"It Is Difficult To Be A Woman With A Dream Of An Education:" Challenging U.S. Adult Basic Education Policies to Support Women Immigrants' Self-Determination

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Introduction

I also need to keep my house clean, prepare food, give quality time to my husband and son. I feel I need a longer day to do everything but the most difficult for me is to concentrate and learn. My father died in Mexico this month and I worry about my mom….. It is difficult to be a woman with a dream of an education. It is sad to think that maybe I won't continue to come to my current school (Gonzalez 2004: 15)

Women immigrants are an increasing population in the U.S. (Clifford & Pearce, 2004) *and* in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) system, particularly in English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programmes (Creighton & Hudson, 2002; Kuang et al, 2004; Spurling, Seymour & Chisman, 2008)[i]. We argue that their numerical predominance and comprehensive needs are not factored into U.S. ABE policies by reformers who are anxious about the system being labeled as, "another social program" (Comings, Reder, & Sum 2001: 23, Guy 2005). The current opposition to welfare development in ABE (like

support services) discourages this population from persisting in learning so that they may

satisfy the demands for qualifications in the knowledge economy and achieve their life

goals for themselves, their families and communities (Stromquist & Monkman 2000).

The ABE system currently overlooks the organization of social stratification, including

how migrants are divided into 'skilled' and 'low-skilled' under global capitalist migration

management systems (Piper 2008, Boucher 2008). As Brine puts it (2006), the system of

lifelong learning is now divided into the privileged whose educational qualifications are

transferable to the 'knowledge economy' (like universities that are linked to high-paying

careers) while others are relegated to the 'knowledge society' (adult basic education with

low-skilled jobs). Adult education has traditionally tried to dispel these class hierarchies

and it would be even more important, during a neo-conservative period to challenge

women immigrants' status (whether classed, in terms of skilled or not) as disposable

labour in the global economy and support their self-determination in all aspects of their

lives.

While their invisibility in policies reinforces social exclusion, the point is not just to

recognize difference, but to go beyond it, towards redistribution of resources for this

population (Nussbaum 2003, Walby 2005, Fraser 2000). Although adult education

policies have been critiqued in other parts of the world, like the UK and Australia, for the

myopic employability and social cohesion agendas (Cooke & Simpson 2009), largely

absent is a collective voice of dissent of the U.S. ABE system, where this agenda is

strongest. In this article, we address the U.S. ABE system and its systematic denial of quality services to immigrant women.

Allan Luke (2005) describes ABE systems, like the U.S. case, in terms of: *New Basics* (a futures oriented curriculum that can be measured through standardized testing), *Productive Pedagogies* (system-wide focus on pedagogy as the core work of teaching, including language learning), and, *Literate Futures* (a state strategy for achievement and skill gains). These reforms 'steer from a distance' (665) in emphasizing accountability, standardisation, management, and centralised control. These developments reflect Corbett's (2008) metaphor of an "edumometer," which involves technologies of power, like performance-based and outcomes-based testing. These mechanisms distract from authentic problems of ABE students, including their low wages within the labour market. Although these issues tend to impact immigrant women immigrants strongly, they are ignored by sectors such as adult education which focus on their labour for building the national economy rather than on their advancement within it.

Women immigrants' human capital is prized in so far as it supports the new service class, rather than transforms a segregated class system. As McDowell (2009) has shown, industrialised countries' managed migration policies are specifically for the recruitment of temporary migrants for low-wage jobs that are in short supply of indigenous workers ('occupational dustbins'), not for their own social or occupational mobility. While industrialized countries benefit economically from migration, socially, women

immigrants are considered part of the 'immigration problem' (Sassen 1998), and are viewed as undeserving of social services and rights. Working mainly in the lowest wage sectors, protections for women immigrants are absent or minimal at best.

We situate the problem of the neglect of immigrant women stakeholders in the U.S. ABE system within the context of transnationalism and feminist policy and with an emphasis on structural barriers, such as race, class, and gender, operating within the global economy. The U.S. is one of the largest destination countries for immigrant women who enter it in order to fulfill their "dream of an education," as a woman student (above) attests. Yet the one-size-fits-all, neutral system, that is void of support services, makes it difficult for them to persist (Imel 1996). The U.S. ABE system is a case study of "Cinderella" systems (like those in Australia, Germany and the UK) that have been recognized as poorly resourced despite demands made by new groups such as immigrants: "Continuing education institutions may be praised to the skies," a German adult education system representative declared (Rau 2001), "but they are the Cinderella of the education system, seldom properly fed and clothed." This global deficit in services is of great importance since education may be less accessible to women immigrants as developing countries' initiatives are prioritizing girls' primary education, rather than adult literacy, as shown in the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs). Even with girls' education, the focus is on the "economic value of their education as a means of reducing poverty, rather than talking in terms of girls' right to education and the role that it can play in enabling girls to realize other rights later on as adult women" (Hoare 2009: 1).

Although gender mainstreaming has been endorsed in development agendas, gender-based literacy inequalities prevail and World Bank policies have been criticized for neglecting gender-sensitive education (Burnett 2006: 238). Immigration has also been addressed by *Education For All* (EFA) initiatives, because it "raises demands for literacy skills among migrants themselves and members who remain behind" (Burnett 2006: 22). Yet little action has been taken and the focus is on regional and urban-rural movement rather than from the South to North. Moreover, specific groups of immigrants, such as women, are not discussed.

Women, in their move from developing to advanced countries' educational systems, and their learning needs are rarely considered in policies. We argue that this concern is crucial given growing global inequalities in educational provision. Furthermore, developed countries' ABE systems are a critical point of entry for immigrant women to progress. The CONFINTEA VI conference group agrees that the U.S. ABE system needs to align to EFA goals and promote equity for marginalized populations like immigrant women. These UNESCO-based authors found that a report on the U.S. ABE system was not far-reaching and, "failed to incorporate…equality of gender relations" or immigrants in a robust way due to the system's individualistic, functional and neo-liberal economic focus (Hill et al 2008). There was a lack of remediation for systemic discrimination: "There is no discussion of the history of racial and gender discrimination that has contributed to education disparities, nor is there a discussion on civil rights legislation and its impact on ALE [Adult Literacy Education]" (Hill et al 2008). Likewise, an analysis of gender-based

indices in developing countries and across Europe concluded (Walby 2005: 383): "While the Millennium Development Goals attempted to produce indicators and some (limited) targets appropriate for developing countries, there is much less development in relation to the more developed countries, despite the commitment of the EU in 1998 to do this." These structural inequalities in educational provision in advanced economies mean that women immigrants' needs are invisible, making redistribution unworkable and collective transformation unlikely.

Educational reformers in the U.S. have responded to the record growth of immigrants by discussing their basic education as a stepping-stone to their full participation in the U.S. labour market (Crandall 2008). Yet little consideration is given to developing *women* immigrants' needs and interests, despite their large presence in the system. We address this problem through three distinct and complementary aspects. First, we discuss the trend of the feminisation of migration (the increase in women's migration) to the U.S., and around the world, and explore its implications for immigrant women learners and prospective learners' needs and barriers in the U.S. ABE system. Next, we discuss our feminist policy framework, which highlights the importance of developing women's capabilities within ABE systems. Then we examine the discourse of U.S. policies in government-based policy documents to detect their sensitivity to immigrant women. We conclude with points that address immigrant women's education within an international context.

Connecting The Feminisation of Migration to Women Immigrants' Barriers and

Needs Within ABE

Women comprise approximately half of the global migrant labour population (World

Bank 2006, Bose 2006, Ghosh 2009). The autonomous pattern of women migrating from

low-income to high-income countries is relatively new in numbers alone. This

phenomenon is often referred to as the "the feminisation of migration" (Castles & Miller

1998, Engle 2004). While some women immigrants may benefit from it and some male

immigrants lose out, it connects to the 'feminisation of poverty' because women often get

caught in a pattern of migrating to escape poor working conditions in developing

countries only to end up working in the low-paying service sector in advanced economies

(Kingma 2006, Sassen 1998). The demand for low-cost labour and profits has spurred

women's migration and a growth in feminized vocations like domestic service and health

care, where machines do not require physical strength and women can be "the distributors

of the service" (Engle 2004: 19). Burgeoning export businesses, guest worker

programmes and permeable borders as well as trade laws (such as NAFTA) spur the need

for women workers in a globalized economy (Bauer 2006). Women are in high demand

for service work because of employers' perceptions that they are flexible, can work long

hours, are temporary residents, and will not demand high salaries (Bjork 2002). In adult

education, it would seem that they are desired for similar purposes.

Saskia Sassen (1998) theorizes that the U.S., as well as other capital rich nations, create unstable markets overseas in third world urban centers. This phenomenon produces large-scale displacements from the countryside. Women move to work in these jobs, but they are insecure. Once women are engaged, they are more amenable to follow markets and enter permanently into the short-term economy, even if it means moving to the U.S. or other nations: "most of the countries experiencing large-scale migration flows to the U.S., it is possible to identify a set of conditions and linkages with the U.S., that, together with overpopulation, poverty, or unemployment, induce emigration." (Sassen 1998: 40). This pattern is reflective of U.S. investments in large-scale production for export. Furthermore, the state's authority is transferred to supranational organizations and with this, new privatization schemes allow for cross-border transactions (Sassen 1998: 5).

When women immigrants arrive in the U.S., regardless of whether they came alone or followed a spouse, they are more likely to work in low-paying jobs and be vulnerable to gender, class, and racial discrimination at home as well (Bauer 2006, Clifford & Pearce 2004). Women immigrants are more at risk for abuse by family members when they engage in paid work or in education in a new country, because their new public identities threaten patriarchal conventions and their domestic roles within their families (Menjivar 1999). In one study, Mexican women who participated in an educational programme in order to someday work in offices, found that their husbands (who worked mainly in the construction industry) regarded their educational engagement with suspicion and resentment, and abuse was rife. Volpp and Marin (cited in Isserlis 2002) show that

immigrant women in abusive relationships will stop attending programmes when they are coerced, intimidated, and threatened with their immigration status and custody of their children. Isolation from 'high enclosure' (the tendency to live, work, and speak with others of the same culture) is experienced by immigrants, but can be more intense for women (Zhou 2004, Bailey 2005, Norton 2000). Women immigrants often feel that their educational aspirations create conflicts due to the time-commitment to learn. Their participation is both a 'desire' and a 'threat' (to family life/work and spousal authority) so they quit because managing this tension, without programme supports, becomes too difficult (Rockhill 1990: 1). For those professional women who migrate so that they can develop their careers, they may find themselves deskilled in both low-paying industries *and* adult education ESOL courses that are too basic (Cuban 2009). They may also experience health problems, due to stress from caring for family at home *and* abroad (Adkins, Birman & Sample 1999**,** Brod 1995, Cumming 1992) which steal them away from educational programmes, like the quote of an immigrant woman struggling to persist in an ESOL programme (in the beginning of the article).

Furthermore, cost-cutting efforts such as placing prospective students on long waiting lists for ESOL or turning them away at the door are increasing (Gonzalez 2007, CAELA 2008), which exacerbate the barriers immigrant women already experience; for example, they may feel obliged to put their own needs last when families have to choose who among them is eligible for studies. Costs are important factors for women in general, as studies have consistently shown that women, more than men, have childcare and

transportation problems that lead to dropout (Merriam, Caferrella & Baumgartner 2007). Problems such as these are often treated as "personal" barriers in policies rather than as institutional or societal ones and support services are seen as outside of the remit of the ABE system. For example, the *Program Standards for Adult Education ESOL* (2000: 17) states: "The *personal* situation of adult learners and the many demands on their lives affect attendance in class and the amount of time they have to devote to learning English [emphasis added]." These gendered barriers are so pervasive and complex that they go undetected in the ABE system, *because* they are categorized as "personal." Moreover, the "excessive use of motivation" to explain individual rates of participation implicitly makes women alone responsible for their education, at the same time that they are made invisible, as Rockhill eloquently coined it: 'Literacy is women's work, not their right' (Rockhill 1982, 1990).

Nonetheless, women immigrants' do enter the doors of ABE, in spite of the aforementioned barriers, and more immigrant women than men are aware of courses in their communities. In one National Center for the Study of Education Statistics (NCES) study, 45 percent of immigrant women, compared to 37 percent of immigrant men knew about ABE courses (Kuang & Collins 1997) and another study (Jones-Correa 1998) showed that women immigrants use community-based organizations more than male immigrants. Family literacy and ESOL community college courses are heavily attended by women (Sparks 2001).

Yet these learners have difficulties in *persisting*, as many do *not* finish the courses they start (Lucey 1998; Porter, Cuban, & Comings 2005, Cuban 2009). Aside from some qualitative studies, disaggregated data on the persistence or retention rates of immigrant women learners, as a population, does not exist apart from sex-based data on ESOL classes. In one participation study of ESOL students (Spurling, Seymour & Chisman 2008) the researchers found a student profile that was a majority female. Yet their chapter on persistence included demographics on age and ethnicity but did not mention gender. A national report in the same year on the participation of ESOL students in ABE did not mention gender either (CAELA 2008). The absence of gender-sensitive research and policies can lead to the unintentional neglect of women immigrants' complex needs and interests. This policy gap forces individual teachers to solve students' complex problems; studies show that traumatized women ESOL students come to their teachers first for help, even when they are unprepared to deal with their problems (Adkins 2002, Singleton 2002).

A Feminist Policy Analysis of Women Immigrants' Education

Participation and advancement for women immigrants is fraught with hidden barriers, as discussed above. A critical feminist policy analysis (Marshall 1997, Stromquist 2006, Nussbaum 2003) in conjunction with gender-based theories of immigrant learners (Rockhill 1990; Fenwick 2007, Mojab & Gorman 2003; Norton 2000) highlight women immigrants' needs, as they are framed within structural conditions (gender, race, and class), with the *aim to support their wider participation and persistence in the ABE*

system so as to improve their capabilities. When women migrate in order to better their

lives and those of their families, they find that they encounter many structural barriers;

their time and energy investments for an education are limited due to societal constraints

and few social protections or support services. We use a global feminist framework to

spotlight how women immigrants are often (although not always) hindered from

achieving their aspirations and capabilities in a system that makes them invisible and

reinforces, rather than challenges, existing inequalities.

We use Nussbaum's human development framework for education as "the key to all

human capabilities" (2003: 24) because this resource is the most unevenly distributed

throughout the world, and redistribution can support women immigrants' social

citizenship (i.e., access to services and rights). Nussbaum argues that typical

contractual/liberal views assume that immigration would cease to exist if states were self-

sufficient and politically stable, ignoring that "one of the greatest causes of immigration,

economic inequality – along with malnutrition, ill health, and lack of education, which so

often accompany poverty (Nussbaum 2003: 7) --- are global issues. She advocates for

disadvantaged groups (women immigrants for example) as entitled to compensation

through the institutional support of advanced economies' institutions and systems.

Our feminist policy analysis focuses on how women immigrants' needs are hidden in

advanced economies' ABE systems because of the neo-liberal policy approach that

ignores class, race, and gender issues. This problem manifests in two ways: (1) Through

the dominant human capital rationale that emphasizes women immigrants' work within the low-paying secondary service sector rather than the knowledge economy, and (2) the official view of citizenship as a one-dimensional political, rather than robust social concept, which ignores the social aspects of women immigrants becoming full citizens (because of limited access to services due to new anti-immigrant legislation) (Portes 2007). These two factors appear to heavily limit women immigrants' capabilities.

The human capital approach sees education for immigrant women in terms of their service value in the low-paid labour market, resulting in downward pressures and their 'race to the bottom' (Walters 2000). Women immigrants' ABE opportunities are framed in individualistic ways and as economic resources to benefit the national economy, not resources for their autonomy and collective power (Robinson-Pant, 2004). This economic shift in emphasis (since the 1980s) reflects larger privatization trends of human and public services toward market demands with a focus on individuals (Walters 2000).

Women immigrants have limited means to gain social citizenship (Bellis & Morrice 2003) within the ABE system, which upholds liberal notions of individuals achieving on their own, with limited or no social services. ABE curricular standards focus on individualistic behaviours associated with being a productive worker, reductive 'political' acts, such as voting, and the amount of parental involvement in schools rather than on women immigrants' working conditions or their access to social services such as health care, education, and welfare—in other words, their social citizenship (Nash 2005).

Without knowledge of their social rights, or access to them, women immigrants are at a disadvantage because they are often left depending solely on low-paying industries for their survival or on their cash-strapped personal networks. The commercial ESOL curricula that most women immigrants read in their ABE classes have been found to neglect real-life problems, such as, "unhealthy living and working conditions, crowded clinics, high costs…which neither prepares students for what they might encounter nor legitimates these experiences when students do encounter them" (Buttaro & King 2001: 55-56).

Assessing the Policy Discourse Through an Examination of ABE Policy Adoption Documents

 The policy adoption stage (decisions to execute policies which have already been formulated) can illuminate how women immigrants have been disadvantaged by gender-neutral policies and excluded in the earliest phases without political representation, in spite of their large presence and motivation to attend courses. Little analysis has been conducted on the translation process of policies from the political arena to ABE audiences or how leaders in the field "sell" it to ABE stakeholders—practitioners, researchers, managers, funders, and learners—through the language and discourse of their arguments.

Policy arguments of reformers are stated in the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). Enacted in 1998, WIA replaced the Adult Education Act of 1969 and the National

Literacy Act of 1991, and moved ABE from the Department of Education to the Department of Labour and Workforce Development to focus heavily on vocationalist skills and related learning that is linked heavily to employment and the economy (Demetrion 2004). The legislation devolves decision-making and authority to states through block grants (Sparks 2001) and is akin to the No Child Left Behind legislation (Isserlis 2008) in emphasizing individual performance accountability and narrow achievements of learners that fit with developing their human capital for economic purposes.

We conducted an examination of major policy adoption documents that were responsible for converting the decisions from WIA legislation to ABE programmes to assess whether women immigrants' needs were addressed and their incorporation into the discourse, as well as to ascertain possible reasons for omissions.

Methodology and Analysis

Content analysis was chosen as the inquiry method because it can detect through assessing words, terms, and phrases whether or not a topic is present, its various forms, and the frequency of its occurrence. This methodology has the capacity to determine characteristic qualities and messages (Holsti 1969); it is also an effective feminist policy analysis approach because it can highlight important contemporary issues that women face, like women immigrants' needs and barriers to their participation. One of the main goals of this approach is to understand the extent to which women immigrants' issues (as

previously discussed) are visible and the discourse that is used to describe them. By analyzing documents in an unobtrusive and critical way, and by drawing on the feminist policy analysis described above, the socio-political forces and beliefs that relegate women to the peripheries of educational life and gender biases in educational policies surface so as to challenge long-held assumptions (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2007). While formulating such a perspective early in an analysis can appear to bias the results, we take account of it by creating a sign-posting system. Content analysis signals problems rather than explains them, which is why we conjoin it to a feminist analytic. Our data derive from a purposive sample of a select few documents, which focus on the larger ABE system because they enable a direct examination of the discourse (i.e., problem framing, policy rationales, and proposed solutions) of ABE policy makers as agents and advocates.

Selecting the correct documents is a fundamental step otherwise the investigation yields spurious findings, confirming what is already known. The documents we chose to examine were policy adoption texts that were written with the intention of translating WIA to practitioners and other stakeholders in the ABE system. They all have 'action agenda' type titles from 2000 to 2006 with the goal to enact WIA. All of the documents are authored by U.S. government agencies that control and influence ABE programmes and initiatives (through the dissemination of information on policies, programmes, and research) and are considered canonical in the ABE world; they are widely discussed on government-based ABE discussion boards and appear on websites in electronic formats, are in national centres that exist to advocate for policy reforms, and are cited in major

literature reviews. The year 2000 was chosen as the starting date because it was important for introducing 21st century vocationalist-oriented literacy and language initiatives of WIA into ABE. We did hope that the policy documents would include women immigrants and their interests as it has a vested interest to widen participation and increase retention rates; these problems have historically plagued the field (Merriam, Cafferella & Baumgartner 2007).

To summarize our methodological process, the first step in looking for hidden concepts, like women immigrants' needs, is to identify the topic and research question through a literature review. The next is to conceptualize the issues within a larger framework (feminist policy analysis) and to operationalize them with terms that refer directly to the population (women immigrants and their needs). After searching for these terms, documenting them, and analyzing them within a table, we read and re-read the documents and compared them with each other to assess their central purposes and how they fit into the larger agenda of adult literacy. Moving through these steps allowed us to explore all aspects of women immigrants' issues (as discussed above) within ABE policies and the degree to which they are present (see Table 1 in the Appendix). We sought to discover the theory of action underlying the adoption of these policies (Resnick & Glennan 1992), particularly since all of the documents promoted *action* agendas—and whether women immigrants or any related aspects were incorporated into the policies or influenced their elaboration. By "theory of action" we mean the assumptions policy reformers make about women immigrants, resources for them, and the steps to be taken in practice. In this case,

we wanted to know whether the policies considered ways in which women immigrants and their needs were acknowledged to support their persistence in ABE and to address their capabilities.

Findings

Our findings from the content analysis revealed that the term, women immigrants, and all references to this group, were rarely featured in the six policy adoption documents. In one document, women immigrants were directly connected to "population growth" and another document focused on the children of "women immigrants," reflecting the development literature on women and girls as critical to national growth (Robinson-Pant 2004). In the U.S., it appears that the same standards apply for women. The terms "women," and "gender" and "female" and "sex" were sparingly mentioned and mostly apart from (rather than with) the terms: "immigrants" and "migration" and "immigration" and "migrants" demonstrating the rigidity with which students are identified by policy makers.

The absence of women immigrants as a population, and in consequence, their needs, is reflected in the fact that WIA legislation and the Adult and Family Literacy Act[ii] do not highlight the changing demography of ABE, even though approximately half of its population are ESOL (CAELA 2008). Although the "priority" groups in the Act are the unemployed and "recipients of public assistance and other low-income individuals, including single parents, displaced homemakers, and pregnant single women," immigrant

women, a growing population, are not included.

The lack of specific reference to women immigrants in these policy documents is a serious flaw because as more immigrant women participate in the ABE system, they boost participation figures (and thus, resources requirements), but their needs and interests are ignored. The terms gender, sex, female, and women(an) were mentioned in the documents only with reference to women's general numerical predominance in the ABE system, or as a variable that was noted along with age, race, and social class and little else, thereby neglecting their strong presence in the system and the labour market. While gender is mentioned in *Vision*, it is done so in the context of culture, treating it as fixed and stemming from "expectations" of the country of origin (5) rather than for the ways it is constructed within both countries, or within the home and labour market.

Literacy and language learning were framed as instrumental delivery services, namely for the development of vocational skills in the marketplace and as unrelated to full and active citizenship in communities and in daily life. According to U.S. adult literacy policymakers who argue for basic education as a stepping stone to post-secondary education, but without any set pathway towards this goal, "immigrants are: "a resource that, after they improve their basic skills, could provide the growing workforce our country needs...The 34 million workers who fall into the new literacy challenge category represent a resource that, after they improve their basic skills, could help their employers better compete in the new economy" (Comings, Reder, & Sum: 8). Reformers use a

human capital rationale to link the "new basic skills" of labourers to the demands--
technological and otherwise—of the "New Economy" [capitals in the original] (Comings,
Sum & Juvin 2001) for purposes of increasing economic growth, national development,
and global competition. Social services were sometimes mentioned as important to
students' persistence but rarely were they specified, and all of the reports saw such
services as outside the scope of the programmes and only in terms of partnerships with
other organizations. Problems of ABE learners are perceived in individualistic terms and
are fixable through "one-stop" centers, as *Blueprint* advises. Only one document, *Vision,*
speaks for immigrants' rights to services, but it does not focus on women's issues.

Images and metaphors used to describe students in the selected documents could in
general be viewed as deficit-driven. Students are perceived as being in need of ABE to
upgrade skills for purportedly better jobs, with one policy document (Comings, Sum, &
Reder 2001) asserting that "service jobs demand higher skills" and "low-skill jobs are
disappearing" (11). The assumption is that there exists a skills shortage in the population
rather than a deficit of well-paying jobs, shifting attention away from institutional racism,
sexism, and class issues (Cuban 2004). Women immigrants, as an unmarked category of
representation, often suffer from discriminatory forces at home and work, which are not
taken into account in ABE policies that focus solely on immigrants' functional skills and
productive force in the labour market.

Finally, economic rationales stressing human capital returns to the nation's New Economy rather than for the groups themselves, are most emphasized in *New Skills* and followed up in *Building a Level Playing Field* an*d Evidence-Based Model*. More recent action agendas for the ABE system became more scientific based and focused on performance and accountability for students' skills level gains, like*, Blueprint* (in 2003) and *Evidence-Based Model* (in 2006), rather than improving their capabilities in comprehensive terms.

Although little is said about women immigrants in the documents, the analysis revealed two important themes that connect to our feminist analysis underlying women immigrants' needs: (1) A proliferation of vague policy statements on commitments rather than the "action points" they refer to, thereby neglecting the considerable barriers women immigrants face and limiting solutions; and, (2) A narrow view of literacy learning content that limits the possibilities for women immigrants' full and active citizenship. These findings were discovered by working through our theory of action model and connecting them to our feminist analysis; going through the various steps of the analysis when, after filtering out gender-sensitive issues, we discovered how literacy and language learning were framed, how statements were used to describe immigrant students in general, and the rationales that were invoked for providing basic education to immigrants. These findings helped us to understand underlying problems of gender within a larger

framework of adult literacy on the national and international stage, and helped us raise questions about systemic improvement.

1. Policy Saturation with Vague (Ambiguous) Declarations of Action

In all of these reports, there was no solid identification of human and financial resources to reach desired objectives, suggesting that symbolic, rather than material, resources were envisaged. Without financial redistribution for support services that could benefit women immigrants it would be difficult to see how they could progress. For example, in the *Margins* report the language focuses on "commitments" or "priorities" around "resources" with few, if any, implementation decisions. This recognition only creates a sense of ambiguity and obscures the importance of resource redistribution; there is no evidence or information for improved "quality" and what it would look like and "quality" rarely refers to instruction. Little is said about access to education especially because general enrollments have fallen (Sticht, 2007). In an e-mail to adult literacy policy-makers entitled, "Five Year Fall from the Literacy Summit," Sticht (2005), in referring to the *Margins* report, he asks: "were the goals [of *Margins*] well thought out? Was an action agenda document the best way to proceed? What went wrong? What should be done next?" Similarly, the *Vision* paper calls for greater capacity for ESOL learners in the ABE system but there is very little stated on resources for instructional and support services. This agenda was not followed up on, and with the demand for ESOL classes by immigrants which are not supplied, it is not clear how immigrants, let alone, women immigrants will be served by ABE. "Learning English" and access to English classes, as

the Public Policy Institute of California has observed, "is free of charge but with a catch." (Gonzalez 2007).

The *Blueprint* paper of 2003 is not a follow-up to the 2000 *Margins* document. Instead, it focuses heavily on performance accountability with little attention to the poor conditions and resources for teachers and students; little monies are slated for adult students, in comparison to children, and there is a higher turnover of part-time teachers (Sticht 2005). Under these contradictory conditions, how can the system be accountable to traditional student populations, let alone women immigrants? Yet "accountability" is framed in the *Blueprint* report as "student-centered" rather than, what in fact it is, a top-down initiative to force students to meet the demands of a competitive system that rewards and sanctions providers based on achievement test scores. Furthermore, to achieve the necessary reading performance gains that are required in this new system, policies champion evidence-based reading models that are not fit for ESOL learners. As Kruidener (2002: 48) notes, "there has been very little alphabetic assessment for those who learn English as a second language at the K-12 or adult levels."

One of the main problems of many of these policy documents is that they rely exclusively on statistics from the early 1990s (the time of the National Adult Literacy Survey. NALS) and do not take into account the changes that have occurred since. Consequently, policy makers become indifferent to major global shifts arising from women's immigration. While some of the documents indicate that immigrants are omnipresent, their needs are

not explicitly discussed in ABE policies. For example, *Blueprint* (p. 5) states, "Even now, immigrants fill about one half of the jobs created through labour market expansion." In this case, immigrants and their labour are acknowledged, only in so far as they fill labour shortages.

These policies and their stated action agendas have little transformational effects on women immigrants and their needs and interests. Many of these documents refer to the learners in the programmes in generic terms and, in so doing, ignore the needs and conditions of women who are more severely marginalized in society. When women with little formal education move to the U.S. hoping for an education (they may not have got before or want to develop), they find it difficult to meet their expectations due largely to their isolated domestic lives. With few support services, they are discouraged from persisting in literacy and language programmes and fulfilling their full capabilities. While some of these documents mention support services, they do not prioritize them nor give details as to what extent they would be covered. The *Margins* paper mentions childcare as part of a host of other concerns for students and in the *Evidence-Based* paper, childcare is not viewed as something that ABE programmes can directly offer, but only through other organisations. But, if communities do not have funding for these services, how can women immigrants receive them? This question is not asked in the discourse on ABE partnerships with community organisations.

The problem of policy adoption documents and their high rhetoric (of action points) vs.

practice (the ability to implement them, with resources and research data) is not endemic to the U.S. ABE system. Without money or data the ability to make good cases for women's education worldwide is hindered. One of the major problems of the 2005 Global Monitoring Report is that it is, "missing the money" (Rahman 2004); there is no data on the relative or proportional amounts that regional governments have spent on primary education and no information on education budgets after Dakar: "The sad truth is that promoting basic education is still not seen as a driving force for development by both donors and recipients of international aid." (Rahman 2004: 4). As Rahman points out, tiny international budgets are slated for girls' education, only 3%. In a sense, without hard (enrollment) or, even soft, data, these budgets have been considered "lost goals" and are "forgotten promises." Moreover, the EFA report on women, gender and education (2003/4) takes a very pessimistic view and leaves it to "governments to make difficult decisions about investment in adult literacy in systems where resources are severely restrained." (Rahman: 5). Without costing information, it is very difficult to sense how the world's 862 million adults can acquire literacy. Because compulsory education-- the important link to girls' and later, women's literacy and education--- is not emphasized with guidelines, models, substantive reinforcements, and encouragement, it is not surprising the situation has not drastically changed in educational institutions. All of this leads to poor operationalisation and conceptualization problems. Empowerment is neither defined nor discussed in the U.S. based reports, like *Margins*, or, in *Blueprints*. At the international level, a study of Dakar goals (Stromquist 2005: 8) revealed that the indicators "equate any education with empowerment" and that there is a heavy focus on

individual capacities. This leaves little space for a feminist discourse on women immigrants' empowerment either in the U.S. or at an international level.

2. A Narrow View of the Required Literacy and Language Learning Content

Most state-mandated literacy programmes that focus on women, such as family literacy, rely on a transmission model of learning that assumes inculcating literacy in adults will automatically lead to more highly educated and literate children. Using this logic, if women immigrants are not able to attend classes regularly (due to the barriers discussed previously) how can they pass literacy on? The slogan "teach the mother and reach the child" remains a major principle of women's education in both the developing world and in the U.S. (Cuban & Hayes 1996). Yet it contains many contradictions for women themselves, that is, "mothers as women and people with their own literacy interests are secondary to mothers as agents for others" (Mace 1998: 2). The content ideology, then, reproduces women's secondary status in society, sending the message to women that they have less worth in and of themselves, as citizens, workers, and human beings. Women's roles and positions are reproduced in policies focusing exclusively on the family as the unit of production and consumption (Robinson-Pant 2004). From their lower status in the home and in society, it is not a far stretch for immigrant women to work in low status (cleaning and caring) jobs with low wages and poor working conditions, both of which go unchallenged in ABE or in many developing countries' literacy classrooms (Torres, Omolewa, & Ouane 2008).

The focus in these policy documents is on short-term work-related goals in the ABE system. This focus neglects the lives and dreams of women who may seek literacy for many other reasons; such as personal purposes (like writing letters) or political ones (joining a union) aside from assimilating into the low-waged market. In addition the vocational training curriculum rarely discusses the "hidden curriculum" of the workplace like job segregation, as discussed above, which affects many women immigrants.

Culture is another neglected issue in literacy and language instruction. The language of the curriculum is almost always in Standard English in the U.S. and in many other countries, it is the official language in the curriculum and in teaching. These programmes do not consider the native languages of immigrant women, or even use them to increase their English language proficiencies, as with bilingual programmes. While some programmes, use native language literacy to develop skills in both Spanish and English, in the U.S. this approach tends to be avoided (Rivera 1999) and none of the policy documents that were examined recognized other languages as critical resources. If we consider that women are on the move, we can assume that other languages would also be important to know, not to mention the fact that a number of women may not have had a basic education in their home countries, or are able to read or write effectively, making academic and vocational English more of a challenge for them, and creating double-disadvantages.

Another barrier to useful content is a narrowly defined civic education (such as voting) ignoring those situations at the local community level where women immigrants might have a greater impact and are able to practice civic skills. Reviewing such documents as *Blueprint* and the *Evidence-Based Adult Education Model,* it appears as though these policies reinforce uniformity rather than diversity through managed enrollment in conjunction with reduced federal spending that limits basic services (Belzer & St. Clair, 2003). The focus instead is on performance and accountability of students rather than offering them support services to stay in programmes and persist in learning.

The effects of this regimentation are that groups of learners, such as immigrant women, are not accommodated. For example, most U.S. ABE classes are scheduled regularly during the weekdays. But work schedules and unsociable hours in service sector jobs (where many of women work) do not mesh with these programme schedules (Cuban, 2007). Also, many of these classes are at night, making it difficult for immigrant women to go to a programme because they feel unsafe going to and from it, or, because they cannot access public transportation then. Furthermore, night-time programming may make it difficult for women immigrant students to meet their families' needs if they are the sole supporters (e.g., making dinner for the children). Reduced funding has made support services scarce (although little data exists), with childcare atypical (Tolbert 2005, Colton 2006).

Although ESOL programmes are known to be more flexible with regard to instruction (i.e., drawing on more pedagogical approaches) (Burt, Fischer, & Peyton, 2003, Chisman & Crandall 2007) due to increasing demand (approximately one in four students is an immigrant in the community college system), the only offerings are usually large classes focusing on generic topics that are tested such as citizenship, jobs, language, GED, math, and reading, and many of these are multi-leveled (Crandall & Shepherd, 2004), making it difficult to diversify instruction or content for sub-groups of students. With teachers facing new demands, including increased paperwork related to performance-based testing, more students, and limited infrastructure, they have less and less time to focus on students' needs (Burt, Fischer, & Peyton 2003).

Likewise, educational programmes across the developing world show similar signs of narrowing curriculum and using more accountability and performance-based curriculum and testing. The focus on funding "quality" government-run programmes means that basic literacy instruction for adults, where reading and writing are defined in limited terms (measurable skills and tasks), with cognitive approaches (as in the *EFA Monitoring Report 2005*) prevails, neglecting many other aspects of adults' lives (socio-emotional development as an example). Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based programmes (CBOs) tend to be more prepared and disposed to meet the hardest-to-reach populations and their comprehensive needs. Yet there have been no major efforts to fund or support NGOs and although they are discussed as important in most of the

UNESCO literature, especially because of their flexibility, they are not given enough attention, and are subsequently stripped of their power to effect change.

Conclusion

In the policy documents that we analyzed through our theory of action model and our feminist policy framework, concepts and conditions related to women immigrants and their social support needs are deficient. Yet these issues should be highlighted, since ESOL populations (immigrants) are increasing in schools (Suarez-Orazco 2001) and in ABE, they compose nearly 50% of the system. Moreover, women students participate in large numbers in it. Our document analysis focuses on how policies neglect to account for this "invisible student majority" (Marshall 1997: 2). Our analysis indicates that adult education is endorsed by policy leaders who draw on a human capital perspective—that of fitting students into the labour market, albeit with no specific strategy or adequate resources for goal attainment. The consequences are that women immigrants' social and political interests are not factored in to its structures. In this policy framework, there are no socially transformative objectives such as allowing for a wider curriculum or embedded social support services that would enable marginalized groups to persist in programmes—without this, immigrant women are disadvantaged, when their specific material and social conditions are neglected. The narrow focus on literacy and language content that excludes attention to the everyday constraints facing immigrant women makes it difficult for them to assess their rights in the public or private sphere. This is a strong reminder of Fraser's (1989) contention that policies are institutionalized

interpretive systems that frame women and their needs according to questionable interpretations. And yet, gender-based policies need to be enacted and refined if women are to have access to state resources.

To make the ABE system realize its purpose of facilitating wider changes in social relations, policies need to be redefined to consider a wider social framework and to recognize the specificity of immigrant women's conditions. It needs to incorporate features that provide them with a web of collective and institutional support needed to enable them to move into positive transitions. Unfortunately, today few policies move beyond a purely economic framework to consider socio-political ends such as the emergence of women as citizens with full understandings of their social rights and responsibilities, in which they are not seen as a means to economic targets but as an end in themselves (Nussbaum 1997; Stromquist 2006). Even if women immigrants' needs were acknowledged, "the politics of recognition still speaks insufficiently to change" (Walby 2001: 1). Gender mainstreaming is the first step in this direction. It was explicitly introduced as a core policy instrument at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 with recommendations for all countries, including the U.S., to move into compliance. It allows for gender-based budgeting, assessments, and the tools to assess women's capabilities in the system as well as concrete outcomes for women's development (Walby 2005). Gender mainstreaming can be expanded to include unnoticed populations, such as women immigrants, who will likely increase in the developed world. Attention can be given to their global citizenship and social rights in states (Noddings

2006). The large and increasing number of women immigrants to the U.S. raises the question of what the obligation is of the developed world with regard to the education of *all* of its residents in these days of globalization's porous walls and long-term structural changes.

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Appendix

Table 1: The Presence of Women Immigrants' Needs in Six Policy Documents

Title/Author	Purpose of ABE with important quotes	Terms[iii]: "Women Immigrants," or "Immigrant women" including, gender, sex, female, women, immigration/ate	Document Based on Historical Reference	References to ABE sup[…] services That Could As[…] Women immigrants to[…]
Margins to the Mainstream (NCSALL, 2000) 54p.	Treatise on the importance of the federal role of ABE as a system, for "parents, workers and community members (p. 7) who are in need of basic educational services—"the system calls on all of us" to act (p.1) and "we are in fact a field and that one field is ready to move ahead" (p. 10). ABE students are part of a "nation divided…on the other side adults lack those skills (p. 1). The system shold be organized around 3 priorities: Quality, Access, and Resources (p. 3) which is how the report is organized, with Outcomes and Action points.	0	Data from the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) reveals alarming skill deficiencies in the general population and a 1989 federal treatise *Jump Start* asserts a strong role for ABE (McLendon, 2000). *Margins* was discussed at a 2000 Literacy Summit for ABE practitioners and policymakers.	Support services=5 time[…] outside the system of A[…] providers assisting stude[…] access them; i.e., "supp[…] are widely available to a[…] students" (p. 5). Childca[…] along with transportatio[…] specified within ABE sy[…]
ESL Vision and Action Agenda (TESOL, NCLE, OVAE, 2001) 16 p.	Vision is a "complement" to Margins (p. 1) and was written by TESOL experts and U.S. Department of Education policymakers at a conference, to "ensure that the needs of the large and growing population of adult English language learners are addressed" (in acknowledgments, p. 1) as they are 50% of its population (p. 4)	immigrants=5 times; Immigration= 4 times referring to population patterns, legislation, and services (pp. 4-7). Gender=1 time "gender expectations of the country of origin" (p. 11). Immigrant students are a "population" seen as "linguistically and culturally diverse" (5 times).	Based on *Research Agenda for Adult ESL* (1999), focused on ESOL populations in the U.S. ABE system.	Support services unspec[…] appearing 1 time: "enco[…] collaborative organizatic[…] an active role in promoti[…] involvement of their clie[…] educational programs" v[…] "affordable support serv[…] 11). Childcare=1 time al[…] transportation and health[…]
New Skills for a New Economy (NCSALL and Mass Inc., 2001) 106 p.	Sets key roles for WIA focusing on new skills for vocational education within a "New Economy" for Massachusetts and the nation. The authors state, "the long-term economic health of our state depends on our willingness to invest wisely in a stronger more fully integrated adult education initiative. At the same time, we need to hold the ABE system and the community colleges *accountable* for the outcomes of the students they teach" (p. xv).	Immigrants=185 times, as in a "part of the changing workforce" and the "earnings prospects of immigrants in today's labor market (p. 11). Immigrants are an "untapped resource" for the economy and ABE: "a substantial amount of workers remain an untapped resource because of their limited ability to participate in the New Economy [capitalized in text]" (p. 1, chapter 8). They are one of "three challenge populations" who have "English-speaking deficiencies" (p. 9). Gender=4 times referring to number of women learners in ABE and as teachers. Women=8 times predominantly as majority participants in ABE. Female=1 time in a study of participants.	Follows from a study *The Changing Workforce Immigrants And The New Economy 1999* which advocates for basic education and public policies to address immigrants within labour market	Support services=2 time[…] for instruction would inc[…] support services (p. 7). S[…] services are for disadva[…] youth and adults" to sec[…] gains in earnings (p. 9) a[…] considered to be under a[…] system based on soft fur[…] 4). No information on su[…] services for immigrants.[…] authors recommend coll[…] social security numbers[…] document participation.[…] are "customers of the sy[…] 11, Ch. 8) It is individua[…] student's own motivatio[…] the key to success" (p. 2[…]
Building a Level Playing Field (NCSALL) (2001) 27 p.	Advocates for Congress to support the "new basic skills" (Murnane & Levy 1996) and to invest in the ABE system and improve services (p. 23). ABE "should not be seen as *another social program* (italics ours) with few economic benefits; it is an economic development program that should provide a favorable return on the investment" (p. 23).	Immigrant women=1 time as in "children born to immigrant women" (p. 11) Immigration=6 times referring to studies, statistics and future increases. Immigrants=14 times referring to growth in population those with low education. They are one of "three challenge populations" as a "national resource" (p. 23)	Based on *New Skills for a New Economy* data and, *New Basic Skills* (Murnane & Levy 1996) as well as *Margins*	Support services=1 time[…] providing better outreac[…] potential students, neces[…] support services to mak[…] for them to study, and m[…] convenient ways to learn[…] the use of technology."
Blueprint for America's Future	Guidelines and discussion for the development of ABE "with the Bush administration's vision" (p. 1) with the	Immigrants=1 time referred to as workers with low skills, and "foreign workers….have significantly low	0	Support services=1 time[…] coordinated "with other[…] (p. 10). They should be […]

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(OVAE, 2003) 13p	aims and implementation agenda of WIA, so as "to address the national skills deficit" (p. 3) and for "what works" (2, 6, and 9, 11). ABE program should be "research-based" to "equip them [adults] to succeed in the next step of their education and employment" (p. 1).	literacy skills" and "immigrants fill about one half of the jobs created in labor market expansion" (p. 3)		centers." "For profit ag should "compete with lo agencies" to offer "high education" (p. 9). The ne "create new partnerships emhasized. Performance in the context of sanctio providers that are not ac results" (p. 7). Accounta times, as in, "accountabi results" (p. 2).
Evidence-Based Adult Education (NCSALL, 2006) 173 p.	ABE should develop into an evidence-based system, with policies and "managed enrollment" (p. 17) program that derive from both practitioner wisdom, theory, and empirical research about what works. For students to acquire "basic skills in reading, speaking and writing" (p. 20) there must be "effective instruction."	Gender=1 time along with race and age). Women=11 times referred to in various contexts, like subgroups. Immigrant=1 time as in "immigrant groups" and educational needs (p. 24). Immigration=1 time referring to support services along with substance abuse and domestic violence"	Blueprint and the "what works" clearinghouse, and part of compliance guidelines for the new Institute of Education Sciences.	Support services=112 ti "supports to participatio focus on referrals. "Adu often require services th met by educational prog Childcare=8 times and r a barrier to participation services for adults need long enough to be succe Performance=28 times; Accountability=21 times

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[i] Studies by NCES indicate that the amount of women enrolled in ESOL courses has increased, suggesting an increase in immigrant women within ABE; Comings, Sum, and Uvin (2001) report that in 1999, 71% of all Asian students enrolled in ABE programmes were women. See also: Seymour, Sperling, and Chisman for majority women ESOL in their case study (2008).

[ii] See website for the Act: http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/policy/hr1261.htm#1

[iii] The term, feminiz(s)ation of migration did not appear in any of the documents