

Life and Learning of Korean Artists and Craftsmen

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If we agree that learning is more than a temporal event absorbing knowledge, skills, values, or attitudes in an institutional setting, then we must assume that learning is a lifelong formative activity embedded in everyday life. It produces who we are. “Lifelong learning” opens a new dimension in understanding the relationship between learning and life. As Jarvis (2006) asserts, “Life is about being: human being is about learning” (p. 133). In other words, life is a learning journey. This view of lifelong learning theorizes it not as a popular policy term as used by international organizations but as a viewpoint to look at the phenomena of learning throughout one’s life.

The theories of adult learning have produced dominant image of learner and learning. It appears that prominent descriptions of learning are identified in the form of “adjective-plus-learning theory.” The adjective, such as experiential, transformative, and situated, seems to describe some essence of adult learning. But the adjectives are trapped in binary thought of Enlightenment. This Enlightenment project has been criticized much. Objecting to the grand narrative that has sustained the Enlightenment project, postmodern critique rejects locating human actions, including learning, within any foundational certainty. The use of adjectives in theorizing adult learning could be read as an attempt to signify authentic certainty that leads to technological solutions in teaching adults. The postmodern condition of theorizing adult learning is inevitable.

The postmodern condition is closely related to the reemerging discourse of lifelong learning in the field of adult education. Lifelong learning became a popular policy slogan in the 1990s in the context of globalization, the aging society, and the rise of new information technology. National governments around the world use lifelong learning to reorganize their adult education policies. It is taken for granted that lifelong learning could enhance employability in an uncertain, risky job market. People need to acquire knowledge and skills endlessly, since knowledge and skills change so quickly. Nothing lasts permanently. But this is not a new phenomenon in human history. Every individual is in risky situation at all times and learning may be one reliable tool that we have to navigate it.

The discourse of lifelong learning potentially expands the theoretical exploration of adult education beyond pedagogical applicability, because there are many more things that we learn in our lives than are taught in educational settings. The discourse of lifelong learning breaks the boundary of education in general and opens up loose spaces for different metaphors and theories of learning. Yet there is a lack of theory and scarce empirical research in lifelong learning because it requires the consideration of complex interplays between learners and their life contexts.

This book tries to offer a different conceptual tool for describing learning in terms of postmodern and/or lifelong learning conditions. In the book, I critically review dominant adult learning theories and propose a concept of rhizoactivity.

This book is not just a conceptual one but also contains concrete lives. I have used a life history approach. In the field of adult and lifelong education research, life history gained its popularity during the postmodern condition of social life; so-called meta-narratives have lost favour in explaining one's life and career in a risky society. It is also closely related to self-reflexive practices in the late-modern society. Therefore, life history is not just a story of one's past. One looks back at one's life with present perspectives looking forward.

In this book I analyse life history in the *Korean People's Oral History Series* published by the *Deep-Rooted Publishing House* in South Korea. The data contains life narratives of twenty Korean people who were born between 1898 and 1926. Each person's narrative of life, love, and work is presented in about 120-160 pages of transcripts. Most of the interviewees were from the lower class and had little formal education. Many of their vocations or roles were vanishing ones in the modernized Korean society. Some of them were designated as National Intangible Cultural Assets for their traditional Korean art skills. I put forward the following question in analysing the life history. What lifelong learning activities in the sociocultural-historical contexts function in what ways in constituting the learner and his or her life context? This question explores how learning activity functions in one's life, where it is to be found, how it gets produced and regulated, what its social effects are, and how it exists in one's life.