

Editorial: Canadian Adult Education: Neither Dead Nor Dying

A recent article by Gordon and Mark Selman—two of Canada’s best known adult educators and as close as we currently have to an adult education dynasty—bemoans what they claim as the “death” of the Canadian adult education movement (Selman & Selman, 2009). Certainly, since the demise of the Canadian Association for Adult Education in the 1980s, adult educators’ influence on government policy has waned and to date we have been unable to replace it with an organisation that reflects the breadth and diversity of our approaches or the extent of our reach. Ironically, this same period has witnessed an unprecedented growth in university graduate and undergraduate programs in and about adult education and the development and increasing popularity of concepts like the knowledge society, learning organisations and lifelong learning (even though these latter terms may be used as much by economists and business folks as they are by educators). Yet, our own organisation—CASAE/ACÉÉA—following the same the leftist orientation as CAAE is about to celebrate its 30th anniversary and is still led by what one observer called “populists, community organisers, social gospel idealists and democrats” (Friesen, 1994, p. 174). So, to announce the death of a Canadian adult education movement seems a little premature or even misguided...as the contents of this latest issue of the Journal amply evince.

Our five articles cover the broad spectrum of adult learning and educational practices. First, Dianne Conrad and Elenor Wardrop explore the recognition of prior learning (RPL), an area of educational practice almost totally shaped by adult education principles and theories. Conrad and Wardrop show how, by engaging in RPL’s process of intensive reflection, learners can better understand the nature of their past learning, create new knowledge and become empowered. Next, Claudie Solar, Laurence Solar-Pelletier and Mathieu Solar-Pelletier report on a recent synthesis of Francophone adult literacy research in Canada. Their study falls into two parts: the first consists of a portrait of the authors of each study, the context and topic of their research, its date of publication, methodology, and funding source while the second part categorizes the corpus of research into specific topics and sub-themes.

Nancy Taber, Loretta Howard and Georgan Cope Watson discuss the crucial role of researcher subjectivity. Their study examines their own research practices in conducting a collaborative inquiry into professional practices and relates how their experiences, assumptions and subjectivities influenced their research approach and became powerful influences on their respective understandings of the results. Next, Michael Welton explores how some of Canada’s first immigrant settlers in 17th and 18th Century New France learned to make their living and express themselves in the exceptionally difficult and restrictive circumstances of those times. Welton shows that the concept of a *learning society* is far from new and, although forbidden from engaging in what we now think of as citizenship education, these early settlers began to inject a critical perspective into an extremely intellectually conservative culture.

The final paper arose from a panel discussion at the recent 2010 CASAE conference. There, a distinguished panel of adult educators—Shibao Guo, Daniel Schugurensky, Budd Hall, Tonette Rocco, Tara Fenwick and Arpi Hamalian—discussed various aspects of the internationalisation of adult education. They each examined their understandings of internationalization and its purposes, the extent to which it was affecting adult education in Canada (and beyond) and its emerging trends and issues. In the interest of promoting a wider debate on these issues, we are delighted to present a collated summary of five of the panelists' prepared remarks to a wider audience.

As usual, we also include several book reviews: on education and work, immigrant women, writing for social change and a recent update on adult learning theory. Finally, we publish the annual list of degrees in adult education and cognate subjects awarded by Canadian universities in the past year. A quick count of the number of graduates and consideration of their topics shows just how far-reaching and dynamic our field remains... and one that is, thankfully, neither dead nor dying.

References

- Friesen, G. (1994). Adult education and union education: Aspects of English Canadian cultural history in the 20th century. *Labour/Le Travail*, 34, 163-188.
- Selman, G., & Selman, M. (2009). The life and death of the Canadian adult education movement. *Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education*, 35(2), 13-28.

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