
Adult Women Education on the Screens (1959-1972)

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Abstract

A first socio-historical investigation on films led me to work on *Retour à l'école ?*, a 50 minutes B&W film shot in 1966, built on interviews of (male) auditors of an adult education centre in Nancy. I analysed its images as an involuntary demonstration of the fact that the French *Promotion sociale* politics had forgotten women workers.

Now, going on further, I am no longer studying the lack of women learners on screens, but on the contrary, what images show when films tackle with the question adult women learning. This paper will be based on the first findings of an exploratory research combining the setting-up of a film corpus and a visual and discourse analysis.

The corpus is composed of about twenty films with diverse aims and durations (from 3 to 50 minutes) produced for a wide TV broadcast between 1959 and 1972, those dates framing a rich period of social and political changes concerning both adult education and training, and the social role and employment of women.

I'll analyse changes occurring in the films during this period. Notably, I'd like to check if the 1967 turning point in adult education politics, that I identified, in previous research, as the moment when politics began to consider women as possible beneficiary from learning programmes, was made visible on the screens.

Films will be presented in the context of their productions and conceived as unities of discourses and practical experiences passed through by knowledge in the Foucault's meaning.

The study period is marked by a strong rise of TV documentary films devoted to "women problems", which can be related to the abundance of discourses on the topic spread in the framework of international organisations (ILO, UN, Unesco, international trade unions).

The analyse of the films will notably focus on what is shown (and how this is shown), and what is said: on women working conditions and their motivations for work, on vocational and/or trade union or any else type of education, as well as on the household (which a very rarely addressed topic in films concerning men). Who else are presents on the screens: husbands? Children? Employers? Adult educators?

First findings reveal diverse ways to tackle with adult women learning whether situations take place in rural or in city context. Men and women coeducation is also varying according to the kinds of educating programmes (more frequently in trade union or general education and very scarcely when vocational programmes).

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What is also visible is the growth of the theme of women returning to studies after having raised their children, linked with the idea of their social isolation and the "empty nest" depression. Upgrading or "recycling" programmes were, then, considered as a means for linking with others and regain self-confidence so as to being capable to find a job after a long interruption.

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