CREATING LEARNING SPACES FOR ADULTS IN THE CON/LIB DEM ERA?

Sai Loo¹, Jacqueline McFarlane-Fraser²


Background to the topic:

A Coalition government of Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties has governed the UK since it came into power with the backdrop of the 2009 global recession and the inheritance of the nation’s ‘unacceptable high deficit level’. With this Coalition government subscribing to the tenets of neoliberalism of creating appropriate market conditions in order to reduce the country’s perceived over bureaucratic, inefficient and unproductive public sector (Harris 2007), it has sought to reform and reduce the size and the nature of the public sector.

Research questions/focus of the enquiry:

The aim of this paper is not to critique the political imperatives of the UK government but to study and identity the possibilities of learning spaces that are created by its policies. The paper also aims to theorize new conceptions of these learning spaces and in particular, focuses on the impact the policies have on spaces of learning for adults in its widest sense (Jarvis 2009).

Research methods and/or mapping of the literature:

This paper reports on the findings of a case study of a charitable organization for an ethnic minority group, which is based in a multi-cultural city in England. It uses this case study to investigate and understand the learning spaces for adults.

Analytical and/or theoretical frame:

The paper focuses on conceptual frameworks, which relate to lifelong (OECD 1996; Illeris 2007) and informal learning (Colley et al. 2003), ‘civic courage’ (Gramsci in Hill 2010), ‘epistemic cultures’ (Knorr Cetina 2005) and ‘intellectual labour’ (Giroux 1988) by investigating the issues, challenges and strategies, which the charitable organization has experienced resulting from the government’s policies.

Research findings and/or contribution to knowledge:

The paper identifies concepts and strategies, which may be relevant to organizations and institutions, which have activities, that relate to adult learning. It also discusses the impacts in the longer and medium terms on the learning spaces for adults.