

Editorial: The Continued Dynamism of Canadian Adult Education

At this year's CASAE conference, delegates had an opportunity to review an early draft of Canada's submission to next year's international CONFINTEA VI conference. Recognising that the wealth of detail provided in the report was ample evidence of Canada's strong involvement in adult education, delegates were critical of the report's predominant neo-liberal rhetoric and felt that it did not sufficiently convey the diversity and richness of Canadian adult education or address many of the key issues that influence its current practice and future development. Specifically, they were concerned about

- the lack of any national coordination or a national body that promotes awareness of adult education in Canada;
- the paucity of resources for the provision of adult education for vulnerable people in the underprivileged sectors of society such as immigrants, aboriginal peoples, lower income and rural people and those with disabilities, whether mental, physical or hidden;
- education for democracy and greater participation in civil society;
- the growth in, and access to, information and communication technologies and their influence on the provision of adult education; and
- various factors that affect the lives of Canadians such as the environment, health, poverty and homelessness.

In sum, delegates felt that, while appearing to be comprehensive, the draft report provided only a partial and largely uncomplicated and ahistorical picture of Canada's approaches to adult education. They were concerned that emphasising only those aspects of adult education that enhance people's involvement in existing economic structures subtly downplays its other, more social and cultural, aspects.

Thankfully, the same criticism cannot be levelled at our journal. In this latest issue we carry four articles that examine a broad range of adult education activities and their contribution to current social, political and cultural concerns. First, John Egan examines the experiences of young queer men as they move into adulthood. Carrying the wounds from their usually homophobic K-12 schooling, these young men encounter unexpected disappointments in finding comfort, support and validation. Egan's study shows the vital importance of tacit and informal adult learning in such situations. However, it also carries a passionate plea for the creation of societies that value and celebrate tolerance and diversity, no matter what forms they take.

Of course, not all adult education focuses on marginalised groups or approaches outside of the mainstream. According to Edward Taylor, Amanda Neill and Richard Banz, millions of North Americans visit museums each year, many participating in some form of learning activity while there. Identifying this as an under-researched area, they explore the perspectives and role of museum docents in museum education and offer several

suggestions for developing greater awareness of, and further research in, this ubiquitous arena of non-formal education.

We next include two articles in our Perspectives section. Firstly, Jennifer Sumner looks at the fair trade movement. Exploring the role that adult educators might play, she examines the fair trade movement's potential for developing social, environmental and economic possibilities not readily available within dominant neo-liberal market conditions. She concludes that promoting fair trade can also help globalise other aspects of civil society such as worker and citizen cooperatives, public education, and universal healthcare.

Our final article offers a perspective on workplace learning by Bruce Spencer. He argues that too much of the adult education and work and learning literature ignores the link between human resource management and workplace learning. Taking one commonly-used HRM textbook as a representative example, Spencer examines how it presents and represents only dominant views of the economy and of society. Further, it excludes any approach that might be deemed critical or addresses issues of equity, power, authority, control and ownership.

We also carry four book reviews that variously consider flexibility and lifelong learning, teaching adults, and developing adult education programs. Two of the reviews have been written by graduate students at the University of Victoria and we are delighted to provide an opportunity for the more junior scholars in our field to contribute in this way. Finally, we present the annual list of recent adult education graduate degrees and titles of theses and major papers listed by university. A quick count of the number of graduates and consideration of their topics shows just how far-reaching and dynamic our field is. If only the authors of the CONFINTEA draft report had taken the trouble to read our journal first!

Tom Nesbit
Editor-in Chief