

# ***Kansas: Themes in Multicultural Adult Education Resonating Across the Nation***

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Our traditional curriculum, disconnected from life, centered on words emptied of the reality they are meant to represent, lacking in concrete activity, could never develop a critical consciousness. Indeed its own naïve dependence, on high sounding phrases, reliance on rote, and tendency of abstractness actually intensified our naiveté. (Paulo Freire, 1980, p. 37)

Across the country in our communities, our schools, and our businesses, we are experiencing a cultural shift as new immigrants of many ethnic backgrounds arrive speaking different languages and adhering to different beliefs. From the beginning, the United States has always been a destination for people around the world seeking a better life. These new immigrants often enter our society and begin at the lowest rung of the ladder. Historically, it typically takes several generations before new immigrants and their families are fully integrated into mainstream society. We are not—and have never been—a homogeneous society, and it is this diversity that lies at the heart of this nation's cultural experience. We argue that it is also this diversity that has created and shaped our enduring democracy.

This special issue of *Educational Considerations* focuses on the experience that many new immigrants face when they arrive in Kansas and the United States, and the role that adult education plays in assisting them to become contributing and valuable citizens. Though the articles in this issue center on Kansas, it is clear as we travel across the country that what is expressed in these articles is not unique from the rest of the United States. For many rural communities in the Midwest and the Plains, if it were not for these new immigrants, industries and businesses would be unable to fulfill their labor needs, and their local economies would dry up, resulting in further depopulation of these already sparsely populated regions. An argument might be made that most new immigrants come to places like Liberal, Kansas, in search of opportunity, and because they come there is opportunity that otherwise would not exist.

What might be most exciting about this special theme issue is that all of the articles are written by practicing adult educators and/or adults who have experienced firsthand what it means to emigrate to this country. Almost all of the voices that you will hear throughout these articles have had little or no formal academic training, resulting in some rough edges but honest and powerful messages. Because we are inspired by Freire's words as quoted above, this issue is written as an intellectual treatise that is connected to the reality that both adult learners and educators experience every day. The words written here are informed and shaped by a reality that is often lost in academic jargon, complex sentences, and high-sounding phrases. Though we do not claim that the authors of these articles have achieved critical consciousness, through the process of reflection and putting their words down on paper we hope that you will see a glimpse—mere moments—where a new understanding is achieved.

We begin with an overview of adult learning in Kansas, followed by a depiction of how this state fits into the globalization of capital, technology, and labor. The first two articles not only set the stage for Kansas, they also situate Kansas within the larger context of the United States. The second part of this issue is composed of three articles where voices of adult learners and their children are allowed to speak for themselves with little or no editing. These translated transcriptions are testimonies of raw but eloquent voices that we hope will strike at the core of our readers' preconceptions and experiences. The final and third part is a collection of five case studies written by educators working in adult learning centers across Kansas. These are the voices of adult educators who may or may not have studied adult education theory but are called upon daily to perform an invaluable service to their communities and their students. They are given sparse budgets to work with and asked to achieve great miracles. While we, as editors, did work with each of the authors as they collected data for their case studies, their experiences are accurately preserved in their final reports. These case studies are all different, reflecting the unique realities of their communities, their students, and their challenges. While we argue that what is happening in Kansas is not all that dissimilar to other places in the country, these case studies show that adult learning in Kansas is complex and varied.

We hope that you enjoy reading these articles and are moved by some of the voices that you hear. We also welcome your comments, stories, and insight. These articles merely represent a snapshot of how our country is changing and the role adult education is playing.

## **Endnotes**

Freire, P. (1980). *Education for Critical Consciousness*. New York: Continuum.

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