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Public pedagogues of change: advocacy networks, civil society organisations, and self-help authors in Mexico

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ABSTRACT

This article explores informal adult education for change in Mexico through the conceptual lens of social movement learning and public pedagogy. It adopts a multiple case design featuring two advocacy networks, two civil society organisations, and two self-help authors. It analyses how they position themselves as change agents addressing issues of food sovereignty, violence against women, social justice, environmental justice, financial insecurity, and emotional health. The article deconstructs how such agents diagnose problems and prescribe solutions that share a common logic: the unlearning of hegemonic knowledges and the learning of alternatives. It presents a continuum of pedagogical strategies, ranging from the most public (spectacular protests and social media work) to most private (targeted lobbying and workshopping). It contributes, methodologically and analytically, to literature at the intersection of social movement learning and public pedagogy. Methodologically, in a field dominated by stand-alone case studies from North America, it offers a comparative study of three domains of informal adult education in Mexico. Analytically, it unpacks public pedagogical messaging common to these domains and explain the strategies, interests and political implications that differentiate them. We encourage educators to assess the range of public pedagogical work that may be mobilised in the pursuit of change.

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Social change; public pedagogy; social movement learning

Introduction

Change is top of mind for many people in Mexico, and with good reason. Half the population of Mexico earns an income under the official poverty line, and just one-fifth of households earn over half of all income in the country (INEGI, Gerónimo-López et al., 2021). Of the 50 cities in the world with the highest per capita murder rates, 15 are in Mexico (Statista, 2022). Accidental and violent deaths account for over 10% of fatalities in Mexico, and over 10% of murder victims are female (INEGI, 2017). Mexicans perceive elevated levels of corruption in their political and legal systems (CEMEFI, 2021), and low levels of political or corporate commitment to environmental protection (Latinobarómetro, 2020). In the face of such issues, Mexicans are seeking change – in their individual lives, their local communities, and the broader society.

Change is a ubiquitous theme in Mexican popular culture. The ‘Movement for National Regeneration’ party, whose leaders characterise their mission as facilitating the ‘fourth transformation’ in Mexican history, controls the federal government (de Gori, 2020). For several years, a prominent slogan of the largest chain of department stores in the country (Coppel)

has been ‘Improve your Life’. While messages of change are mobilised to convince Mexicans to vote and consume in particular ways, they are also cornerstones of diverse adult education initiatives. In this article, we explore informal adult education for change in Mexico – focusing on prominent spaces in which people are entreated to learn for the sake of changing themselves and society. While we focus exclusively on Mexico in this article, it is important to note that the political and commercial mobilisation of change-related slogans occurs in many countries and may function to trivialise efforts to transform the ways in which people relate with one another.

Concepts of ‘social movement learning’ and ‘public pedagogy’ have structured vibrant bodies of scholarship in adult education. In this article, we employ these concepts as a lens through which to analyse messages of change produced by three prominent public pedagogues: advocacy networks, civil society organisations, and self-help authors. Through bringing agents from these disparate domains into comparative analysis, we show how, despite sharing seemingly common messaging, they deploy such messaging through different pedagogical strategies and with divergent material interests and political implications. We conceptualise ‘agents’ or ‘public pedagogues’ of change to include individuals or collectivities that, in specific fields of action that impact public or private life, produce messages oriented to change some condition. It is important to note that our work focuses exclusively on public pedagogues’ messages, and not the reception of such messages by others. As such, we examine a form of adult education pedagogy and curriculum, but not adult learning.

Literature review and conceptual framework

The study of social movements has been prominent in the scholarship of adult education since key publications from the late 1980s and early 1990s (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991; Finger, 1989; Holford, 1995; Spencer, 1995; Welton, 1993). Kuk and Tarlau (2020) document dramatic growth in the publication of scholarly work linking adult education and social movements: prior to 1990 there were never more than ten publications per year sharing those two keywords; since 2011 there have never been fewer than ninety such publications annually. Central to such scholarship has been the concept of ‘social movement learning’. Hall (2009, p. 46) conceptualised social movement learning as:

(a) informal learning occurring by persons who are part of any social movement; (b) intentional learning that is stimulated by organized educational efforts of the social movements themselves; and (c) formal and informal learning that takes place amongst the broad public, the citizens, as a result of the activities undertaken by a given social movement.

The first two of these phenomena – learning accomplished *within* social movements – have been extensively studied (Choudry, 2015; Earl, 2018; Gerónimo-López et al. 2021; Hall et al., 2011, 2012; Brookfield, 2012; Isaac-Savage & Merriweather, 2021; Ramdeholl, 2019). Existing literature about learning *within* social movements encompasses both conceptual (Crowther, 2006; Foley, 1999; Gouin, 2009; Jeremic, 2019; Kilgore, 1999; Kluttz & Walter, 2018; Scandrett et al., 2010) and empirical work (Moyer & Sinclair, 2020; Ollis, 2008, 2020, 2021; Sandlin & Walther, 2009; Schroeder et al., 2020; Walter, 2007), including case studies from the Global South (Brooks, 2019; El-Kassem, 2008; Endresen & von Kotze, 2005; Holst, 2021; Kapoor, 2007; Langdon, 2011; Larrabure et al., 2011; Sims & Sinclair, 2008; Walters, 2005, 2022). However, learning accomplished *because* of social movements has received less attention from scholars of adult education (Boumlik & Schwartz, 2016; Irving & English, 2011; Walker & Walter, 2018).

Over the past decade, the study of public pedagogy has also become significant within adult education scholarship. Sandlin, Wright, et al. (2011, p. 4) state that public pedagogy:

refers to various forms, processes, and sites of education and learning that occur beyond the realm of formal educational institutions – including popular culture (i.e., movies, television, the Internet, magazines, shopping

malls), informal educational institutions and public spaces (i.e., museums, zoos, monuments), dominant discourses (i.e., public policy, neoliberalism, global capitalism), and public intellectualism and social activism.

Most analyses of public pedagogy have focused on popular culture and informal cultural institutions (Dennis, 2015; Flowers & Swan, 2015; Gür et al., 2021; Jubas et al., 2015, 2020; Jubas & Lenters, 2019; Sandlin, O'Malley, et al., 2011; Sandlin, Wright, et al., 2011; Sandlin et al., 2010; E. Taylor, 2010; Wright & Sandlin, 2009). While there are studies of cultural resources as tools for social movements (Brookfield, 2012; Cordova, 2016; Zorrilla & Tisdell, 2016), there is little published about activists or civil society leaders as public pedagogues. The studies included in the *Handbook of Public Pedagogy* (Sandlin et al., 2010) that focus on 'activist sites of learning' primarily address public art, community art, and outreach projects of faculty members at American universities. Recently, movements such as 'Black Lives Matter' and '#MeToo' have inspired scholarly analyses that link the concepts of social movement learning and public pedagogy (Cassily & Clarke-Vivier, 2016; Clarke-Vivier & Stearns, 2019; Jubas, 2023; Salvio, 2017).

In this article, we employ concepts of social movement learning and public pedagogy to analyse messages of change produced by three distinct agents of informal adult education in Mexico: leaders of advocacy networks, leaders of civil society organisations, and self-help authors. Within the context of social movements, advocacy networks and civil society organisations can be distinguished as two forms through which people's participation in such movements may be sustained or institutionalised. Civil society organisations tend to have a more formal and hierarchical structure, operate programmes to further particular goals, and engage in fundraising and public-awareness campaigns (Davis et al., 2005; Zald & Ash, 1966). Advocacy networks tend to be less formally structured and seek to demand change from political or commercial authorities by facilitating collective action (Acosta, 2012; Keck & Sikkink, 1998).

While leaders of advocacy networks and civil society organisations explicitly claim to facilitate social movements, authors of self-help books typically encourage individual action in the pursuit of personal change (McLean, 2013, 2014, 2015; McLean & Dixit, 2018; McLean & Vermeylen, 2014). Despite clear ontological and strategic differences between the promotion of individual and collective action, we see both conceptual and empirical reasons for including self-help authors in the study of public pedagogues of change. Conceptually, following the feminist claim that 'the personal is political', V. Taylor (1999, p. 18) argued that self-help reading was significant to the women's movement 'not only for the personal reconstruction that takes place . . . but in exhorting women to embrace broader understandings of their problems'. Empirically, in our own recent interviews with readers of self-help books, several such readers told us that 'one of their key learning outcomes was related to a sense of solidarity: the recognition that other people shared their struggles' (McLean & Dixit, 2018, p. 290). As such, while the individual pursuit of change – even by large numbers of individuals – does not equate to a collective movement, one should not assume that self-help reading is irrelevant to social change. Indeed, there are parallels between the issues addressed by the three agents of change analysed here. Poverty and inequality motivate both community development projects and the sale of self-help manuals for financial success. The obesity epidemic motivates both policy advocacy for mandating warning labels on junk food and the sale of diet books. As we document in our methodology section, in Mexican popular culture self-help authors, leaders of advocacy networks, and leaders of civil society organisations all engage in significant forms of public pedagogical work.

Motta and Esteves (2014) elaborate a conceptual framework that links social movements and public pedagogy in the quest for progressive social change. They begin by stating their wish to 'situate historically, politically and theoretically the centrality of the pedagogical in both the learning of hegemonic forms of life, social relationships and subjectivities but also in practices of unlearning these and learning new ones' (p. 1). They locate public pedagogical strategies as central to oppression: 'the geopolitics of knowledge produced through the colonial capitalist pedagogies of everyday life enacts therefore a violent monological closure and silencing of all

“others” (p. 5). However, public pedagogies are also central to emancipatory struggles. Motta and Esteves argue that counter-hegemonic public pedagogies ‘render visible, literate and subject those made superfluous by capitalist coloniality’, and that social movement pedagogies have two fundamental moments: ‘unlearning the oppressor’s logics’ and ‘the affirmative co-construction of becoming otherwise’ (p. 5). Motta and Esteves conclude that ‘the pedagogical practices of social movements are at the heart of the reinvention of an emancipatory politics of knowledge for the 21st century’ (p. 21). Likewise, writing about violence against women in Latin America, Segato (2018, p. 15) argues that we need to develop ‘counter-pedagogies capable of rescuing a sensitivity and a connectivity that can oppose the pressures of the time and, above all, that allow us to make alternative paths visible’. In this article, we explore how advocacy networks, civil society organisations, and self-help authors claim to engage in pedagogical practices that help adults unlearn and learn in ways that may support progressive social change. We unpack the messaging common to these domains and explain the pedagogical strategies, material interests, and political implications that differentiate them.

We contribute to an emerging body of literature that examines connections between public pedagogy and social movements. Our contributions to that literature are innovative due to our research methods, analytical approach, and geographical focus. Methodologically, studies at the intersection of social movements and public pedagogy tend to focus either on stand-alone case studies (Sandlin et al., 2010; Walker & Walter, 2018; Walter, 2013) or the analysis of very similar cases from single domains (Irving & English, 2011; Walter, 2012; Walter & Earl, 2017). Our use of comparative case study methods enables us to undertake an innovative form of analysis – one focused on understanding the similarities and differences between substantively different domains in which diverse public pedagogical actors claim to promote progressive change. This analysis enables us to distinguish what these domains share (messaging that defines problems and prescribes solution with a common pedagogical logic) from how they are different (diverse pedagogical strategies, material interests, and political implications).

Geographically, most adult education scholarship linking social movements and public pedagogy focuses on North America or other anglophone countries (see Boumlik & Schwartz, 2016, for an exception). Mexico provides a compelling focus because while its social movements have been extensively studied, the public pedagogical work of advocacy networks and civil society organisations has been neglected in existing scholarship. For over a century, Mexican political history has been characterised by social activism and organising in opposition to authoritarian governments (Bracho, 1990; Córdova, 1984, Cadena & López, 2020; Pozas, 2018). Milestones in the twentieth century included the Mexican Revolution and the leftist and labour organising that followed, the student movement and popular urban movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and the Zapatista movement and the emergence of pro-democracy civil society organisations at the end of the century (Cadena, 2015; Fernández, 2012; Inclán, 2018; Reygadas, 1998; Tamayo, 1999). Over the past quarter-century, with the authoritarian Mexican state weakened by forces rooted both in global capitalist imperialism and organised crime, new movements and organisations have proliferated: demands for Indigenous dignity; silent marches carried out by middle-class organisations in different cities to demand peace and security; massive protests against state crimes (i.e. massacres of peasants, Indigenous people and students); and street performances and feminist marches against gender-based violence (Álvarez, 2020; Escalante & Canseco, 2019; Gordillo-García, 2023).

Mexican scholars have extensively documented the work of advocacy networks and civil society organisations, but there have not been rigorous analyses of their public pedagogical roles. This gap in Mexican scholarship is puzzling, given the strong influence in Latin America of activist-scholars such as Paulo Freire and Orlando Fals Borda, whose ideas of popular education highlight a distinctively Latin American epistemology – conceiving of decoloniality as a form of resistance and social change in the face of what is perceived as the oppression of a capitalist, neoliberal, and patriarchal system. While in Latin America there are important efforts to understand social

movements as spaces for popular education and critical pedagogy (see Grupo de Trabajo CLACSO Educación Popular y Pedagogías Críticas, 2023), in Mexico this analytical approach has not been prominent.

Research methods

We use a case study approach (Gerring, 2004; Yin, 2014), employing a multiple case design to compare purposively sampled examples of public pedagogues engaged in the promotion of informal adult learning in Mexico. To explain our approach, we highlight our positionality vis-à-vis informal adult education in Mexico, describe the scope of the three public pedagogical domains included in our analysis, review our rationale for selecting cases, and document the data sources upon which our analysis is based. Laura is a lifelong citizen of Mexico City. She is a professor of sociology at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, where she leads research into how civil society organisations, government agencies, and private companies interact in the development of public and corporate policies (Montes de Oca, 2019, 2021). Laura has extensive involvement with informal adult education for change in Mexico. From 2004 through 2010, she hosted a weekly programme, entitled ‘Sharing Experiences’, on *Citizens’ Radio* in Mexico City, interviewing civil society organisation leaders and social movement activists about their work and their concerns. Her observations about the culture of social movements and organisations in Mexico are rooted in two decades of scholarly research, hundreds of formal radio interviews, and thousands of informal conversations with leaders and activists in the field. Scott is a Canadian who lived in Mexico City from 2016 through 2021, working at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, where he conducted research into Mexican self-help culture. Scott is fluent in Spanish and has published in both Mexican and international journals about self-help reading in Mexico (McLean, 2022; Montes de Oca & McLean, 2019).

While our experience with civil society organisations, advocacy networks, and self-help culture helps explain why we selected these three domains for a study of informal adult learning in Mexico, there are more objective reasons for doing so. Prominent among such reasons is the sheer scope of Mexicans’ engagement in these domains. As an example, among Mexican adults who read a book in 2017, 28% read a self-help book (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2018). Taking into consideration population data and literacy rates (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2017), this means that, on an annual basis, more than 10 million Mexicans read self-help books. In 2019, there were over 46,000 formally constituted civil society organisations in Mexico, and nearly 3 million Mexicans worked for one – 75% of them as volunteers and 25% of them as paid employees (Gür et al., 2021). National data on events – such as protest marches, blockades, and sit-ins – facilitated by advocacy networks are not available. However, from 2015 through 2017 the municipal government of Mexico City authorised over ten thousand protests, an average of over nine per day (Arredondo, 2018). Participation in collective action was measured in a national survey that involved adults, aged 15 years and older, from across Mexico (Latinobarómetro, 2020). Based on that survey, [Chart 1](#) estimates the proportion of Mexicans who have participated in protest activities and implies that over eight million have participated in authorised demonstrations. The fact that millions of people participate in self-help reading, civil society organisations, and collective protests makes the study of these domains essential for understanding informal adult learning for change in Mexico.

In the interpretation of [Chart 1](#), one should note that in the Latin American context, the participation of Mexicans in protest activities is distinguished by the propensity of Mexicans to engage in highly adversarial or confrontational tactics. There are six countries in Latin America with more than twenty-five million inhabitants: Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Argentina, Peru, and Venezuela. According to data from Latinobarómetro (2020), Mexicans are less likely to sign petitions or participate in authorised demonstrations than are citizens in all other large, Latin American countries apart from Peru. However, Mexicans are more likely to participate in

unauthorised demonstrations, block traffic, or occupy buildings or factories than are citizens in all other large, Latin American countries apart from Brazil. One should also note that while labour unions are important partners in many social movements in Mexico, strikes or other forms of direct action against employers constitute only a small proportion of protest activity in the country.

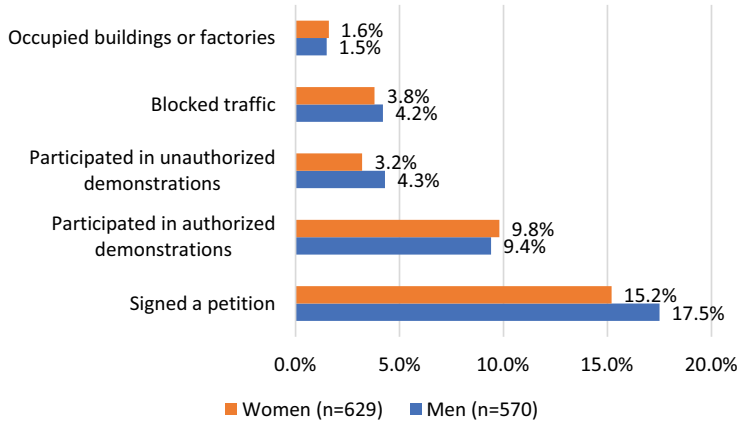


Chart 1. Proportion of adult Mexicans who have ever ... (Source: Latinobarómetro, 2020)

The first stage in our selection of cases for inclusion in this article involved quantitative analysis, and the second stage involved qualitative judgement. We chose self-help authors based upon their popularity with Mexican readers. We obtained industry data concerning the sales of self-help books (Nielsen Company, 2019), and used those data to identify the sub-genres and authors most popular with Mexicans. Table 1 lists the 10 best-selling self-help books in Mexico in 2018 (in descending order of sales, with English language titles). Note that the analysis for this article began in 2019, and therefore the bestsellers from 2018 represented the most recent possible sampling frame. Note as well that we conceptualise a ‘self-help’ book as one written with the explicit pedagogical intent of helping readers change and improve some element of their personal or professional lives. Rimke (2020) provides a typology of 18 distinct sub-genres of self-help, ranging from those providing tips about beauty and fashion to those describing how to advance social justice.

The sub-genres of financial success and personal wellness are particularly popular with Mexican self-help readers. We selected Sofia Macías and Miguel Ruiz for inclusion in our analysis because they are the leading Mexican figures in these sub-genres. Macías authors the most popular series of financial success books in Mexico and she engages in substantial online and social media activity. Ruiz has sold more self-help books than any other Mexican author and he regularly offers seminars in both Mexico and the USA.

We identified civil society organisations by first analysing the fields in which such organisations are active. Chart 2 documents the number of civil society organisations in Mexico that are involved

Table 1. Best selling self-help books in Mexico, 2018.

Book	Author
(1) <i>Make your bed and other little habits that will change your life and the world</i>	William McRaven
(2) <i>Mindcode: the science of getting the brain to buy</i>	Jürgen Klarić
(3) <i>You always change the love of your life (for another love or another life)</i>	Amalia Andrade
(4) <i>The four agreements: a practical guide to personal freedom</i>	Miguel Ruiz
(5) <i>How to win friends and influence people</i>	Dale Carnegie
(6) <i>Little capitalist pig: personal finance for hippies, yuppies, and bohemians</i>	Sofia Macías
(7) <i>Rich dad, poor dad: what the rich teach their kids about money</i>	Robert Kiyosaki
(8) <i>The power of now: a guide to spiritual enlightenment</i>	Eckhart Tolle
(9) <i>Not the end: life isn't over until it's over</i>	Odin Dupeyron
(10) <i>Things you think about when you bite your nails</i>	Amalia Andrade

(Source: Nielsen Company, 2019).

in various fields of intervention – out of the 42,965 organisations eligible to receive support from the federal government (Centro Mexicana para la Filantropía, 2021). Note that organisations are frequently involved in more than one category of activity.

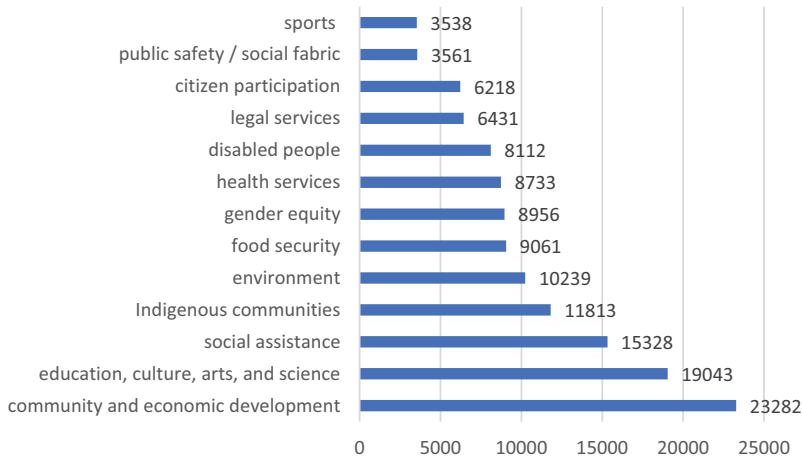


Chart 2. Number of civil society organisations active in specific fields, 2019. (Source: Centro Mexicana para la Filantropía, 2021)

Among civil society organisations, we selected *Greenpeace México* (GM) and *Oxfam México* (OM) because of their longevity and prominence, their extensive scope of work, and their focus on environmental justice and social justice – key themes for thousands of organisations in Mexico. While *Greenpeace* was established in Canada in 1971, GM was formed in 1993 following a protest that stopped a shipment of toxic waste in Mexico. While *Oxfam* originated in Britain in 1942 through the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief, OM was formed in 2008, when the Mexican organisation *Faces and Voices* joined the *Oxfam International* confederation.

We identified advocacy networks for inclusion in our analysis by first identifying the substantive causes for which Mexicans would be most likely to mobilise. **Chart 3** documents estimates made by *Latinobarómetro* (2020) about the proportion of adult Mexicans who would be ‘completely willing to demonstrate and protest’ for various causes.

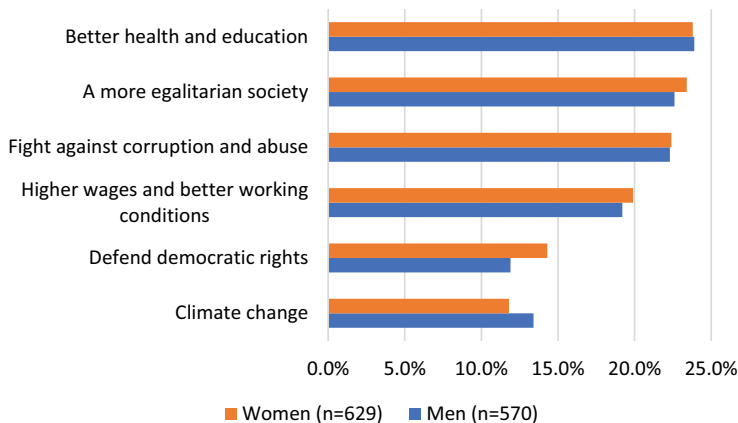


Chart 3. Proportion of Mexican adults who would be “completely willing” to protest for ... (Source: *Latinobarómetro*, 2020)

Among Mexican advocacy networks, we selected *Without corn there is no country* (WCNC) and *Not one woman more, not one woman less* (NOWMNOWL) because they are prominent networks addressing issues of high importance across Mexico. WCNC emerged in 2007 in response to events that began in the late 1900s and threatened the livelihoods of peasants and Indigenous people across

rural Mexico. NOWMNOWL emerged in the 1990s in response to waves of murders of women and girls in Ciudad Juárez. WCNC and NOWMNOWL share a networked structure in which participants (both individuals and organisations) join in protests or campaigns without formal membership.

For each of our cases, we examined publicly available documentation and engaged in qualitative data analysis guided by five cascading questions:

- (1) How do networks, organisations, and authors position themselves as **change agents**?
- (2) What are the fundamental **issues about** which they are seeking to promote change?
- (3) What **underlying problems** do they identify as characterising these issues?
- (4) What **solutions** do they recommend for solving such problems?
- (5) How do they pursue these solutions through **pedagogical strategies**?

Both authors engaged in the analysis of all six cases, with Laura taking lead responsibility for the analysis of advocacy networks and civil society organisations, and Scott taking lead responsibility for self-help authors. The analysis process involved repeated, inductive reading of the corpus of documentation. The nature of documentation analysed varied for each case. See the appendix for a list of documentation cited. Note that citations to such documents are made using alpha-numeric codes corresponding to items in the appendix. Note as well that materials cited in the appendix represent just a fraction of the documentation we consulted to build our understanding of each social movement and civil society organisation.

In the following sections, we narrate public pedagogical messages of change disseminated by prominent Mexican advocacy networks, civil society organisations, and self-help authors. While we interpret the messages sent, we do not assess the veracity of such messages or study the reception of such messages by learners. Our goal in this article is to enable scholars and practitioners of adult education to understand public pedagogical messages of change in Mexico. Further research is required to assess whether and how such messages lead to change for individuals and society.

Findings

Public pedagogical messaging (I): change agents and their concerns

Leaders of WCNC and NOWMNOWL position their networks as engaged in existential struggles. WCNC claims, ‘we are fighting to achieve food sovereignty by strengthening peasant production through favourable public policies and an alternative plan for the countryside and the country – one based on inclusion, justice, sustainability, and solidarity’ (WCNC-1). WCNC contests public policies and international trade agreements that promote agro-industrial production for global markets over small-scale production by local farmers. They position their network as being driven from the bottom up (‘change comes from below, from the people’) and they link their work to social justice: ‘while hunger and food insecurity exist, there will be injustice; conversely, while peasants and the countryside exist, there will be hope’ (WCNC-1). The existential struggle of NOWMNOWL is about saving women’s lives. Their network is a public demonstration of solidarity in defiance of violence against women: ‘No attack without a response. Not one woman less. We want to be alive. Voices and screams linking us, resounding in streets and squares in a renewed practice of mutual recognition and support’ (NOWMNOWL-1, p. 48). Leaders of NOWMNOWL actively participate in international networks of activists in the struggle against gender-based violence.

Participation in social movements is central to the identity claimed by GM and OM. Leaders of OM claim that they ‘are part of a global movement advocating for change that empowers people to create a safe, just and poverty-free future’ (OM-1). Leaders of GM assert that the organisation exists ‘because our fragile planet needs a voice, needs solutions, needs change, needs action’ (GM-1).

These organisations position themselves within struggles for social and environmental justice. OM works ‘to combat extreme inequality and work with others to ensure that all human beings can fully exercise their rights and enjoy life with dignity’ (OM-1). GM works ‘to construct, with the participation of the people, a green and peaceful world’ (GM-2).

Self-help authors also present themselves as agents of change working to help people overcome challenges. Macías claims that her mission is to ‘help people so that money stops being an obstacle in their lives and goals, bringing them knowledge and tools of financial education and entrepreneurship’ (SM-2). She tells readers that she is helping them to achieve ‘financial freedom, which is simply the ability to do with your life what you want and make the decisions you want without being held back by money or your debts’ (SM-1, p. 26). Ruiz claims that he is a ‘spiritual teacher’ who ‘has spent the past three decades guiding people to personal freedom through his profound insights regarding the nature of human reality’ (MR-3). He tells readers that following his advice ‘will lead you to personal freedom, to success and plenty; it will make fear disappear and transform it into love and happiness’ (MR-1, p. 66). Both authors claim that their expertise is rooted in experience. Macías links her advice about financial security to years of work as a finance journalist, while Ruiz links his advice about emotional wellbeing to his family upbringing and to knowledge acquired through having practiced as a neurosurgeon.

Public pedagogical messaging (II): problems and solutions

Macías, Ruiz, and the leaders of WCNC, NOWMNOWL, GM and OM each claim the status of change agent, and each work to address an important issue. To explore these agents’ messages of change, we analyse their respective diagnoses of social problems and prescriptions of solutions (see Table 2). A notable pattern emerging from Table 2 is that self-help authors promote individual action, leaders of advocacy networks promote collective action, and leaders of civil society organisations promote both.

Macías and Ruiz claim that financial security and emotional wellbeing depend upon individuals changing their habits. Macías (SM-1) compares the inability to save money with the inability to stop smoking or lose weight (p. 22), and she employs humorous terms to pathologize bad spending habits: ‘spendingitis’ (p. 17), ‘buyingitis’ (p. 27), ‘credit carditis’ (p. 93), and ‘giftitis’ (p. 94). Macías’ readers are afflicted with bad habits, and the first step on the pathway to financial freedom is to adopt good habits. Likewise, Ruiz (MR-1) claims that emotional suffering is rooted in ‘habits and

Table 2. Change agents’ diagnoses of problems and prescriptions of solutions.

Agent	Issue	Underlying problems	Solutions offered
WCNC	Food sovereignty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Global agri-food capitalism ● Neo-liberal public policies ● International trade agreements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Progressive public policies to support small-scale agriculture ● Renegotiation of trade agreements
NOWMNOWL	Violence against women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Patriarchy and misogyny ● Gender-based inequalities ● Hegemonic masculinity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prosecution of perpetrators ● Promotion of feminist values ● Protection of activists’ rights
GM	Climate change/ loss of biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Noxious corporate actions ● Adverse public policies ● Consumer behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Corporate social responsibility ● Progressive public policies ● Greater public awareness
OM	Poverty and inequality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Global capitalism ● Political-legal corruption ● Ineffective public policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Empowerment of communities ● Applied research ● Progressive public policies
Sofía Macías	Financial insecurity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of financial literacy and bad habits that lead people to overspend and not save money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Individuals gaining financial literacy and changing their habits of spending and investing money
Miguel Ruiz	Emotional health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pathological cultural patterns of childhood socialisation resulting in adults’ emotional suffering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Individuals gaining self-awareness and changing their habits of thought and action

routines of which we are not even aware' (p. 93) and that the pathway to emotional wellness is adopting the new habits represented by his 'four agreements'.

Individual behaviours are central to the diagnosis offered by GM in the field of environmental justice. The organisation focuses its attention on issues relating to climate change and the loss of biodiversity, and it argues that such issues are closely linked to contemporary patterns of production and consumption. Regarding consumption, they write, 'we live in a world where the culture of buying, using and throwing away has led us to an overconsumption that excessively exploits natural resources and people' (GM-3). Since individual behaviours are part of the problem, they are also part of the solution: 'to change attitudes and behaviours' to promote forms of consumption oriented towards sustainability and responsibility. However, GM complements this focus on individuals by advocating for public policies and corporate practices that support environmental justice. They write, 'in exposing threats to the environment and in finding solutions, we have no permanent allies or adversaries. If a company or government is willing to change, we will work with them' (GM-4).

Intervening at multiple levels is part of the solution prescribed by OM to the problems of poverty and inequality. They claim that inequality 'in people's real possibilities to have control of their own lives is a complex problem that requires work on many fronts' (OM-1). OM argues that poor government performance, corruption, and permissive regulatory frameworks reinforce economic, political, and social practices that reproduce and aggravate various forms of inequality – including those based on wealth, income, access to services, gender, and ethnic status (OM-2, OM-3). In the face of such complex problems, OM promotes interventions including working with individuals and communities to facilitate training, leadership development, and disaster relief (OM-4); and working with governments and civil society to conduct and disseminate research and advocate for progressive public policies (OM-5).

While leaders of GM and OM pursue environmental and social justice by promoting individual change and collective action, leaders of WCNC and NOWMNOWL focus on collective action. NOWMNOWL argues that violence against women is rooted in cultural norms of patriarchy, misogyny, and hegemonic masculinity. They write that, as women 'we live in a situation of war against us' and that 'sexist violence is the responsibility of culture, public and private institutions, families and churches' (NOWMNOWL-2, pp. 236–237). In the face of such warfare, leaders of NOWMNOWL seek solutions by spectacularly confronting hetero-patriarchy (NOWMNOWL-3), by making violence against women more visible (NOWMNOWL-4), by pursuing the prosecution of those who commit acts of violence against women, by promoting women's reproductive and labour market rights (NOWMNOWL-5), and by eliminating the criminalisation of feminist activists (NOWMNOWL-6). While these solutions revolve around collective action, they presuppose that individuals outside the movement will somehow change attitudes or behaviours due to such action.

Leaders of WCNC seek, through collective actions of protest and advocacy, to change public opinion and public policies. To do so, they catalyse change among individual members of the public and decision-makers in governments. The underlying problems behind the deterioration of Mexican food sovereignty and rural livelihoods are, for WCNC leaders, neoliberal public policies that marginalise local (Indigenous and peasant) agricultural production and promote global agro-industrial interests and the use of genetically modified seeds. The solution to such problems lies in the replacement of such policies by those that better support small-scale agricultural production and sustainable rural livelihoods. They link food sovereignty with social development and environmental protection, through demanding 'to exercise our right to a healthy and adequate diet, with fresh products cultivated by peasants and Indigenous people who, in addition to food, give us water, air, forests, and culture' (WCNC-1). They strive to 'rescue the countryside' from deterioration, along with rescuing: 'mother earth; the peasant economy; fresh, local and healthy food; Mexican corn; and good quality tortillas' (WCNC-2). To do so, leaders of WCNC work to: raise public awareness of the importance of food sovereignty, sustainable models of Indigenous and peasant production, and the protection of the genetic diversity of Mexican corn; demand public policies,

programmes, and regulations that oppose free trade and support local production of non-genetically modified corn, beans, and other products; guarantee the right to food; recognise the rights of Indigenous peoples to protect their territories; promote the conservation of forests; and restrict the use of corn for biofuel until problems of hunger and malnutrition have been resolved (WCNC-2 and 3).

In the cases described here, change agents have identified problems and proposed solutions. While the problems are complex and diverse, the solutions share a common element: public pedagogical logic. To achieve their goals, social movements, civil society organisations, and self-help authors assert that individuals must change the way they think and act; a pedagogical logic that involves unlearning and learning. As Motta and Esteves (2014) argue, making change requires unlearning hegemonic patterns of thought and action, and learning new ones. The change agents analysed here express this pedagogical logic in various ways. Leaders of NOWMNOWL eloquently state that their network seeks ‘to name the wave of death that is being thrown on our bodies, repudiating that pedagogy of cruelty that seeks to paralyze us’ (NOWMNOWL-1, p. 48). Leaders of WCNC argue that Mexicans must first refuse industrial models of agricultural production and the consumption of highly processed foods, to promote food sovereignty and healthy eating. Ruiz (MR-2, p. 189) writes about ‘awakening’ as a precursor to being able to address emotional suffering: ‘the awakening is like being at a party where there are thousands of people and everyone is drunk except you . . . That is the awakening, because the truth is that most humans . . . don’t have the awareness that they are living in a dream of hell’. Macías claims that the first step to personal financial security is to unlearn one’s extravagant spending habits and start setting aside a little money each month (SM-1, p. 22). GM contends that both households and corporations need to unlearn irresponsible forms of natural resource consumption as a precursor to learning more sustainable forms (GM-3 and 4). OM argues that the ‘political and juridical apparatus’ acts to reproduce inequality and poverty (OM-2, p. 32); therefore, citizens must unlearn assumptions about institutional structures and demand that governments transform such structures so that their rights as citizens may be exercised (OM-7, p. 4).

Pedagogical strategies, material interests, and political implications

In terms of public pedagogical messaging, the six cases analysed here are remarkably similar. They claim to be agents of change in their respective fields of intervention. They diagnose problems and prescribe solutions. They even promote a common pedagogical logic of unlearning hegemonic knowledges and learning alternatives – with hegemonic knowledge being positioned as a component of the underlying problems and alternative knowledge being positioned as a component of the solutions. Such shared messaging obscures highly diverse pedagogical strategies through which adults are engaged in the process of learning. Here, we describe the pedagogical strategies that characterise advocacy networks, civil society organisations, and the self-help industry in Mexico, and explain how these diverse pedagogical strategies reflect different material interests and contradictory political implications.

One can situate pedagogical strategies of change in Mexico along a continuum, at one end of which are the most public practices (spectacular, disruptive protests where even those who do not wish to participate are compelled to do so) and at the other end of which are the most private practices (workshops and seminars where participation is restricted). [Table 3](#) identifies which of our six cases engage in each of the six pedagogical strategies.

Spectacular protests are a distinctive part of Mexican culture, particularly in Mexico City, where radio stations broadcast ‘disruption’ updates and where the municipal government posts a daily online agenda of protest marches, road blockades, and sit-ins (de Seguridad Ciudadana, 2023). Spectacular protests serve a pedagogical function: to raise public awareness of issues. GM explains that it coordinates ‘public campaigns’ that orchestrate ‘direct, non-violent actions’ designed to inspire citizens to ‘participate in the search for solutions’ and to catalyse action by governments and

Table 3. Pedagogical strategies: from most public to most private.

Case	Spectacular protests	Social media engagement	Websites and books	Partnership building	Targeted lobbying	Workshops and courses
WCNC	✓	✓		✓	✓	
NOWMNOWL	✓	✓			✓	
GM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
OM		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sofía Macías		✓	✓			✓
Miguel Ruiz		✓	✓			✓

businesses (GM-5). Examples include climbing the ‘Estela de Luz’ (a tall monument) and dressing the ‘Diana the Huntress’ fountain with gas masks and oxygen tanks to draw attention to air pollution. NOWMNOWL engages in provocative forms of protest – occupying public spaces, marching on prominent buildings, blockading major thoroughfares, and diffusing feminist art. One of their notable protests – ‘Exodus for the Life of Women’ – involved a march from Mexico City to Ciudad Juárez in 2009 (NOWMNOWL-4). Provocative slogans mobilised at spectacular NOWMNOWL protests include ‘Sorry for bothering you, but they are killing us!’ and ‘Stop covering up for abusers!’ (NOWMNOWL-7). WCNC plants corn on city streets and organises celebratory fairs to draw attention to food sovereignty.

All change agents profiled here engage in extensive **social media work**. Macías and Ruiz disseminate their self-help messages through YouTube channels, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Through engaging with followers via social media, self-help authors disseminate pedagogical messages and market revenue-generating products and services. GM and OM are both active on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and GM also has a YouTube channel. Social media provides civil society organisations with platforms to disseminate pedagogical messages about environmental and social justice, to recruit volunteers, and to solicit donations. Activists with WCNC collaborate on the YouTube channel (‘Canal GEAVIDEO’) and are active on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. NOWMNOWL employs Facebook and its supporters have posted numerous videos on YouTube. Activists in the network state that their media include ‘the body, the protest, and the click’ (NOWMNOWL-8, p. 46).

Civil society organisations and self-help authors also disseminate messages through **websites and print materials**. GM and OM have sophisticated websites (GM-2; OM-6) through which people may access multimedia resources, make donations, or become volunteers. Ruiz (MR-4) and Macías (SM-3) employ websites to sell books, market courses and workshops, and disseminate self-help messages via blogs and podcasts.

As one moves towards less public pedagogical strategies, one notes that advocacy networks and civil society organisations engage in **partnership building** and **targeted lobbying** activities, while self-help authors offer **workshops and courses**. Macías offers an online course (‘Financial Challenges’) involving monthly seminars, weekly exercises, and an interactive community of users (SM-4). Ruiz offers lectures, workshops, retreats and apprenticeship programmes – online, at a centre near Mexico City, and at locations across the USA (MR-5). For self-help authors, such events are a source of revenue and an opportunity to market books.

OM engages in private pedagogical work, with a view to facilitating community development. They provide educational programmes in communities to learn ‘from and with’ people (and especially from youth, women, and Indigenous people), to create ‘agendas of change’, and to promote leadership development and community participation (OM-1). For social movement leaders and civil society organisations, private pedagogical work is typically focused on building coalitions with other organisations and lobbying policy makers. The WCNC movement exemplifies coalition building, as its food sovereignty campaign, involving over three hundred organisations, has been sustained for over 15 years. Lobbying for changes to public policies and programmes is an inherently pedagogical process. A special form of such lobbying, in which WCNC, NOWMNOWL,

and GM engage, is intervening in the legal system to challenge existing laws and represent victims or activists whose work has been criminalised.

Despite sharing considerable content in terms of public pedagogical messaging, the pedagogical encounters facilitated by self-help authors and leaders of advocacy networks and civil society organisations differ according to material interests and political implications. Self-help authors and publishers seek to profit financially from the sale of books, webinars, and workshops. As such, the outcome sustaining self-help pedagogical encounters is to elicit enough satisfaction on the part of learners such that they purchase further products and/or recommend such products to others. The fact that commercial transactions typically accompany pedagogical encounters in the self-help industry has a parallel in post-secondary education, where students pay tuition to enrol. The material interests underlying pedagogical encounters organised by civil society organisations are more complex. Civil society organisations must generate awareness and positive public relations to support fundraising efforts involving philanthropic donations and government or corporate sponsorship. They must also nurture engagement among current and prospective volunteers and employees. As such, the outcome sustaining pedagogical encounters organised by civil society organisations is two-fold: to convince donors, volunteers, and employees that the organisation is making a difference in the world; and to raise the awareness of other stakeholders of the issues and changes being promoted by the organisation. The material interests underlying pedagogical encounters organised by leaders of advocacy networks are parallel to those of civil society organisations, except that networks typically do not have paid members of staff whose salaries need to be recovered. Leaders of civil society organisations and advocacy networks thus strive for pedagogical impact both upon supporters and upon people (such as those inconvenienced by spectacular demonstrations or targeted by lobbying efforts) who may be indifferent or antipathic to the lessons being presented.

Differences in pedagogical strategies and material interests correspond to the contradictory political implications that characterise these three domains. The self-help industry promotes individual accommodation to the status quo. In the cases analysed here, this means that rather than address the social roots of problems relating to financial insecurity and emotional health, self-help solutions encourage individuals to better manage their financial and emotional resources to escape problems that other people cannot. Civil society organisations promote liberal reforms aimed at ameliorating social problems through working with existing institutions. In the cases analysed here, this means that civil society organisations encourage governments, corporations, and individuals to change policies and practices to align better with the goals of social and environmental justice. In some cases, advocacy networks promote resistance to the status quo. In the cases analysed here, this means that network activists directly confront those that they hold responsible for violence against women and the global imperialism of industrial agriculture – and mobilise others to collectively oppose their enemies. In other cases, scholars have studied how advocacy networks reproduce the status quo or nurture hateful phenomena such as homophobia, racism, and misogyny (Grace, 2016; MacNeill et al., 2020; Simões et al., 2021).

Conclusion

Our findings present a snapshot of informal adult education in Mexico, narrating six case studies drawn from three domains in which millions of adults each year pursue individual, community, or social change. This narrative enables readers to better understand public pedagogical messages about challenges relating to food sovereignty, violence against women, social justice, environmental justice, financial insecurity, and emotional health. Due to the limitations of our research – specifically the absence of insight into what adults learn or change due to their reception of such messages – we cannot describe the engagement of adults in Mexico with these issues. Nevertheless, through our empirical work, we have advanced scholarship at the intersection of social movement learning and public pedagogy in three important

ways. First, we have presented the first study that systematically compares three different sets of public pedagogical agents promoting change: leaders of advocacy networks, leaders of civil society organisations, and self-help authors. Our comparative methodology makes an important contribution to a scholarly field that has been dominated by stand-alone case studies or the comparison of cases that are in most ways very similar. Second, we have extended the geographic scope of scholarship at the intersection of social movement learning and public pedagogy by studying a non-anglophone country outside of Europe. Third, we have documented similarities and differences between the public pedagogical messaging and strategies of advocacy networks, civil society organisations, and self-help authors. Importantly, we have shown how apparent similarities in public pedagogical messaging obscure important differences in pedagogical strategies, material interests, and political implications.

In terms of the broader implications of our study, we have endeavoured to help educators assess the range of public pedagogical work that may be mobilised in the pursuit of change. We have sketched the contours of the material interests and political implications of advocacy networks, civil society organisations, and self-help authors, and we would encourage further research from scholars of adult education to explore how these domains intersect and how adults respond to the messages of change they generate. Are there symbiotic or mutually supportive relationships between messages of change generated by leaders of advocacy networks, leaders of civil society organisations, and self-help authors? Do the conflicting material interests and political implications of these three domains render their messages of change antagonistic or counter-productive to one another? What is the impact, on adults' reception of messages of change from these three domains, of the mobilisation of slogans of change by political actors or commercial enterprises?

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Appendix: Sources

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