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Adult education and community capacity building:
The case of African-Australian women in the Northern Territory

Abstract

Currently, migrants play a major role in Australia's diverse population growth. While most migrants used to be Europeans in the past, the number of non-European migrants, especially Sub-Saharan Africans has increased significantly since 2000. This may be due to natural disasters, political unrests and civil wars in their home countries. It may also be due to the fact that Australia has promoted policies of multiculturalism and integration of migrants. These policies have broad goals that include social, economic and political participation of migrants in their communities (DIAC 2008c; DIMA 2006; DIMIA 2003). Various forms of education have been used to implement these goals (Allender, 1999; AMEP 2008; Falk et al 2000; Galbally 1978). For migrants, education is not only an adaptive strategy for social and economic integration but also a means of survival; and an important step in reconstructing identities and rebuilding their lives (Bron 2003). Having an understanding and knowledge of the language, socio-economic, political and cultural issues of Australia will not only help migrants to be aware of their rights and responsibilities; it will also assist them to participate fully in their communities.

This paper, drawing from a qualitative study in-progress, explores the role of Adult Education in building the community capacity of African-Australian women in the Northern Territory. While recent studies of African migrants have focused on mental health, culture, employment, housing and English language acquisition issues in other states of Australia with little or no reference to women's capacity building and the Northern Territory; this case study uses a methodological approach based on heuristic phenomenology (Van Manen 1997 & 2002), feminist standpoint and decolonizing theories (Belenky 1997; Hooks, 1989 & 1990; Hesse-Biber 2007) to give a voice to African-Australian women in the Northern Territory. It will examine their experiences – their struggles and achievements; and highlight the key role of adult education in community capacity building.