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1972-YEAR OF AFFIRMATION FOR ADULT EDUCATION

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Abstract

By the early 1970's adult educators had become accustomed to having their field largely ignored by public inquiries into the field of education. Three reports published in 1972--UNESCO's Learning To Be and the Worth (Alberta) and Wright (Ontario) Commission reports in Canada--gave great prominence to adult education and lifelong learning. This article examines the nature of these reports including the origins and background of some of the ideas contained in them. The article also considers several other events of the same period, the effects of which combined to raise the visibility of adult and lifelong education and to move them closer to the mainstream of educational planning.

Résumé

Au début des années 1970, l'éducation des adultes était largement ignorée dans les enquêtes publiques sur l'éducation. Trois rapports publiés en 1972 - le rapport de la Commission Faure à l'UNESCO, Apprendre à être, et les rapports Worth (Alberta) et Wright (Ontario) au Canada - ont accordé une grande importance à l'éducation permanente. Cet article examine la nature de ces rapports et notamment l'origine et le contexte de certaines idées émises. Il retrace aussi plusieurs autres événements qui sont survenus durant la même période et qui ont contribué à augmenter le visibilité de l'éducation permanente et à les introduire comme bases de la planification de l'éducation.

> We therefore offer as our central concern, not education, in its formal and institutional sense, but learning.
>
> Alan Thomas - 1961[1]

The year 1972 was one of startling developments for those in Canada who were involved in the field of adult education and who were concerned about the place of that activity in public policy. For some decades, supporters of adult education in

Canada had been advancing their case through various forms of advocacy, all too frequently with little if any effect.[2] A long sequence of royal commissions and other public inquiries about education had received representations about adult education and their reports either had ignored the field completely or had paid only lip service to it. An extreme example was the Royal Commission on Education in British Columbia which when it reported in 1960 devoted less than half a page to adult education in a 460 page report.[3] Although that commission made several hundred recommendations on some 158 different subjects, none was made on the education of adults. There had been a few other more satisfactory public documents, but adult educators who were active in advocacy activity had become inured to having their point of view largely ignored, at least by those public inquiries which were concerned with an overview of the whole field of education.

The events of the year 1972, seen against this background, were truly startling and tremendously encouraging for adult educators in Canada. In that year the reports of not one, but two high-profile provincial inquiries - in Ontario and Alberta - were published, giving great prominence to adult education and the concept of lifelong learning.[4] At the international level, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) published the report of its International Commission on the Development of Education, a report which espoused the concept of lifelong education and singled out adult education as one area which should be accorded priority treatment.[5] These and other significant events during the same year resulted in adult education gaining an unaccustomed prominence of place in public discussion about educational policy, and more broadly, in national development strategy. The phrase "triumphal affirmation" which Alan Thomas used with reference to the Ontario report[6] conveys something of the reaction of informed adult educators at the time.

While it is reasonable to single out a particular year - in this case 1972 - as one in which a number of significant events took place, such an eventful year was not, of course, an isolated period. The closer one looks at the developments during that year, the more one becomes conscious of the background which led up to these occurrences. It is justifiable to state, however, that the events of 1972 broke with dramatic impact on many adult educators in Canada, many of whom were not aware of the previous events which were stirring in educational circles.

Three Major Reports

The three major reports identified above - two originating in Canada and the third at UNESCO - adopted the concept of lifelong learning (although this was restricted in the case of the Ontario report as the terms of reference of that report focused on post-secondary education). All three reports put particular stress on the fact that the educational influences in society should not be viewed as confined to what traditionally had been termed educational institutions but were much more broadly pervasive in various economic, social, and cultural aspects of society. In other words, education should be considered as not only lifelong but lifewide. The concept of the "learning society" was not only central to all three reports but was adopted as the title of the Ontario document.

The three commissions were operating in very different circumstances. The UNESCO document, Learning To Be,[7] addressed the international community and of necessity had to express its analysis and recommendations in very general terms, leaving their application to the various member states. The international panel of seven experts, chaired by Edgar Faure of France, was doing its work in an atmosphere of urgency. The alliance which had been forged in the early years of de-colonization between economic planners and educators, and the "educational euphoria" of the sixties, had given way in the minds of many, to what P. H. Coombs termed in his landmark study published in 1968, "the world educational crisis."[8] It was being discovered that huge expenditures on education in both the developing and the more industrialized countries, based on what Coombs called "the linear expansion of existing or inherited systems," simply was not working. The costs were rising beyond what many nations could afford to put into education and it was becoming increasingly clear that the strategy, however expensive, was not achieving the desired results.[9]

The recommendations of the UNESCO panel, as expressed in Learning To Be,[10] were provided as general guidelines and based on three main themes: the widening gulf between the developed and the developing countries; the need to find a wider concept of education, one which was both lifelong and lifewide; and the need to break through some of the traditional pedagogical notions and to develop "democratic systems and methods more appropriate to the education of the mass of the people."[11] This 'learning society' as described by the report was to result in the individual playing a more active part in his/her education. "Responsibility will

replace obligation" it stated.[12] The emphasis on adult learning infused the whole document as did the potential role of non-formal as well as formal education.

In an analysis of several reports which appeared in the early seventies, Alan Thomas developed a continuum upon which he placed the various documents in terms of the breadth of the reports' concerns.[13] The UNESCO report was placed at one end of the scale, concerned as it was with the whole world and with the entire life span. Next to the UNESCO report he placed A Choice of Futures, the report of the commission chaired by Dr. Walter Worth in Alberta.[14] This latter report, too, took as its major focus the concept of lifelong learning, but in keeping with its mandate, explored the application to a single jurisdiction, the province of Alberta. The Worth Commission, in developing the application of lifelong learning in Alberta, did so from a philosophically liberal point of view, with an emphasis upon pragmatism, individualism, rewards based upon individual achievement, an optimistic view of society's capacity for reform, and a belief in a progress through technological advance.[15]

The achievement of maximum opportunity for lifelong learning on the part of Albertans was seen to require strong development in two previously neglected areas, early childhood education and adult education (referred to by Worth as "further education"). It was recommended that both these areas be given equal status with the K-12 and higher education sectors. Opportunities for adult education and support for adult learning were to come from various agencies in society, both educational and "non-educational" (e.g., employers) and from a new agency which was to be created called the "Alberta Academy". The latter agency was to facilitate adult learning by various and flexible means, with an emphasis upon the use of the media and non-formal approaches.[16]

The Worth Commission clearly was influenced by the concept of recurrent education (described later) as well as by the concept of lifelong education. An examination of the report indicates the espousal of a humanistic, lifelong learning concept and a belief that these goals could be reached largely by the enlightened utilization of the institutions already in place. Priority was placed on the democratization of education but there was little indication of how this goal was to be realized.

The Ontario report, The Learning Society, frequently referred to as the Wright Report after the Chairman of the Commission was a more limited document in the sense that its focus was upon the

post-secondary sector. Nevertheless, there was frequent reference to "lifetime learning" and to what was termed "continuing education". Post-secondary education was described as "not an activity confined within the walls of the familiar institutions of teaching and learning" and education was to be seen as "a continuous, lifelong process."[17]

Post-secondary education in Ontario was to have four major sectors, each with its governing council: the universities; the colleges; the creative and performing arts; and the Open Education Sector. The latter sector was to foster a range of flexible and non-formal learning activities provided by many agencies, including a new institution, the "Open Academy of Ontario". The report referred to continuing education as "a transforming concept whose time has come"[18] and the ideal of "The Learning Society" infused all sections of the report. As with the Alberta report, a great deal of stress was placed on access to post-secondary and continuing education on the part of any citizen who wished to make use of them. Major provision was recommended for information and counselling services.

How the world had changed in one year! Adult educators, accustomed to having their field and their concerns practically ignored by such public documents, now found their proposals and aspirations in the limelight and the subject of widespread public discussion. As is usually the case with such public documents, the presentation of the reports carried with them no assurance that corresponding action would follow. The nature of these reports and the prominence given to many matters of interest to adult educators also resulted in the dramatic widening of the forum within which these ideas were discussed. Adult educators, used to talking mainly to each other, now were faced with the challenge of moving out of their comfortable professional circles and taking part in a wider forum. The basic point, however, is that such concepts as adult education, lifelong learning and the *learning* society had 'arrived' and were on the public agenda. It is easy almost two decades later to forget that the changed context within which we function today was brought about through the impact of these reports.

A Historical Background to the Three Reports

Although some of the concepts which informed these three reports (and others of the period) burst with considerable impact upon the world of education, they were not entirely new. As Denis Kallen has reminded us "Every major idea can with some

goodwill and much artisanship be traced back to antiquity."[19] Leaving aside consideration of such long-range ancestry, we should note that in the decade or so leading up to the early seventies, many of the key ideas embraced by the three reports were under active discussion and development.

In the case of recurrent education, which was such a prominent feature of both the language and the structure of the Worth Commission report, the idea had emerged in Sweden in the late 1960's. It was brought to increased prominence when Olaf Palme of that country presented the idea to the Conference of European Ministers of Education in 1969. The idea was subsequently taken by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which published a report on it as early as 1971.[20]

Recurrent education was basically a strategy or administrative device which allowed alternating periods of work and study for adults throughout their working lives. The scheme appeared to hold promise by assisting governments to cope with current challenges common to many of the industrialized countries: high levels of unemployment (especially among youth); soaring costs of formal education; and the need to upgrade the skills of the workforce. Recurrent education was accepted in varying degrees by many OECD members in a remarkably short period of time.[21]

The concepts of lifelong education, the learning society, and the related idea of "education permanente", also had been under active development in the preceding years. "Education permanente" was the terminology adopted by the Council of Europe and placed particular emphasis upon lifelong education and the importance of the connection between the individual's development and his/her role in the social, cultural and political life of the community. Much of the experience with the development and implementation of the idea was reflected in J. A. Simpson's Today and Tomorrow in European Adult Education[22] which appeared shortly before the publication of the UNESCO report.

The concepts of lifelong education and lifelong *learning* undoubtedly have as long a lineage as that suggested by Kallen.[23] In this century, the idea found eloquent expression in the language of the well known 1919 Report[24] in the United Kingdom, was coin-of-the-realm in adult education circles in subsequent decades, and found a prominent place in the final declaration of the UNESCO (second) World Conference on Adult Education which was held in Montreal in the summer of 1960.[25] As

documented by Parkyn and Alenen in their studies,[26] lifelong education was the subject of particularly active development in UNESCO committees from 1965 onwards with Paul Lengrand of the secretariat being undoubtedly the key figure.

Lengrand produced a working document for UNESCO's International Committee for the Advancement of Adult Education in 1965 and at that time urged that UNESCO endorse the concept of lifelong education. The first version of his book, An Introduction to Lifelong Education,[27] was published by UNESCO in 1970 and contained many of the basic ideas subsequently adopted by the Faure panel and reflected in Learning To Be. A remarkable document, Lengrand's small book reflects both the analytical detachment of social science and a passionate commitment to human values. Learning To Be also reflected the critique of educational systems which emerged from student unrest in the late sixties and from the work of contemporary authors such as Freire, Illich and Coombs.[28]

These developments at the international level were well known in certain circles in Canada and certainly among those engaged in the Worth and Wright studies. Additional voices at work within Canada most certainly had an impact. Dr. Roby Kidd emerged from the Montreal World Conference of 1960 as a prominent world figure in educational circles. During the sixties he published several volumes in which he developed the idea of lifelong learning.[29] Dr. Alan Thomas was the Director of the Canadian Association for Adult Education for most of the sixties and in a series of statements and briefs to the Worth and Wright Commissions developed the implications of the concept of lifelong learning.[30] Of particular importance with respect to the work of both Kidd and Thomas was the fact that they had been stressing for at least a decade before the reports of 1972 the point which all three reports endorsed and indeed made central to their recommendations: that what is most essential is learning, rather than education, and that learning takes place throughout society, not just in the traditional educational institutions.

The Tokyo Conference of 1972

Another event of the year 1972 which was less surprising to adult educators but which added to the overall impact of the year's events was the UNESCO (Third) World Conference on Adult Education held in Tokyo in the summer of that year. By far the largest of the three World Conferences which had been held since the War, the Tokyo meeting was distinguished from its

predecessors by the fact that many countries sent as delegates not adult educators, but senior officials of government and of ministries of education. Adult education was no longer the concern of only adult educators; it had now become the concern of educators and national planners as well, and a part of national development strategies.[31] Kidd has described the Tokyo meeting as more professional than its predecessor,[32] an indication that the adult education field was strengthening its position in formal educational structures.

The dominant theme of the conference was the need for the increasing democratization of adult education, both in the sense that the field should serve a broader spectrum of society, and that adult learners should have an effective voice in the choice of educational goals, methods and content. Lifelong learning was widely accepted and referred to as a master planning concept at the conference.[33]

Other Developments in Canada

There were other developments taking place at this time which added cumulatively to Canadian adult educators' sense that fresh winds were blowing. The publication in the United States in 1970 of Malcolm Knowles' The Modern Practice of Adult Education[34] with its exposition of the concept of andragogy provided many Canadian practitioners with a stronger sense of the uniqueness and significance of their field. The suggestion that increased attention should be paid to learning, as distinct from education, encouraged in the previous decade by the work of Kidd and Thomas was further enhanced by the publication in 1971 of Allen Tough's major study of adults' self-directed learning efforts.[35] A sense of both the accumulation of significant experience in Canadian adult education and of emerging expertise and professionalism was re-enforced by substantial volumes about community development (1971) and adult basic education (1972) which also were published at this time.[36]

Following the Tokyo conference, the Canadian Commission for UNESCO established a task force, the purpose of which was to communicate to adult educators across Canada some of the insights which had emerged from the conference. While the working group was engaged in this task, Learning To Be was published by UNESCO four months after the Tokyo Conference. It was decided to incorporate that publication into the Canadian task force's work. The Commission published a summary of the UNESCO report for use in Canada.[37] It also contracted with the

two national adult education organizations, the Canadian Association for Adult Education and the Institut canadien d'education des adultes, to organize conferences in several cities across Canada (held in 1973) through which the ideas contained in the UNESCO report could be publicized.

Another important event of the year 1972 in Canada was the publication of a report on community colleges in the province of Saskatchewan.[38] At the heart of the position and its recommendations was that the focus should be upon the individual learner in his/her community and that community resources should be mobilized in support of learning needs. It was very much a lifelong learning model with an emphasis placed upon information and counselling services and on the use of non-formal as well as formal educational approaches. As such it was to a high degree consistent with the main elements of the Worth, Wright and UNESCO reports.

Canada as Part of a World Community of Ideas

It is significant that adult educators in Canada not only drew inspiration from the prominence given to adult education in the several developments discussed, but it is also clear that at the same time Canada was taking its place in an international community of ideas about adult education. The Worth Commission in Alberta had drawn considerably upon the OECD thinking about recurrent education, and its report makes repeated reference to the concept of lifelong learning. The Ontario report drew its title and a great deal of its language and thinking from the literature of lifelong education which was emerging in Europe. In Learning To Be, the UNESCO panel quoted at some length from the discussion paper issued by the Worth Commission which focused upon the nature of lifelong learning. Reference is also made in the Faure report to the Quebec TEVEC project, the multi-media adult basic education project, and to Tough's research on self-directed learning.[39]

Following the Tokyo Conference, UNESCO commissioned John Lowe of England who had prepared much of the documentation for Tokyo to write a book which examined "the state of the art" internationally.[40] In his book, Lowe made reference to a number of features of adult education in Canada, singling out for particular praise the report of the Wright Commission in Ontario.

Canada's relationship with the international community of ideas concerning lifelong learning was further enhanced at this time by

the central role played by Roby Kidd with his discussions leading to the formation of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE). Kidd was the leading figure in consultations about the ICAE before and during the Tokyo Conference. Based in Toronto, the ICAE was established in 1973 with Kidd serving as its first Secretary-General.

In his examination of the Worth Commission report in 1973, Barry Moore made an observation which adds a dimension to the significance of these events of 1972.[41] He pointed out that as of approximately 1970, the "second generation" of educational planning began. He attributed the development of this new approach to the OECD, UNESCO and other planners at the international level such as P. H. Coombs. Rather than seeing educational systems as separate entities, and instead of concentrating almost exclusively on formal education, the newer approach called for educational planning to be both "comprehensive" (including both non-formal and informal aspects of the field) and "integrated" (that is, developed as an integral part of broader social and economic planning processes). In 1985, Coombs referred to the former as the comprehensive "learning network" of the society in question.[42] He also pointed to what he saw as a prolific increase in "human learning needs" in the 1980's, an increase brought about by development, in the sense that the term is used in international planning circles.

This kind of educational planning of necessity brings non-formal, adult and lifelong education into a central role in planning strategy. The authors of the Worth, Wright and UNESCO reports realized the importance of these matters and framed documents which accorded a new and unaccustomed prominence and priority to adult education as part of a larger strategy. Adult educators found themselves catapulted from the margin into the mainstream of educational thought and debate.

Conclusions

The publication of Learning To Be by UNESCO and of the Worth and Wright reports in Canada did not by any means bring about an immediate or spectacular series of revisions in public policy. Nor can it be claimed that the other events of 1972 which are described here had any such major effect. However, these developments, taken together, may now be seen to have been important in at least two ways. First, they encouraged and spurred on to renewed effort many adult educators who had been attempting to promote the advancement of educational

opportunities for adults in our society. It was indeed an important time of affirmation for many of us. Second, the concepts related to the future development of education. They concerned the place of learning in adult life which found expression in the three reports and in the other concomitant developments described earlier which seem to have influenced the direction of future events.

Within Canada there has been in the last two decades an increasing acceptance of continuing and lifelong education as one of the bases for educational planning. A number of major new institutions and educational services have been established in order to make educational opportunities for adults more accessible and effective. Examples include several provincial educational television networks, the creation of distance education institutions such as Athabasca University (Alberta) and the Open Learning Agency (British Columbia), and the expansion of opportunities for part-time degree study. At the international level, organizations such as UNESCO, OECD and the World Bank have broadened their roles in education, and more particularly within the field of adult education. For instance, one can note the OECD's promotion of the concept of recurrent education and the World Bank's decision in the 1970's to broaden its loan policy so as to include education or human resource development projects. Development planning increasingly has been influenced by ideas such as "the learning society", lifelong learning and the importance of non-formal and informal educational influences, all of them concepts and strategies which were given fresh impetus by the events of 1972.

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