

fresh look at all these conflicting scenarios. It may perhaps be too naive to hope that these new research agendas will be developed from, and be informed with, theoretical rigor, progressive politics, and human compassion" (p. 151).

Given that the language in this book is difficult, that the sequencing of chapters lacks editing logic, and that it focuses on countries which are discussed only rarely—and they typically only in international contexts—I find myself echoing Torres's comment: it is probably naive to hope that new research or practice will result from this book in literacy or mainstream adult education. However, if educators are to develop the theoretical postulates for the field which Ireland and so many others continue to ask for, we will need to look beyond our own borders for inspiration. This book, I would suggest, can take us a long way towards that goal.

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#### UNIVERSITY ADULT EDUCATION IN CRISIS

John McIlroy and Bruce Spencer. 1988. Leeds: Leeds Studies in Adult and Continuing Education

At first glance, Canadian adult educators might well question the relevance of a book which is clearly based in the British university adult education system. The richness of this book, however, lies in examining the similarities rather than the differences between those two contexts. Even the casual reader can draw numerous, disconcerting parallels between the bleak British scenarios and the current situation of adult and continuing education within Canadian universities. An in-depth examination of those similarities is instructive. It provides useful insights into the structures and political pressures, limitations and

potentials which influence Canadian adult and continuing university education.

*University Adult Education in Crisis* is organized into five chapters. In each chapter, McIlroy and Spencer skilfully weave together three inter-related themes. The first theme provides the reader with details of the upheavals and transformations which are leading to the demise of university liberal adult education. This information is extensive, well-referenced and clearly presented. Although from time to time the exact nature of the British institutions may be unknown to the Canadian reader, the essence of the story remains intact.

The second theme locates the demise of university liberal adult education in the social, economic and political agendas of its time. This analysis is thoughtful, critical and straightforward. McIlroy and Spencer do not hesitate to argue forcefully that "government policies...are... leading to the gradual dismantling of the extramural departments and the erosion of liberal adult education for all except those sections of the middle class who can afford it" (p. 20). This argument is defended with both empirical and theoretical evidence. Although the empirical evidence tends to be specific to the English and Welsh situations, the theoretical evidence is well-referenced and provides the reader with a broad range of generic bibliographic material.

The third theme extends the discussion of the plight of university adult education. It relates the ideological shifts within university adult education to the ideological shifts within universities. Through the use of analogy and illustration, McIlroy and Spencer highlight the parallels between the crisis of purpose and function in extramural departments and the crisis of purpose and function in universities as a whole. In this way, they highlight the potential of extramural departments to be leaders within the university community.

Chapter One, entitled "The Great Tradition?" is based on the premise that present turmoil in university adult education are rooted in the past. Thus, it gives a brief but tidy overview of university adult education from the mid 1800s to the 1970s. Throughout this chapter, the argument is made that the "the great tradition" of turning "the excellence of the university to the social purposes of those excluded from it" (p. 16) is being replaced by newer purposes which are "soaked in vocationalism" (p. 16).

Chapter Two ("University Adult Education in the 1970s—Prelude to Crisis") and Three ("Years of Crisis") detail the changes in university adult education over the past twenty years and relate those changes to education in the wider university and to political pressures which influenced them. Throughout these chapters, McIlroy and Spencer further their argument that university adult education is indeed in crisis.

Chapter Three emphasizes the natural convergence of the notion of lifelong education with the advanced technical requirements of industry. It explores the political pressures which directed the development of adult and continuing education away from the provision of liberal adult education during an era of financial stringency. It focuses on the divisions between those who viewed the times as an opportunity to advance university adult education and those who saw it as the institution of elitist and vocational activities to the disadvantage of the working class. It explicates how these divisions of philosophy and interests eroded the status and power of university adult education within both the university and the state.

Chapter Four, "Issues and Arguments," examines the critiques made of liberal adult and continuing education both from internal and external sources. It explores the drive toward vocational and professional continuing education and the problems inherent in that trend. These analyses are particularly poignant ones for Canadian university adult education units which are under increasing pressure to consider this direction as a tactic to survive university budgetary restrictions. This chapter raises both philosophical and practical issues about the direction that such units may be tempted to adopt. It concludes by suggesting strategies and organizational forms of university adult education as a means to reverse its marginalization and return to its social purposes.

Chapter Five, "The Future of University Adult Education," concludes by offering suggestions for the protection and revitalization of "The great tradition." These suggestions are made within the context of the inevitable pressures of the market mechanisms and the needs of the economy—pressures which are mirrored in the Canadian scene. McIlroy and Spencer emphasize the importance of university linkages both with the community and within the university. In the first instance, they highlight the importance of recognizing the relevance of liberal education for the working class. In the second instance, they argue for an extended leadership role for adult and continuing education within the university.

On its back cover, *University Adult Education in Crisis* is described as “a history, a polemic and a prescription.” For those Canadian adult educators who are involved with university continuing and adult education, it is more than that. This book provides Canadian readers with a handy heuristic device for assessing the past, present and future state of our university adult and continuing education. It offers us a mirror of our own ethical and philosophical dilemmas as we chart the future of university adult and continuing education in Canada.

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