

Introduction to Special Issue on Work and Lifelong Learning

This special issue of *CJSAE* is devoted to presentation of findings from *The Changing Nature of Work and Lifelong Learning in the New Economy: National and Case Study Perspectives* (WALL). The WALL research network was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) from 2003 to 2007 under the SSHRC's Major Collaborative Research Initiatives program (Project No. 512-2001-1011). This research builds on the exploratory studies of the SSHRC-funded *New Approaches to Lifelong Learning* (NALL) network (1997–2002). NALL provided benchmarks of adult learning in many forms, with an emphasis on informal learning, its relationships to “non-formal”/formal education and to paid and unpaid forms of work, and factors related to participation in adult learning and its fair recognition. NALL conducted the first Canadian national survey of formal and informal learning in 1998 (previously reported in *CJSAE* Vol. 13, No. 2) and combined this with a large and diverse series of preliminary case studies (see www.nall.ca). NALL led to the creation of the Centre for the Study of Education and Work at OISE/UT (CSEW), which has become a leading institute for advanced studies in the field of learning and work studies (see www.learningwork.ca). The WALL research network has been designed to extend and deepen the findings of the NALL network and to provide a more comprehensive understanding than prior studies of the learning that adults are doing in relation to the changing conditions of work.

The WALL network has focused on three basic questions:

1. What are the current forms, contents, and outcomes of the array of learning activities of Canadian adults?
2. How have changes in the nature of paid and/or unpaid work and other general social conditions, particularly in the past five years, been associated with adults' learning practices?
3. What differences are there in these learning and work relations between social groups and especially between socially disadvantaged groups and others?

The WALL research strategy included a 2004 representative large-scale national survey of over 9,000 respondents, which generated profiles of changing work and learning conditions on a Canada-wide basis as well as for different socio-demographic groups. The WALL survey offers general benchmarks for continuing population studies of work and learning. Some of the basic results of this survey are compared with the findings of the 1998 NALL survey in the first article in this issue by D. W. Livingstone. Livingstone summarizes the main 1998 and 2004 survey findings on current participation in further education courses and intentional informal learning activities related to employment, housework, community volunteer work, and general interests. While participation in further education has continued to increase among all who are employed, vastly more are engaged into old age in intentional informal learning activities regardless of levels of prior schooling or further education. There are also significant indications of underutilization

of the high levels of schooling of the Canadian labour force. Further analyses of WALL survey results can be found on the network Web site: www.wallnetwork.ca.

Recognizing the breadth of issues integrally related to work and learning, the WALL network also included 12 case studies that also built on prior NALL case studies to offer fuller insights into the current working conditions and learning practices of diverse groups. The 12 case studies covered five foci:

1. Sectoral: biotechnology, light manufacturing, public service sector, nursing homes
2. At-Risk Worker: disabled workers, immigrant workers, visible minority workers, women workers, older workers, younger workers, those with limited formal schooling
3. Unpaid Work: housework and community volunteer work
4. Transitions: transitions between education and work for youth and adults
5. Labour Education: developing new learning tools and relevant programs to prepare future and current workers for inclusion in the new economy

Accounts of all case studies are available on the network Web site: www.wallnetwork.ca.

The seven case study articles in this issue are reflective of the range of the WALL case studies, which combined supplementary survey analysis, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, documentary analysis, and participatory action research methods. Case study methodology attempts to balance the specificity of local settings or particular groups with broad interests and usefulness. We believe that these articles illustrate the value of combining case study methodologies with large-scale surveys to study this complex phenomenon, and offer insights that adult education researchers and practitioners across and beyond Canada will find relevant and valuable to their own work.

Two articles focus on the virtually unexplored relations between unpaid work and learning. The case study led by Margrit Eichler has re-conceptualized the dimensions of housework and identified various aspects of related informal learning (see Eichler and Albanese, 2007), and draws on both the WALL survey and an array of focus groups and interviews conducted across Canada to document these forms. The paper by Lichun Willa Liu from this case study uses the WALL survey data to compare Canadian-born, Chinese immigrant, and other immigrant respondents in terms of their housework-related and general interest-based informal learning. She explores how gender, immigration, and ethnicity influence the informal learning involved in these activities. She also does in-depth interviews with 20 new Chinese immigrants in Toronto to examine the impact of cross-cultural immigration on household work and the knowledge and skills acquired through such work.

The learning processes of volunteers involved in community sustainability are the focus of the research reported on by Fiona Duguid, Karsten Mündel, and Daniel Schugurensky. This case study, based on interview data, illuminates how volunteers' mostly

informal learning processes were integral to the success and sustainability of communities. Differentiating sustainability as social, ecological, and economic, this research contributes to theories about informal learning and social movement learning and how adult education/informal learning is a key element in the sustainability efforts of communities.

Bonnie Watt-Malcolm's and Alison Taylor's article details one of the case studies focused on transitions between education or training and work. Exploring a high school apprenticeship program in Alberta, it discusses a more informal level of politics as it elucidates the power relations among partners in the program. These power relations are represented by the negotiations and non-negotiations that facilitate and obstruct effective training. The apprenticeship model is presented as a win-win opportunity for all partners, including learners and prospective employers. The conclusion that government incentives for partnership work remain important in sustaining training programs, even in economic booms, argues in favour of an active policy and program role for government, despite trends toward government disengagement from program planning, funding, and delivery.

Paul Tarc's article draws on the continuing NALL/WALL project led by Harry Smaller and Rosemary Clark on the work and learning of Canadian teachers. He outlines four orientations found in the discourses about informal learning, pointing to how this concept has been positioned and used to support particular arguments. For example, some discourses focus on the significant amount of informal learning occurring that is often not recognized (the "iceberg" phenomenon), while other discourses note how informal learning has been implicated in regimes of surveillance and governmentality. With this orientation to discursive politics, the article then discusses the WALL survey findings as well as focus group and individual interviews with teachers and how they talk about their own informal learning, drawing attention to differences between more experienced and less experienced teachers.

The article by Peter Sawchuk is an example of the sectoral case studies. Sawchuk offers a political economic analysis to explore implications of public sector transformation, notably the widespread trends of contracting out and privatization. The paper focuses particularly on the role of work design and change and the related tensions of centralized and localized knowledge systems and worker cooperation and resistance. Using the concept of "workaround," Sawchuk discusses Ontario public sector frontline workers' responses to increasing privatization, centralization, and imposition of technology as learning.

The Montreal-based team of Charlotte Baltodano, Aziz Choudry, Jill Hanley, Steve Jordan, Eric Shragge, and Martha Stiegman discusses one of the case studies of at-risk workers. It focuses on some of the most vulnerable immigrants to Canada: those who work as caregivers or agricultural workers. In learning to become "immigrant workers", the participants in this case study raise the underlying dynamics of capitalist societies that create both "pushes" for individuals to leave their home countries and "pulls" towards other countries, such as Canada, that promise employment and progress. Their learning occurs within social, political, and economic contexts, and is a reminder of the inter-connectedness of local/national and global forces and structures in the contemporary period, which tends to diminish the importance of the former in favour of the latter.

Anil Verma and Sara Mann examine lower-wage workers' limited access to formal learning opportunities. They propose an explanatory model including the role of demographics, the self-efficacy of lower-wage workers, outcome expectancies, access to resources, and the moderating role of social capital. On the basis of surveys of workers at light manufacturing plants, nursing homes, and hotels in Ontario, they find high levels of self-efficacy, expectancies, and motivation to learn, combined with low incidence of formal training, most notably for visible minorities. They point to a positive relationship between social capital and receipt of training and suggest the development of higher levels of social capital.

The WALL network includes faculty researchers and graduate students from seven universities across Canada as well as a committee of international advisors. Each of the 12 case studies worked with the involvement of community partners who contributed to research design, site access, feedback on findings, and dissemination to their members. Information on all WALL members is also available on the network Web site.

The NALL and WALL research has helped put informal learning on the map for Canada-wide surveys (e.g., Statistics Canada's 2003 Adult Education and Training Survey), facilitated innovative policy development in the area of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (e.g., the Canadian Labour Congress Training and Technology Committee PLAR Statement of Labour Values in 2000), and aided in creating new tools to profile workers' learning generally (e.g., A Commitment to Training and Employment for Women's (ACTEW) Skills and Knowledge Profile tool) and new approaches to estimating specific forms of occupational training (e.g., the NALL Teachers' Learning Survey used across Canada). Case studies have begun to document what previously were completely unexamined issues of learning in the voluntary sector and the household.

This cumulative body of research confirms that Canadian adults are much more extensively engaging in self-reported informal learning activities in relation to their paid employment, housework, community volunteer work, and general interests than they are participating in organized formal learning; that those with little formal schooling or further adult course participation are as likely to devote time and effort to intentional informal learning as are the highly schooled; and that workplace learning is often ingenious and rarely appreciated. If the NALL and WALL contributions are considered in conjunction with other recent survey and case study research, Canada has produced world-leading documentation of the multiple dimensions of adult learning and work activities. Taken as a whole, the WALL findings can aid further world-leading research and should stimulate public debate on an array of important policy questions concerning means to ensure equitable recognition of varied learning experiences and nurture lifelong learning cultures, to design workplaces for more effective knowledge utilization, and to sustain viable learning communities.

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References

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