Finding Empowerment through Continuing Training – Spanish Women's Perceptions

Piritta Pietilä-Litendahl (Corresponding author)

Faculty of Education, University of Lapland

PO Box 122, 96101 Rovaniemi, Finland

E-mail: pirittamaria@hotmail.com

Satu Uusiautti

Faculty of Education, University of Lapland

PO Box 122, 96101 Rovaniemi, Finland

E-mail: satu@uusiautti.fi

Abstract

Empowerment refers to a positive change in the holistic well-being. In this study, the discourse of empowerment is discussed in the light of continuing training process among women in an Andalusian village, in Southern Spain. The study leans on critical pedagogy and feminist anthropology, through which the empowerment process was studied. This is an ethnographic study and a part of a wider fieldwork made during 2003-2007. The informants were woman who attended in a regional continuing education program which aim was at prevent and decrease unemployment as well as at provide further education in growing occupational fields. The empiric data were generated within the training period 2004-2005 during which the informants participated in a course of nursing and health care. Data consist of interviews, field notes, and questionnaires. On the basis of the empirical knowledge, the purpose is to discuss the empowering possibilities that continuing training can offer. Based on the results, the education period appeared an educational intervention enabling a change in women's subject positions and empowerment at the personal level.

Keywords: Adult education; Further education; Subject position; Empowerment; Feminist

anthropology.

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the concept of empowerment and the empowering processes at individual levels, particularly from the women's perspective. The purpose is to discuss empowerment processes as the part of life politics. Originally, the idea of life politics was launched by Ulrich Beck (see e.g., 1995) when he talked about the concepts of risk society and individualization. He argued that in new situations people have the freedom, opportunities, and risks, that life politics can thus be understood as the daily choices along the course of life and life events. In these situations, individual people have to participate in constructing their own life stories (Beck, 1995).

When the traditional emancipatory politics means that people get free from the exploitation and oppression, new life politics can be seen to refer to increasing control over one's life through opportunities and choices (Pease, 2002; see also Rodwell, 1996; Mosedale, 2005; Suoranta, 2005). It is crucial to realize that the emergence of new opportunities is not just positive but the dimension of freedom can also appear oppressive and compulsive (Hoikkala, 1998; Pini, 2002; see also Gill, 2008). In this study, this increasing control is studied through the concept of empowerment (e.g., Rodwell, 1996; Siitonen, 1999; Stromquist, 2002; 2011). The especial focus of the study was to discuss the empowerment process in the light of critical pedagogy and feminist anthropology through the informants' experiences and reflections of the continuing training. Thus, the purpose of the study is to articulate both emic and etic viewpoints.

2. Theoretical Framework of the Study

2.1 The Concept of Empowerment

According to Rappaport (1987), it is not possible to understand the meaning of empowerment before knowing not only about individuals but also knowing what, or who, one has authority over. Therefore, it is relevant to discuss power before familiarizing with the concept of empowerment. Michel Foucault (1984) considered power always related to relationships that have both individual and collective aspects. According to his definition, power is merely exercised than owned and due to its dynamic nature, power can be distributed or acquired. Britt-Marie Thurén (1993) emphasizes the importance of decision making as a form of exercise of power. Likewise, Michel Foucault (1984) highlighted the significance of control as a manifestation of power. What is more, Ulrich Beck (1995), and Rosi Andrade and Sally J. Stevens (2011) stress the role of active participation in the process of gaining the control of own life. Both Thurén and Foucault connected power first and foremost to relationships, and lack of power was therefore considered due to the historical and sociocultural structure (Foucault, 1984; Thurén, 1993; see also Andrade & Stevens, 2011; Suoranta, 2005). This leads to the internalized power structures taken for granted (Andrade & Stevens, 2011; hooks, 2010; Stromquist, 1997). How is this connected to empowerment, then?

Juha Siitonen (1999) defines empowerment as follows:

"Empowerment starts from the person himself or herself: you cannot give the power to someone else. It is a personal and social process that is not caused or produced by another people. Empowerment is a process of a chain of events that can be significantly bound to the circumstances of the surrounding environment (e.g., freedom to choose or atmosphere perceived safe), and this is why empowerment can be more likely in some environments than in others." (p. 93)

Nelly Stromquist (2011) also emphasizes the totality of education, where the both the content and the context play a significant role (see also Andrade & Stevens, 2011). Education and empowerment also are connected to each other (see e.g., Andrade & Stevens, 2011; Heikkilä-Laakso & Heikkilä, 1997; Siitonen, 1999; Stromquist, 2011).

2.2 Empowerment Perspectives in Education

Antikainen (1996; 1998) has analyzed the relationship between empowerment, education, and learning. Significant learning experiences have a central role in the relationship between learning and empowerment. These learning experiences refer to events that direct an individual person's course of life and that change his or her identity (Antikainen, 1996; 1998; see also Siitonen, 1999). Therefore, significant learning experiences are merely life events rather than a part of institutionalized course of life (Antikainen, 1996).

According to Nelly Stromquist (1997), empowerment can be divided into cognitive, psychological, political, and economic dimensions. Inner empowerment consists of the cognitive and psychological dimensions while outer empowerment covers the political and economic dimensions. Furthermore, Stromquist has a feminist approach to empowerment which means that she emphasizes the woman's activity and understanding of one's own reality and its consequences at the individual and societal levels (see also Freire, 1972).

The psychological dimension is related to self-respect and self-esteem, whereas cognitive dimension to increasing awareness of one's abilities and self-appreciation. Political or social dimension influences at the individual and societal levels because it necessitates the ability to organize and execute social changes (Stromquist, 1997; see also Stromquist, 2002). According to Stromquist's (1997) theory, lack of power in women is related to their limited responsibilities outside home, significant role in unofficial production and other low-paid fields, minimal career planning, low self-esteem, and minimal participation in the political system.

It is difficult to distinguish empowerment from the courses of events of development, maturing, or growth that belong to the lives of every living and experience human being (Antikainen, 1996). Moreover, empowerment when discussed in the context of vocational and general basic education is sometimes connected to change agency. This means the ability to be responsible for one's personal change and growth and simultaneously for other's mental empowering during the change process (Heikkilä-Laakso & Heikkilä, 1997; Peterson et al., 2006). The ideal of change agency is to perceive school (alongside home and family) as a place in which the social position (self-image and social behavior) of the youth are negotiated and renegotiated in group situations and experiences (see Stromquist, 2011). Therefore, it

refers to a sort of state of self-definition and change where the group has influence on the final outcome.

This can be better understood by dividing empowerment into inner and outer dimensions. In the context of this study, inner empowerment can be seen covering seven factors: (1) Own time, (2) Sharing of (especially women's) common experiences and problems, (3) Change of routines and rest, (4) Expanding of social relationships, (5) New experiences, (6) Tips how to promote psycho-social well-being and (7) Professional and personal advice related to nursing. From the perspective of outer empowerment, three factors seem especially relevant: (1) Solidarity, (2) The surpassing of the traditional limits of the personal and public, and (3) Increasing visibility (see Andrade & Stevens, 2011; del Valle, 2001; Pietilä, 2009; Stromquist, 1997). Likewise, the relationship between the inner and outer processes is worth discussing because they can strengthen each other (see also Pietilä, 2009).

2.3 Empowerment Process and Learning in Women as the Framework of This Study

In Siitonen's definition, empowerment is considered as three-tiered process where the main focus is on person but where the social and environmental dimensions play remarkable roles. This definition is well suited for the study, as the starting point of women subject positions is seen as a result of societal changes and new expectations as well as traditional gendered norms (Siitonen, 1999; see also Andrade & Stevens, 2011; Pietilä, 2009; Stromquist, 2011). The process described in empowerment can be seen as a positive one, and according to Siitonen's definition, it can be studied only through people's own experiences (Siitonen, 1999). That is where ethnographic methods are crucial. Through the triangulation of ethnographic methods as well as by changing the research position and perspectives, we are able to produce multi-level information about the informants' experiences. Besides, they allow the equal dialogue between emic and etic knowledge (see Pietilä, 2006).

Nelly Stromquist (2011) stresses the importance that education has for girls and women in order to equalize life and career chances. As Stromquist states education tends to foster women´s active participation in decisions making both in private and public spheres and, moreover it expands their possibilities to access to a remunerated work which strengthens their economic situations and provides more autonomy. What is more, within educational environment gender-sensitive education can strengthen the conceptions of citizenship as a whole. The new expectations and conceptions about women´s positions both on public and private spheres have an influence on their educational achievement (Stromquist, 2011; see also Pietilä, 2009).

Zimmerman (1995) defines the empowerment process as the opportunity to control and influence in decisions related to one's life. However, he argues that empowerment can vary from contexts and developmental phases to another, and therefore, any global measurement of empowerment is not possible or relevant. Christine Rodwell (1996) asks whether empowerment is actually a process or merely a product, and concludes that it is a question of division of resources and possibilities that, on the other hand, increases jurisdiction leading to a change. In her definition empowerment enables control and ability to make decisions about one's life.

The idea in empowerment is that the subject becomes an active actor through action. As Stromquist (1997) points out, changes do not just happen if they can happen: it is also necessary remove the resistance involved in the internalized and reproduced roles. Likewise, Moore (1999) emphasizes the opportunity to use economic resources as a display of control (see Gálvez Muñoz & Matus López, 2010).

Certainly, empowerment has been studied in various connections and already for decades (e.g., Gutiérrez, 1994; Keskitalo-Foley, 2000; Kieffer, 1984; Maniero, 1986; Rappaport, 1987; just to name few). However, the main interest in this research is to study how the empowerment is connected with an education process leading to change in a gendered environment, and therefore, studies discussing women's empowering and power, and the connection between education and learning are relevant for this perspective. As Summerson Carr (2002) points out, a schemata of personal development often underlies these theories.

3. Method

3.1 Research Questions and Data

The purpose of this research was to analyze the empowerment process of women who attended in further education course. The following research questions were set for this study:

(1) What was the women's situation before the training period?

(2) How did the empowerment process appear during and after the training period?

The aforementioned questions lay the foundation for conclusions in which the purpose is to further discuss the empowerment process and its manifestation through a three dimensional model of the interconnectedness of theory and practice, in this case the empowerment theory and participation in continuing training

The fieldwork was conducted among Spanish women who participated in continuing training (called ACERCA) during the years 2004-2005. It was the third year when this regional training program was held. The program consisted of educational courses of different disciplines and its purpose was to decrease unemployment and increase education in fields needing more employees. The selection of the students was based on their contemporary employment situation: people with uncertain employment or in danger of becoming unemployed were given the priority. This article focuses on one course which provided further education on nursing and health care and it was aimed for people with higher education degrees. The participants were aiming at responsible positions in nursing homes.

There were 12 participants in the training period. But, as the present study is part of a wider, context-bound fieldwork, the main focus was on the women who lived in the same village where the training was mainly held. They were seven. However, these women's situations and backgrounds were similar to other participants. They were aged between 21 and 38. Three of them had performed upper secondary level education and had family with children. These women defined themselves mostly as housewives although they worked partly outside homes. The rest four women had graduated from higher education and had only short-time work experience and they had no children. They saw themselves as young professional

women in the beginning of their career (see also Gálvez Muñoz & Matus López, 2010).

3.2 Research Approach: Critical Pedagogy and Feminist Anthropology

The fundamental approach of this study originates in critical pedagogy and feminist anthropology. They form the basis for also the analysis of the data obtained in this study. The education processes experienced by the women who participated in this research were analyzed according to the three-phased progress of the interconnection of theory and praxis. These three levels are criticism, awareness, and influencing. Next, we will introduce the ideology in detail.

The common goal of critical pedagogy and feminist anthropology is to bring out the prevailing deficits of the society preventing mutual equality and justice from fulfilling (Burbules & Perk, 1999; Gruenewald, 2003). Moreover, both theories also aim at changing the deficits especially by supporting the oppressed and their activation. Through action and research, critical pedagogy and feminist anthropology want to change the prevailing power structures.

One of the premises of critical pedagogy is criticism toward the prevailing circumstances (McLaren, 2010; Suoranta, 2005). Feminist anthropology adds the women's position and their societal activity in the focus (e.g., Coffey, 1999; Moore 1999; Rofel, 2003; Stromquist, 2011). A critical viewpoint makes it possible to analyze the situation from many points of view and eventually to recognize the injustices. However, not only criticism and recognition are important but the next level leads to increasing awareness both at the individual and at the societal levels. And finally, only through criticism and awareness, one can actually influence and intervene in the situation and pursue fixing the injustices (see Freire, 1972).

This article aims to show that even if the continuing training does not explicitly have a certain theoretical viewpoint, its starting point and goals can be situated within the common framework of critical pedagogy and feminist anthropology. According to this idea, the premises and goal of the training period can be seen as gradually proceeding change process. However, the change is not straightforward vertically and the phases can overlap. A hermeneutic cycle might present the change the best. Horizontally, the process has two parts: the background and the goals. The division is in line with the timely change as the background refers to the starting point of education period and its theoretical premises while the goals are intertwined with the practical information.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The empiric data were generated using ethnographic field methods. Both method and data triangulation were used. The fieldwork was carried out during the training period in 2004–2005. Moreover, the initial data were complemented by a wider research data from an extended fieldwork done during 2003–2007, and the researcher was familiar with the wider field context since 1999. The researcher's position can be described as being on the edge of the field. In one hand, she was "an outsider from the North Pole", who could because of her researcher's position have more freedom of choice than the women participating in the education periods. On the other hand, as a result of long-term connection and shared living

context in Spain, she had become "one of us" through these experiences, feelings and challenges. This made it possible to have a consiuos dialogue between emic and etic data knowledge.

The data consisted of recorded interviews, field notes, and questionnaires. Documents from the education provider as well as files and statistics from the employment office and other labor market support were used for clearing the current educational and labor circumstances in the target context.

All the participants filled two questionnaires, the first one in the beginning of the course and the second one in the end of the course. The aim of this questionnaires was to gather basic information of the informants, and their expectations and experiences. The questionnaires had structured and open questions. The key informants, seven women, were also interviewed twice, in the beginning and in the end of the training. The interviews were thematic. The first interviews were based on the questionnaires and other documents and the second one on the questionnaires and observations. The purpose of the interviews was to deepen the knowledge and get more personal data about informants' experiences as well as talk about their notions on their own subject positions and possibilities (Forsey, 2010). Observation played a significant role in the fieldwork as it can provide important information about women's perceptions of the outcomes of education (see Awartini, Whitman, & Gordon, 2008). The participation level changed from non-participant to participant observation. It was done during the theoretical training period whereas observation was not possible during the period of informants' practical training, but only within the village context.

The data analysis followed hermeneutic spiral (e.g., Crist & Tanner, 2003). The first phase consisted of the first reading of the data and discovering details and entities from them. This phase of analysis started already when the interviews were conducted. Findings from questionnaires and observations supported the planning of interviews, and thus, interviews helped confirming the reliability of the observations. Furthermore, the long-term fieldwork made it possible to review, complete and discuss the preliminary results with the informants and the education providers. The data analysis represents qualitative content analysis which was enhanced with the use of Atlas.ti analyzing software. These analyses led to the further review of results and interpretations.

The analysis leaned on Juha Siitonen's (1999) theory of empowerment and its categories. They were discussed in this research in the point of view of professional growth. However, this study also necessitated special attention to women's empowerment, and therefore Nelly Stromquist's theory of four dimensions of empowerment was also referred to when analyzing the data.

4. Results

4.1 Situation before the Training

Siitonen's (1999) categorization was employed for analyzing the women's experiences and beliefs regarding the continuing training and employment. Table 1 illustrates the starting point among the participants. The analysis is based on the questionnaires performed by the

course organizer and by the researcher before the beginning of the training period. These information were complemented by interviews and participatory observation.

Table 1. The starting point

	Goals	Perceptions of one's abilities	Contextual conditions	Emotions
All participants	Employment New occupation New skills and knowledge New attitudes Personal growth Professional growth	Low education No professional role Hard-working Good personal qualities for working with people	Bad employment situation Unequal and gender-bound labor market Difficulties in combining family and work	Hopefulness Uncertainty about the future Motivation Doubts about one's doing
Young women	Becoming employed in the field one has education Supplementary education	Minimal work experience Doubts about succeeding in work practicum	Hard competition Family's support	
Women with families	Social relationships Change in everyday life Having own time and place Becoming qualified	Long absence from the labor market Long time from education Doubts about one's coping with theoretical studies The ability to combine work and family life	No support No acceptance	

At the beginning of the training period, reasons for which participants had applied for education can be seen as the goals. Therefore, the most important goals are becoming employed, finding a new occupation, and improving one's changes of getting employed through continuing training, qualification, learning new skills and knowledge, and changing attitudes. Mostly, participants seemed hopeful in relation to the fulfilment of goals. Secondary objectives were related to personal growth and for example among women with families to changing routines, and having more social interaction and personal space (see also

Andrade & Stevens, 2010; Gálvez Muñoz & Matus López, 2010; Pietilä, 2009). Even if these objectives were visible in all research data, the secondary objectives were regarded more important in the free discussions.

Low employment defined the participants' belief in their abilities. Poor professional self-esteem is due to long absence from work, lack of work experience, and lack of basic or supplementary education, which are typical features connected to Andalusian women's work (see Gálvez Muñoz & Matus López, 2010). The employment situation stood out among the young women whose first priority was to enhance their careers.

In addition, difficult employment situation can affect self-esteem in other areas of life too. Women with families had experienced that lack of social relationships, disparagement of their roles as homemakers, and perceiving their daily work insignificant decreased their belief in themselves and trust in their abilities (see also Andrade & Stevens, 2011; Gálvez Muñoz & Matus López, 2010; Pietilä, 2009), which was brought up in the interviews and discussions. While the young women were afraid of their abilities to handle practical training and work, women with families were uncertain of their abilities to successfully perform theoretical studies. Despite low self-esteem, the participants described themselves as good, diligent, and responsible employees suitable to work with people. In addition, women with families thought that they are able to reorganize family routines so that they can combine work and family in a balanced manner.

Context-related preconceptions were negative and rather realistic when it came to employment opportunities. The participants believed that labor market discriminate women and more posts are available in male-dominated fields. In addition, women thought that their family situation is likely to influence their employment (see also Gálvez Muñoz & Matus López, 2010). On the one hand, positive expectations were set toward work, a possible workplace, and the employee's role. Work was considered a welcome complement in life and even solving problems in other areas of life. On the other hand, according to the young women in this research, the labor market involves high competition. Higher education, supplementary education, and work experience were seen the keys to success. The young women reported that they were provided with perfect support by their circle of acquaintances whereas women with families had experienced disapproval of their return to the labor market. Therefore, the women emphasized that their loved ones were not supporting their education and employment attempts sufficiently.

4.2 The Manifestation of Empowerment

How does empowerment manifest itself among the women who participated in this research? Table 2 illustrates their thought at the end of the continuing training period. The perceptions collected to the table are based on women's interviews, final questionnaire designed by the researcher, and observations.

Table 2. Situation after the training

	Goals	Perceptions of one's abilities	Contextual conditions	Emotions
All participants	Employment Independence Self-fulfillment Professional growth Money	Ready to enter the labor market Hard-working Good personal qualities for working with people	Scarcity of employment opportunities but there are possibilities Unequal and gender-bound labor market Work is a part of life	Hopefulness Trust and belief in one's skills
Young women	Primarily aiming at getting employed in positions that correspond to their education Possible supplementary education	Minimal work experience, Practical training supports	Hard competition but better chances now Family's support	
Women with families	Having one's own time and place Feeling of being useful	It is possible to combine family-life and work	Age and family have an influence Support and silent approval	

As Table 2 shows, women's goals are more clearly targeted at employment. Although young women aim at positions that correspond to their education, they reported that they are ready to seize other options too and study further in order to reach their professional goals. Employment means a path to economic and mental autonomy, an opportunity to professional and personal growth, and to self-fulfillment (see also Heikkilä-Laakso & Heikkilä, 1997; Stromquist 2011). Women with families associated employment with thoughts of their own space, and an employee's role increased their sense of being useful.

Along the education period and practical training, the women's professional self-esteem improved, which was visible and even brought up in the discussions. They started to believe in their own abilities to handle work tasks (see also Andrade & Stevens, 2011). In addition, they seemingly believed more in their ability to imbibe the employee's role and even verbalized it. The young women had found practical training very beneficial as it gave them

important work experience. Practical training was considered useful also by women with families: they found out that they can combine work and family. Still, women brought up in the free discussions that their experiences varied considerably depending on the work place, the given tasks, and especially the responsibilities and respect shown to them.

The continuing training period did not considerably change women's perceptions of the context. They still thought that the labor market was unequal and competitive. However, they did not perceive the role of gender as crucial in their occupational field because it was clearly dominated by women. Furthermore, the women believed that their own chances had gotten better because of the supplementary training.

Although workplaces and employee roles were still seen very positively, women's thoughts had become more realistic too (see Hoikkala, 1998). The young women believed that their loved ones and friends would support their attempts to find work that correspond their education. But, they were also aware of the difficulties to get a job or even of the possible need to study more. Unlike the women with families thought at the beginning of the period, their practical training period had influenced on their families attitudes: now they had the family's approval to work outside home. Though, the combination of work and family life had turned out be demanding, the highest expectations were set by themselves.

5. Discussion: The Empowerment Process

The purpose of the project was to arrange education in those fields that lack qualified work force. The two results sections have introduced how the training period influenced the women's lives, and which factors changed. Next, we will continue the analysis by discussing the three-phased empowerment process in the light of the women's experiences.

5.1 Stage 1: Criticism

The phase of criticism refers to the starting point reflecting the problems of local labor policies. As all training had to be arranged considering the local circumstances, and also the women's position must be carefully discussed. The purpose of the continuing training was to create an entity that pays attention to many issues, such as how to design educational contents to meet the local employment opportunities and the local culture and how to consider participants' points of view, gender-related facts, employment statistics, and unemployment profiles.

The contents of the continuing training correspond to the current change in the nursing and health care culture. They have been traditionally considered a part of reproductive, voluntary work done by women (see e.g., Galvez Muñoz & Matus López, 2010; Moore, 1999; Stromquist, 2011; Thurén, 1993). Women's entry to the labor market and other reasons, such as narrowing family and relative networks and prolongation of distances, have resulted in a situation in which children who would need part-time or full-time care or the elderly have no possibility of being cared by their family members or other relatives. Therefore, nursing and care have become productive work that requires professional qualifications (Galvez Muñoz & Matus López, 2010; Instituto de Estadística de Andalucía 1975-2007).

The selection of participants happened through positive discrimination. This was because most of the local employment opportunities represent male-dominated fields. Women's and young adults' employment situation seemed considerably weaker, and therefore, participants for continuing training were selected among applicants from these groups, such as women who had devoted to their families during the past few years or young adults who lived with their parents and who had difficulties in finding their first long-term work (Instituto de Estadística de Andalucía 1975-2007; see also Galvez Muñoz & Matus López, 2010). However, because this training was voluntary, already applying for it tells about critical attitude to one's own position in the labor market and awareness of the prevailing circumstances. Participating in the training shows activation and willingness of influencing (see Suoranta, 2005) and more importantly, a shift from a comfortable and passive state toward a process that requires engagement (hooks, 2010).

Criticism is focused differently in different phases: it can be directed in outer factors or in oneself, one's inner factors. The situation before the education shows basically criticism toward outer factors, and only momentarily on one's own abilities at the beginning of the training period. Then, women tended to view their own abilities especially compared to other participants. As a whole, criticism seemed to clearly decrease already during the first weeks of training. Simultaneously, the observations showed that the women started grouping and have more vivid interaction. In addition, their hopefulness toward the future increased (see also Adrade & Stevens, 2011). Their hopefulness seemed to be at its highest and criticism at its lowest at the end of the first theoretical training period, just before the start of practical training. They even belittled possible setbacks. During the practical training, women's criticism increased again and was strongly directed in outside factors: they blamed the circumstances of the practical training for problems, not acknowledging any connection between their own action and perceived difficulties. Women's hopefulness increased again at the end of the practical training period and the whole continuing training. However, this time their hopefulness was more strongly connected with the success of the practical training and the provider of the training place (private sector vs. public sector) (see Hoikkala, 1998).

5.2 Stage 2: Awareness

The next phase of empowerment is awareness. This phase is constructed on self-reflection and self-awareness. The ideas of critical pedagogy regarding the awareness of one's societal place (e.g., FitzSimmons, Uusiautti, & Suoranta, 2013), and the viewpoint of women studies when it comes to perceiving the gendered connections form the core of awareness. Likewise, the participants of this research and the subject positions they had adopted were strongly connected with the gender-bound structures of the everyday life in the local context (see e.g., del Valle, 2001; Galvez Muñoz & Matus López, 2010; Pietilä, 2009; Stromquist, 2011; Thurén, 1993). Applying to the continuing training showed willingness to change the current position. Because the structures defining one's own place form a part of cultural continuum, recognizing and questioning them can be difficult (see Galvez Muñoz & Matus López, 2010; Stromquist, 2011). What is especially problematic is the ability to see oneself outside the "given" position and to assess one's own abilities. The goal is to learn to recognize one's own strengths, weaknesses, and interests, and to view one's position in relation to others.

Self-reflection and self-awareness therefore form an important part of life management.

The research showed that the women's awareness strengthened along the training period. This was especially shown in discussions, interviews, and questionnaires when the women analyzed their own place, abilities, skills, and future goals. The contents of the training and constant social interaction increased the participants' self-awareness (see also Andrade & Stevens, 2011). The most intensive phase of awareness could be located in the middle of the training period. On the one hand, increased awareness and self-reflection also deepened critical attitudes leading thus to a greater levels of awareness as well.

Little by little criticism and awareness become intertwined and it becomes more accurate to talk about critical awareness. This process also illustrates the interconnectedness of the phases of empowerment process and the gradual progress similar to a hermeneutic cycle.

5.3 Stage 3: Influencing

The third and final phase of the process is influencing, referring to the actual change. For the participants of the continuing training, it means activation, increased employment opportunities, and eventual employment. From the theoretical point of view, influencing can be analyzed as a combination of active participation and action (see del Valle, 2001; Siitonen, 1999; Stromquist, 1997; 2011). When they are viewed at the practical level and in the light of empirical information, the change process in relation to the goals of continuing training aim at increasing individual opportunities and willingness and ability to influence one's own position. Therefore, the process fulfills the distinctive features of empowerment as a whole.

Actually, influencing and activation emerge already at the point when someone decides to apply to the continuing training. During the actual training process, influencing appears as active participation in education and voluntary related training events, mutual gatherings, and nurturing of one's well-being. Furthermore, reorganizing one's schedules and household work show activity and influencing. At the end of the training period, influencing is manifested through active work applying and becoming employed, maintenance of social relationships created during the training period, and active efforts to promote one's well-being.

5.4 Summary

Figure 1 illustrates the aforementioned empowerment process among women who participated in the continuing training. This three-phased illustration describes how the empowerment process occurred in the light of this research. It is worth pointing out that empowerment that develops through criticism, awareness, and influencing can also be reviewed in the light of their counterpoints: underestimation, denial, and withdrawal. These three processes form the antithesis of empowerment.

PHASES   BACKGROUND   GOALS

| Criticism | → | Labor market | To provide continuing training in fields with lack of qualified workforce. Participants selected with positive discrimination. |

Circumstances   Women's position

| Awareness | → | Abilities and skills | Recognition of one's own abilities and place: Who am I? What do I want? |

Place in society   Gender-related factors

| Influencing | → | Employement opportunities | Empowerment: Opportunities and willingness to participate and promote one's well-being. |

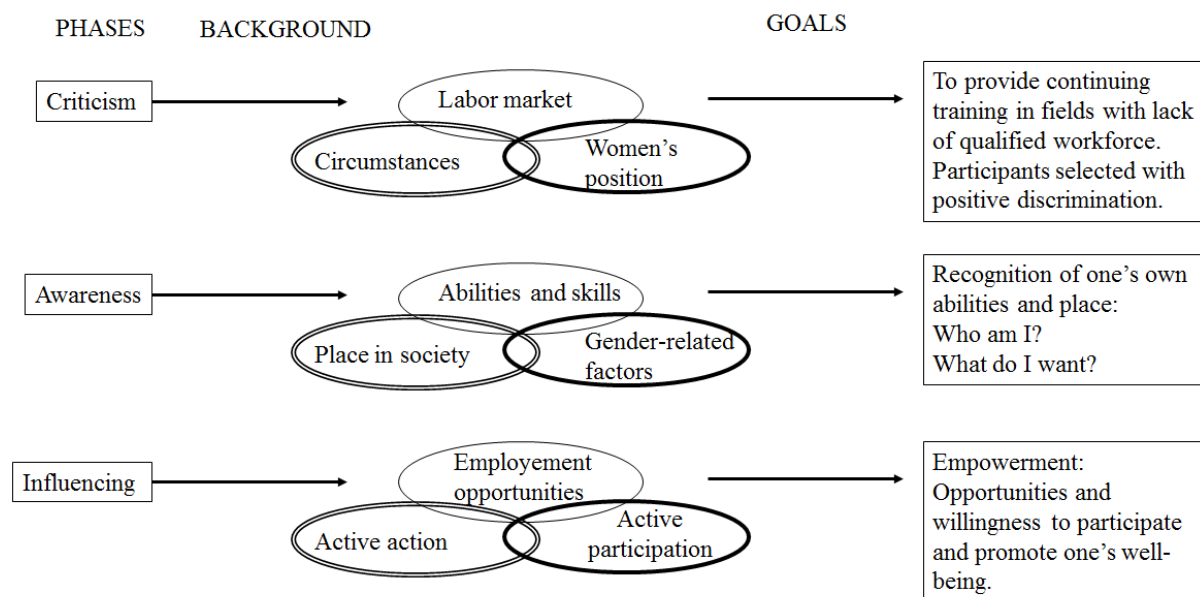Active action   Active participation

Figure 1. The phases of empowerment in relation to goals of
the women's continuing training period

According to Siitonen (1999), empowerment has five premises: (1) Empowerment is a personal and social process; you cannot give power to someone else; (2) Empowerment emerges from oneself and is defined by goals, beliefs of one's abilities and contexts, and emotions, and their interrelationships; (3) Strong empowerment leads to strong engagement, and disempowerment leads to weak engagement; (4) Empowerment is connected with human well-being; (5) Empowerment is not a stable state. When considering the empowerment process among the women of this study, it can be concluded that all these premises appeared. The personality of the process was evident in every phase but so was the social nature of it when the women contemplated their abilities and opportunities versus their positions. Their empowerment process progressed by recognition and acquiring new skills and awareness, and the stronger their empowerment became, the more engaged they were to their goals and objectives related to their training and future. By active participation and reflection, conscious minding for their own well-being their empowerment also represented the fourth premise of Siitonen's definition. Although Siitonen (1999) concluded that empowerment is not a stable state, this study implied that the positive consequences of the empowerment process can last for a long time.

A successful empowerment process releases people's strengths and creativity. Empowerment can be therefore experienced as increased freedom of action and safe atmosphere in which people become appreciated, respected, and trusted (see Siitonen, 1999; Stromquist, 2011). According to Siitonen (1999), positivity is typical of people who have experienced empowerment.

6. Conclusion

As the results of this study showed, empowerment occurred as a hermeneutic process that started from the initial application to the continuing training all the way to the end of the

study period. The process of critical thinking enhanced women's empowerment manifesting the power of education (see also hooks, 2010). This finding is in line with other feminist empowerment studies (Summerson Carr, 2002; see also Becker et al., 2002; Chadiha et al., 2004). On the other hand, empowerment also seemed to work as a catalyst because it led to stronger engagement to the action. In all, it seems that as a result of a successful empowerment process, people adopt a more active role. Although the observations of this study were limited to the training period, some conclusions can also be drawn from the fact that 71 % of the participants of the continuing training were employed after one year from the training.

In her recent article, Nelly Stromquist (2013) calls for women to increase their (gender) awareness and knowledge in order to strengthen their position. Naturally, the situation in the USA in Stromquist's viewpoint differs from the one presented in this research. However, some fundamental ideals must be considered. Stromquist (2013) argues that

"to change a major social pattern such as career choices by women and men it is indispensable to have comprehensive policies that interlink such areas as domestic labor at home, family leave policies, reproductive policies, and compatibility of family structures and labor market." (p. 23)

This study showed that women who participated in continuing training especially targeted to this specific group of women having difficulties in finding employment benefitted from the state action. Still, there are plenty to improve regarding the aforementioned issues brought out by Stromquist but that also were mentioned by women in this research. Because of the empowerment process, the women were able to actively seek solutions, and therefore, this side of educational political and employment political actions should not be ignored and forgotten but actively further studied.

References

Adrade, R., & Stevens S. J. (2011). Finding voice: From relationship to literacy, the potential of women's literature study groups. In M. Miller & K. P. King (Eds.), *Our stories, ourselves. The EmBODYment of women's learning in literacy* (pp. 137-150). Charlotte, NC: Age Publishing.

Antikainen, A. (1998). *Kasvatus, elämänkulku ja yhteiskunta* [Education, course of life, and society]. Porvoo: WSOY.

Antikainen, A. (1996). Merkittävät oppimiskokemukset ja valtautuminen [Significant learning experiences and empowerment]. In A. Antikainen & H. Huotelin (Eds.), *Oppiminen ja elämänhistoria* [Learning and life history] (pp. 251-309). Helsinki: Kansanvalistusseura ja Aikuiskasvatuksen Tutkimusseura.

Awartini, M., Whitman, C., & Gordon, J. (2008). Developing instruments to capture young people's perceptions of how school as a learning environment affects their well-being. *European Journal of Education, 43*(1), 51-70.

Beck, U. (1995). *Ecological politics in an age of risk*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Becker, A. B., Israel, B. A., Schulz, A. J., Parker, E. A., & Klem, L. (2004). Predictors of perceived control among African American women in Detroit: Exploring empowerment as a multilevel construct. *Health Education & Behavior, 29*(6), 699-715. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/109019802237939

Burbules, N. C., & Berk, B. (1999). Critical thinking and critical pedagogy: relations, differences, and limits. In T. S. Popkewitz & L. Fendler (Eds.), *Critical theories in education*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Chadiha, L. A., Adams, P., Biegel, D. E., Zucker, H. L., Auslander, W., & Gutiérrez, L. (2004). Empowering African American women informal caregivers: A literature synthesis and practice strategies. *Social Work, 49*(1), 97-108. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/sw/49.1.97

Coffey, A. (1999). *The ethnographic self: Fieldwork and the representation of identity*. London: Sage.

Crist, J. D., & Tanner, C. A. (2003). Interpretation/analysis methods in hermeneutic interpretive phenomenology. *Nursing Research, 52*(3), 202-205.

Del Valle, T. (2001). Asocianismo y redes de mujeres ¿Espacios puente para el cambio? *Hojas de Warmi, 12*, 131-51.

FitzSimmons, R., Uusiautti, S., & Suoranta, J. (2013). An action-oriented critical pedagogical theory. *Journal of Studies in Education, 3*(2), 21-35. http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/jse.v3i2.3203

Forsey, M. G. (2010). Ethnography as participant listening. *Ethnography, 11*(4), 558-572.

Foucault, M. (1984). *Tiedon arkeologia* [The archaeology of science]. Tampere: Vastapaino.

Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London: Sheed and Ward Ltd.

Gálvez Muñoz, L., & Matus López, M. (2010). *Trabajo, bienestar y desarrollo de las mujeres en el ámbito rural Andaluz*. Sevilla: Instituto Andaluz de la Mujer.

Gill, R. (2008). Empowerment/Sexism: Figuring female sexual agency in contemporary advertising. *Feminism & Psychology, 18*(1), 35–60. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0959353507084950

Gruenewald, D. A. (2003). The best of both worlds: a critical pedagogy of place. *Educational Researcher, 32*(4), 3–12.

Gutiérrez, L. M. (1994). Beyond coping: An empowerment perspective on stressful life events. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare, 21*, 201-219.

Heikkilä-Laakso, K., & Heikkilä, J. (1997). *Innovatiivisuutta etsimässä: irtiottoa keskinkertaisuudesta* [Looking for innovativeness: Breaking through mediocrity]. Turku: University of Turku.

Hoikkala, T. (1998). Traditioista vapaan valinnan illuusio [The illusions of tradition-free choices]. In J.-P. Roos & T. Hoikkala (Eds.), *Elämänpolitiikka* [Life politics] (pp. 152-168). Tampere: Gaudeamus.

Instituto de Estadística de Andalucía (1975-2007). Sistema de Información Multiterritorial de Andalucía. [Online] Available: www.juntadeandalucia.es/iea/bd/sima_web/index.jsp (December 20, 2013).

hooks, b. (2010). *Teaching critical thinking*. *Practical wisdom*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Keskitalo-Foley, S. (2000). Koulutus valtautumisen mahdollistajana? [Education as the enabler of empowerment?] *Aikuiskasvatus, 1*, 4−11.

Kieffer, C. H. (1984). Citizen empowerment: A developmental perspective. *Prevention in Human Services, 3*, 9-36.

Kuronen, M. (2004). Valtaistumista vai voimavaraistumista − Feministisiä näkökulmia empowermentiin sosiaalityön käsitteenä ja käytäntönä [Powerment or empowerment − Feminist perspectives to empowerment as the concept and practice of social work]. In M. Kuronen, R. Granfelt, L. Nyqvist, & P. Petrelius (Eds.), *Sukupuoli ja sosiaalityö* [Gender and social work] (pp. 277-296). Jyväskylä: PS-kustannus.

Maniero, L. A. (1986). Coping with powerlessness: The relationship of gender and job dependency to empowerment-strategy usage. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 31*(4), 633-653.

McLaren, P. (2010). Revolutionary critical pedagogy. *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies, 6*(2), 1−11.

Moore, H. (1999). *A passion for difference*. London: Blackwell.

Mosedale, S. (2005). Assessing women's empowerment: Towards a conceptual framework. *Journal of International Development, 17*(2), 243–257. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/jid.1212

Pease, B. (2002). Rethinking empowerment: A postmodern reappraisal for emancipatory practice. *British Journal of Social Work, 32*(2), 135−147.

Peterson, N. A., Lowe, J. B., Hughey, J., Reid, R. J., Zimmerman, M. A., & Speer, P. W. (2006). Measuring the intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment: Confirmatory factor analysis of the sociopolitical control scale. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 38*, 287–297. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10464-006-9070-3

Pietilä, P. (2006). Näköaloja kasvatusantropologiaan [Perspectives on educational anthropology]. *Kasvatus, 5, 430-441.*

Pietilä, P. (2009). A space of our own: Non-formal education for elder women in Andalusia. *European Journal of Women's Studies, 16, 53-66.*

Pini, B. (2002). Focus groups, feminist research and farm women: Opportunities for empowerment in rural social research. *Journal of Rural Studies, 18*(3), 339–351. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0743-0167

Rappaport, J. (1987). Terms of empowerment/exemplars of prevention: Toward a theory for community psychology. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 15*(2), 121-148.

Rodwell, C. M. (1996). An analysis of the concept of empowerment. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 23*(2), 305–313.

Rofel, L. (2003). The outsider within: Margery Wolf and feminist anthropology. *American Anthropologist, 105*, 596–604. http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/aa.2003.105.3.596

Siitonen, J. (1999). *Voimaantumisteorian perusteiden hahmottelua* [Outlining the basis of empowerment theory]. (PhD Diss., University of Oulu, Oulu, Finland).

Stromquist, N. P. (1997). La búsqueda del empoderamiento: en qué puede contribuir en campo de educación. In M. León (Ed.), *Poder y empoderamiento de las mujeres* (pp. 75-95). Bogotá: TM Editores UN.

Stromquist, N. P. (2002). Education as means for empowerment of women. In J. L. Parpart, S. M. Rai, & K. Staudt (Eds.), *Rethinking empowerment: Gender and development in global/local world* (pp. 22-38). London: Routledge.

Stromquist, N. P. (2011). Women and education in early twenty-first century: A global perpective. *Higher Education and Global Gender Equality, 40*(2). [Online] Available: http://aacu.org/ocww/volume40_2/feature.cfm?section=1 (October 22, 2013).

Stromquist, N. P. (2013). Education policies for gender equity: Probing into state responses. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 21*(65). [Online] Available: http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/1338 (August 27, 2013).

Summerson Carr, E. (2002). Rethinking empowerment theory using a feminist lens: The importance of process. *Affilia, 18*(1), 8-20. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0886109902239092

Suoranta, J. (2005). *Radikaali kasvatus: Kohti kasvatuksen poliittista sosiologiaa* [Radical education: Toward the political sociology of education]. Helsinki: Gaudeamus.

Thurén, B-M. (1993). *El poder generizado*. Madrid: Instituto de Investigaciones Feministas, Universidad Complutense de Madrid & Dirección General de la mujer.

Zimmerman, M. (1995). Psychological empowerment: Issues and illustrations. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 23*(5), 581–599.