

Uncommon Spaces, Uncommon Pedagogies: Preparing Preservice Teachers and Informing Curriculum Through Community-Based Adult Learning

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Abstract

Adult education is increasingly taking place in community-based and informal spaces, where diverse learners engage with literacy, vocational training, and social justice initiatives. These environments offer vital opportunities for promoting equity-driven, lifelong learning; however, they are often overlooked in traditional teacher education, which mainly focuses on formal university coursework and school-based practicums. In response to the changing landscape of contemporary education, this paper explores the ideas of unconventional pedagogies and specifically, how education occurs beyond the traditional classroom in non-traditional settings. We view non-traditional community-based adult learning environments, such as community education centers, literacy programs, refugee camps, and grassroots cultural organizations, as unique spaces that support pedagogical growth and foster critical consciousness among preservice teachers. Drawing on public pedagogy to highlight the educational potential of cultural and social spaces outside formal schooling and guided by Freire's critical pedagogy, which emphasizes that education should be dialogical and transformative, as well as adult learning theory, the paper examines teaching and learning within these unconventional contexts. It also considers how preservice teachers' involvement in these spaces influences curriculum design, especially in terms of developing context-responsive and socially just pedagogies. It argues that teacher education needs to expand its scope to include adult education across various settings—spaces that give preservice teachers essential experiential learning for developing intercultural competence and understanding how curriculum functions beyond formal education, advancing the goals of Sustainable Development Goal 4. The paper discusses the theoretical implications, including the influence of public pedagogy on notions of knowledge, teacher identity, and curriculum development. It concludes with a recommendation for teacher education programs to incorporate structured, community-based adult learning experiences into preservice training to promote socially responsive and context-aware pedagogical growth.