

Editorial:

The Entwinement of Learning and Social Structures

Welcome to the 25th Volume of the *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education/La Revue Canadienne Pour L'étude de l'éducation des adultes (CJSAE/RCÉÉA)*. I am very pleased with the articles and reviews in this current issue. They express the kind thoughtful engagement in the study of adult education we have come to expect from Canadian scholars in our field. An important aspect of this engagement is the willingness of these scholars to address the complex entwinement of people and their social and cultural structures. As is so often the case in the CJSAE/RCÉÉA, all four articles in this issue ponder ways social/cultural structures shape learning and, reciprocally, the ways learning shapes the production, reproduction, or transformation of relation of domination in our society.

In their thoroughgoing exploration of the ways adult education and adult learning influence the formation of women politicians in British Columbia, Darlene Clover and Catherine McGregor approach the interactions of learning and social/cultural structure directly. Existing patriarchal social/cultural structures, they argue, shape the “social conditioning and normative identity formation” of women, making it much less likely for women to pursue careers in politics than men. Clover and McGregor are interested, therefore, in the reasons why some women end up in politics. They wonder what part adult education or adult learning have played in shifting the identities of these women? What learning experiences did they have that offset the conditioning influences of prevailing patriarchal social and cultural structures? Interestingly, according to Clover and McGregor, rather than any deliberate political education initiative, the transformative learning experiences of women politicians often took place informally in contexts of social activism. If adult educators wish to support equitable participation of women in politics, it is important for them to continue to play a role in fostering grassroots social institutions and movements as vibrant and emancipatory learning contexts.

Leona English, Ken MacAulay and Tom Mahaffey are also concerned about the ways adult education mediates between learners and broader social and cultural structures. The focus in their article is on the ways prevailing social institutions frame the discourse of financial literacy and shape actions taken by adult educators to improve the financial competencies of adult learners. Financial literacy, these authors contend, is largely defined by experts with minimal participation of people most deeply impacted by the economic tumult that characterizes capitalist society. Rather than enabling adult educators to engage learners in an exploration of what counts as financial literacy (including, perhaps, radical action to address root causes of economic hardship), most often, the dominant discourses of financial literacy lead to the development of top-down adult education initiatives. English, MacAulay and Mahaffey provide important insight into the ways dominant social and cultural institutions involve adult education in the perpetuation of inequitable social relations. They also hint at ways a more radical practice of adult education might contest the taken-for-grantedness of even hard-boiled notions like financial literacy.

In her article, Erin Careless explores the many social and cultural constraints faced by women academics. Based on a series of in-depth interviews, Careless argues that,

despite the rhetoric of more equitable opportunities for women in academia, patriarchal social and cultural structures continue to make work in the academy much more difficult for women than for men. In fact, as universities increasingly are subject to the pressures of neo-liberalism and adopt the managerialist practices that have swept through the public services, women academics are inordinately impacted. Persistent gender inequalities in areas like childcare and elder care that make academic life difficult in the first place are becoming even more intractable in the neo-liberal university with its high pressure demands for measured performance. For Careless, supporting women in the academy requires we take a hard look at the social and cultural structures fostered by neo-liberalism.

D.W. Livingstone is direct in his concern for the ways adult learning is framed in relation to the development of work competencies in today's society. Rather than acknowledging the vast wealth of learning that Livingstone argues people pursue in multifaceted and complex ways, when it comes to the rhetoric of employability, only the slimmest formal qualifications are seen as important. As a result, the knowledge and skills of workers are increasingly underutilized (and therefore unrecognized and unsupported) in the Canadian workplace. Oft heard complaints by private enterprises that the reason for current rates of underemployment is insufficient levels of formal qualifications are, as Livingstone's painstaking data reveal, unfounded. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Canadians are far better prepared by their formal and informal learning for more jobs than currently exist. Blaming education and the knowledge of workers for underemployment is a old ploy that disguises deeper problems with the organization of work in contemporary Canadian society.

Each article in this issue explores concrete ways dominant social and cultural structures shape adult learning to maintain the status quo. In doing so, the articles open up possibilities for alternative practices with the potential to shape transformed social and cultural structures. The power of dominant institutions to shape adult learning remains a key issue for our field. Political engagement through critical scholarship that has so often prevailed in CJSAE/RCÉÉA remains a key part of what makes this journal so valuable to our society.

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