes development, and education is development. Knowledge, to Mayo (2022), is not pre-given but evolves through dialogue, and makes adult learning important in the contemporary context.

In this situation, dialogue breaks away from the monotonous narrative nature of education to that of critical intervention in communities’ life (Freire, 2014). Community groups in Ghana should be conscientized to take the destiny of their communities into their hands. Even as adult educators build up the activism of community groups to protect their communities, they should operate within the confines of the law to make communities sustainable. This makes dialogue crucial in CD work; and means that adult educators give attention to the concerns of the community groups because they are insiders and know more about their community needs. As voiceless community members gain their voice to share personal experiences from activism, they can make their communities sustainable as they mobilize to tackle the activities of the galamseyers. This means that adult learning is transformative, and adult educators should emphasize on working with community groups in transforming communities, because knowledge becomes complete when it leads people, including community groups, to act upon their reality.

In the broader CD work, adult educators should employ participatory techniques in attracting community groups to participate in CD programs. Bopp and Bopp (1985) argued that community-based participatory programs, first, help create a mirror by which a community can see its own eyes; that is, its own wisdom and knowledge, and second, it can help a community integrate cultural wisdom with academic. As outsiders, adult educators should listen to the community groups in CD work, because inclusive dialogue between adult educators and community groups could aid in halting the galamseyers, and ensuring sustainability of communities in Ghana.

Adult educators should also create opportunities for community groups to participate in programs they initiate in communities. This means that adult educators and community groups share experiences to promote learning in communities. This is where inclusiveness and networking becomes paramount in CD work because active involvement of stakeholders via effective networking is crucial in implementing CD programs.
Conclusion

This study explored adult educators' liberating education roles with community groups in transforming mineral-rich communities from the illegal galamseyers in Ghana. I used open-ended questions to solicit responses from adult learners because open-ended questions that invite dialogue are a simple format for building confidence and creating relationship for learning (Vella, 2008). Freire (2014) observes that knowledge evolves from continual interaction and cycles of praxis and occurs when human beings participate in a transforming act. Thus, when community groups act in unison via learning using the liberating education strategies, they can make communities better.

This study results were presented in three broad themes: liberating education, adult educators' educational roles, and inclusiveness and networks built. The results were presented in eight subthemes or anecdotal evidences to triangulate responses. It emerged that those adult educators involved in CD work adapted critical dialogical learning, critical conversations, and story-telling as facilitation approaches in working with community groups to engender sustainability of communities. It was further revealed that working with community groups tends to empower them to initiate programs to make local communities better.

This study used a small sample size of participants from only one HEI in Ghana; hence, the results cannot be generalized to a larger population. Future research may use a combined study of qualitative findings with quantitative data to be conducted about popular education in empowering local leadership to halt the galamseyers to inform evidence-based government policy for fighting galamsey in Ghana.

To ensure active participation and sustainability in group learning and programs to halt galamsey activities, it is concluded that, adult educators should embrace inclusiveness and networks to make communities in Ghana sustainable.

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