

ARTICLES

TRENDS IN ADULT EDUCATION RESEARCH IN ATLANTIC CANADA (or We're Dancing as Fast as We Can)

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Abstract

This paper examines the state of adult education research in Atlantic Canada. In the opinion of the writers, there is a great need for such research but little is being done and there is little funding for scholarly inquiry. The research that is being done relates to either personal interests or political issues such as the distribution of limited financial resources, rather than relating to social or educational issues.

Résumé

Cet article examine la situation de la recherche en éducation des adultes dans la région canadienne de l'Atlantique. Les auteurs croient que le besoin de recherche dans ce domaine est grand toutefois, ils constatent que peu est fait et que le financement disponible est restreint. La recherche qui est effectuée, découle soit d'intérêts personnels, soit de préoccupations d'ordre politique comme la distribution de ressources financières limitées plutôt que de questions sociales ou éducatives.

Introduction

We would like to begin by pointing out that our opinions and observations emerge primarily from our experiences as academics. We are aware of research done in other contexts and we make an effort, therefore, to set our experiences against a broader social and conceptual backdrop which may be reflective of adult education research across various contexts. The tone of our comments, however, is most heavily influenced by the settings in which we play out our professorial roles. We approach the issue of the trends in adult education research from personal and very specific experiences; hence, we have chosen to represent our experiences in the form of individual stories in addition to reporting on hard data gathered by reviewing research projects conducted in our respective institutions. Two of the writers are attached to a program which has been in existence only since 1986; our perception of the trends in adult education research, therefore, is somewhat short on historical focus but long on matters which concern us in the immediate present and near future.

Our definition of adult education is consistent with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) definition which states: Adult education is the entire body of organized educational practices,... whereby persons regarded as adult by the society to which they belong, develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications...and bring about changes in their attitudes or behaviour (UNESCO,

1980). We have chosen to consider the research act rather broadly; that is, our understanding is that research is not the exclusive domain of academics or only those activities which become published in some conventional academic way. In this regard, we are more likely to think of research as activity rather than outcome. Our statistical reports in this paper, however, adhere to the more traditional view that research involves a systematic exploration of an issue or problem, the results of which are communicated or shared through written documents, often beyond the immediate setting.

Context of This Report

This report examines the research activities of two of the six educational institutions in Atlantic Canada—the University of New Brunswick (U.N.B.) and Saint Francis Xavier University (St.F.X.)—which offer training in the field of adult education in some format. The four institutions not included in the report are the Memorial University of Newfoundland, Dalhousie University, l'Université de Moncton, and Mount Saint Vincent University.

The provision of funds in Atlantic Canada for conducting the entire adult education enterprise (with or without research) has never been more than the bare minimum required to maintain an adult education presence. The institutions most identified with adult education are the community colleges and continuing education departments in the universities. There are, of course, community-based agencies, but as elsewhere, these also operate in hand-to-mouth financial circumstances. This economic fact of life has been with us in Atlantic Canada for some time; we are saddened to realize that the rest of Canada now appears to be facing similar circumstances. We are saddened further by the thought that the conditions which are now affecting adult education research in our part of the world may offer a snapshot of future conditions in other parts of Canada.

The University of New Brunswick Context

The U.N.B. often makes the claim to being Canada's oldest university. Its roots are in the Anglican church, but it is now a publicly-funded, non-sectarian institution of higher education. The University operates on two campuses; the main campus is in Fredericton, the capital city of the province, and the second campus is in Saint John, the province's largest city. Full-time undergraduate and graduate enrollments are in excess of 10,000 students.

The University has had a Faculty of Education since 1973. It is only since 1986 that a graduate program (Master's level only) in adult education has been available. An undergraduate program in adult/postsecondary education was added in 1989. The staffing for these two program areas now includes three full-time faculty members. The Master of Education (M.Ed.) program enrolls approximately 80 students (10 full-time; 70 part-time), 15% of whom complete an independent research project and write a thesis. The Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and undergraduate certificate programs, originally designed to prepare community college instructors, enroll approximately 45 to 50 part-time students and ten full-time students.

The Saint Francis Xavier University Context

St.F.X. is a liberal arts institution of 3,000 students in Antigonish, a small town in north-eastern Nova Scotia. The University traces its origins to a small school of higher studies established by the Catholic church in 1853. It offers undergraduate programs in Arts and Science and a few graduate programs at the Master level; one of these is the Master of Adult Education which was first offered in 1970.

This program has evolved from a rather traditional curriculum consisting of ten courses to one that is experiential, individualized, and personalized. Following a three-week on-campus session, students are expected to design, implement and evaluate the content of their own curriculum. Support for on-going, self-directed student learning activities is delivered using a distance format. The program is staffed by three full-time faculty members and two support staff. Approximately 150 students are enrolled in any year.

The University also offers a diploma program, Training for the Trainers, using a modular design, which is delivered across Canada and to parts of the United States by the Extension Department, and which is staffed by two full-time professional persons and several associates. The Coady International Institute which offers a diploma in social development and courses in co-operative education is another program associated with the University.

Reflecting on our Circumstances

In the face of limited resources, we have found that, as professors in adult education, if we were to actively pursue research interests, we would need to cut back our programs of teaching and student supervision. The zero-sum game imposed by budget limitations allows us to increase activity in one area only by decreasing attention to another. In fact, our game is worse than this because the trend is to operate with continually decreasing resources. All adult education programs in Atlantic Canada now operate with cutbacks and deficits, in terms of both economic resources and personal and professional energy. The recent addition of a faculty member at U.N.B. came about primarily because an external review pointed out that the on-going situation was completely unacceptable.

The feeling for us is analogous to a *marathon dance competition* of the type engaged in during the economic depression of the 1930s. As dancing academics, our sense is that we and our students—most of whom are active adult educators who study part-time—are dancing as fast as we can. The tempo of the music keeps increasing but the needle is stuck—no time, no money, no energy, little research, no time, no money, no energy, little research, no time....

On the face of it, the above situation can easily be judged to be based primarily on the current economic recession. However, there are other influences at work which ought to be worthy of our attention. Perhaps the most interesting and the most complex influence on resource allocation is the place of education in the consciousness of our taxpayers and public policy makers. There is a curious contradiction. Education and re-education, training and re-training, are viewed—or at least are being espoused—by the public and the political leaders as *the solution* to our economic and

social concerns; yet, at the same time, educators and the educational enterprise are held in disregard, as ineffective, costly and perhaps not accountable. While we in the field of adult education tend to see ourselves as being separate from, and more responsive than traditional educators, the general public clearly does not make the same distinctions. Indeed, adult education, as a field of practice, may look today much more like traditional institutional education than has ever been the case in the past. A brief examination of the educational offerings of our institutions indicates that we spend more time and resources on courses for credit than on programs related to community development, personal interests, environmental or economic issues.

The contradiction in the public view of the educational enterprise may be most evident in the university setting. Enrollment pressure on universities is increasing steadily, from both traditional and non-traditional students. At the same time, base funding for universities is moving in the opposite direction. While traditional financial arrangements are eroding, conditional funding arrangements for programs of study and research are increasing. There is a move to the funding of "programs" or "centers," with what is often called "soft money"—money which can move in and out of the institution virtually at the will of the funding agency. The undergraduate adult education program at U.N.B. is an example of this type of arrangement. The financing for the certificate program, which forms approximately 25% of the B.Ed. content, comes almost entirely from one external client. The funds may be used to support programs designed specifically for employees of this client but not to support the general B.Ed. program in Adult Education. The contract offers no explicit recognition of the conventional research function of the University. The soft money arrangement means that we are being offered a much more limited menu from which to select our scholarly sustenance.

Further, we judge that there is a community-held view of the university as being populated by an over-indulged professorate. In particular, citizens focus on three things: *tenure* as the avoidance of accountability, a perception of the university as a place of *easy working conditions* and *above-average salary levels*. As the bubble of faculty hired in the 1960s reaches retirement, there may well be evidence to support such notions. For example, for the past few years, funding cutbacks have been covered off, in part, by a surplus created when faculty at the top of the promotional ladder and salary scale retire. These faculty members are either not being replaced or their work is being covered by temporary and less expensive arrangements.

Such "lower cost" arrangements often mean that traditional university services are not available, particularly in terms of research capacity. In the case of a relatively new adult education program, such as exists at U.N.B., much of the teaching is done by part-time contract faculty at lower levels of pay. Such faculty have no prospects of tenure and are paid for piece-work teaching. They receive no employee benefits, no recompense for course preparation time, no office space and no opportunities for advancement in the salary scale. No demands are made on them to conduct research projects. Because of an increasing presence of contract faculty, the burgeoning work of administering the rapidly developing programs and advising the increasing number

of students is distributed among the increasingly over-worked full-time faculty members. These faculty members function in extremely demanding working conditions which place less emphasis on knowledge creation (i.e., research), and more emphasis on knowledge dissemination (i.e., teaching, student advising, publishing) and service to the university (i.e., administration) even though the faculty contract which determines promotion and tenure decisions calls for equal contributions to all three endeavors. In short, even if new, tenure-track faculty members are appointed and have potential as researchers, their capacity to conduct research is attenuated by the nature of the work assignments and by workload expectations.

Another influence on our marathon dance is the popular neo-conservative notion which holds that any publicly-funded enterprise—including education and educational research—is non-productive; or worse, that such activity is a net drain on the economic life of the province and/or the nation. As evidence of this, we refer you to the common-sense notion of the so-called private sector as being the “productive” and “job-creating” sector. Through such an ideological lens, monies expended by the public sector are almost always viewed as value-reducing and wastage rather than as value-adding. On the other hand, public funds directed to projects operated on behalf of or by private or mercantile enterprises are almost always viewed as value-adding and an effective use of resources. In our judgment, the lack of balance in this sensibility seriously distorts the picture. It represents a press toward user-pay policies. This perspective has the effect of curtailing the distribution of non-conditional resources to the publicly funded and operated educational enterprise. This is not necessarily an effective way to nurture a broadly-based research enterprise, an enterprise in which the scholar is generally able to determine the content and direction of inquiry.

Research Trends at the University of New Brunswick

Our examination of research trends is based on the research conducted, or in the process of being conducted, by faculty and students in the U.N.B. Adult Education program. Since the program has been in place for only seven years, the accumulation of research projects is small: two faculty members have been engaged in nine projects and individual students in 19. We have summarized this information in Table 1.

Purposes, Funding and Researcher(s)

Table 1 indicates that the research being conducted at U.N.B. tends to involve small, personal interest projects which can be conducted without research funds; or small-to-medium, practical projects conducted with the encouragement (and sometimes the funding) of government departments and agencies. This is true for the research conducted by both professors and students. Research teams were composed, for the most part, of students acting as assistant researchers and faculty members in other disciplines.

Few student projects have any funding support. Four students who were government employees received funding from their own departments; one received support and encouragement but no money. Most faculty projects are funded—three from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and four from various government departments.

Table 1

Research Trends in Faculty and Student Research Projects at U.N.B., 1986-1993

Research	Student	Faculty
Purposes		
Personal/professional interest	17	6
For federal/provincial government departments/agencies	2	3
Funding Support		
None	15	2
Federal/provincial funding		
SSHRCC	--	3
Departments/agencies	4	4
Researcher(s)		
Individuals acting alone	19	5
Research Team	--	4
Topics		
Teaching and learning	9	2
Program development/evaluation	4	2
Adult learners/educators	2	1
Organizational development	2	--
Field of adult education	1	2
Participation	1	--
Elder abuse	--	1
Bibliography	--	1
Populations		
Women	6	2
Adults in formal programs	5	1
Prisons/inmates	2	--
Community college/university staff	3	1
Older adults	1	1
Parents	1	--
Religious educators	--	1
Adult education publications	--	1
Adult education programs	1	2
Methodologies		
Descriptive	5	--
Causal	3	2
Comparative	1	1
Historical	1	2
Grounded Theory	8	4
Interactive	1	--

Note. The above breakdown represents a total of 19 student projects and 9 faculty projects.

Topics and Populations

Personal interest projects tend to focus on issues which arise out of the researcher's experiences as learner, teacher, counsellor or administrator. Gender issues are important to the women. Organizational change is important to men and women who occupy middle management positions. Instructors are interested in classroom-based research which allows them to improve their instructional techniques. Employed students tend to conduct research which evolves from their workplace concerns; unemployed students conduct research which evolves out of the concerns expressed by local organizations—such as the prison system—and which are transmitted as research ideas through faculty members.

Methodologies

The research methodologies are divided equally between traditional (descriptive and historical) and non-traditional (grounded theory and interactive) approaches. While there is an increasing awareness among students and colleagues of non-traditional approaches to educational research, there is also a disquieting degree of reluctance toward using such methods, apparently because students and colleagues are unsure that such research will be valued by funders, users, or publishers. Even worse in light of adult education traditions, most researchers do not give serious consideration to approaches which initiate change, such as action research, participatory research or community mobilization. Only one project, currently being conducted by a student, falls into the category of interactive research. Even research which is part of curriculum development tends not to take place in other than conventional ways. In a sense, while there is strong interest conceptually in non-traditional and action-oriented research, there is a chill on the research climate with regard to using non-traditional research methodologies.

Very few local organizations appear to be conducting research, except perhaps in the form of market research to determine the viability of new programs. Our perceptions of the research conducted by public and private organizations in New Brunswick suggest that such projects, and any requests that faculty or students conduct them, tend to be of two types. One involves an evaluative focus; that is, the inquiries identify current problem conditions or examine the outcomes and worth of existing programs. The second type is descriptive research which assists organizations to define their target populations, identify the needs of these populations, examine the marketability of specific programs and services, and identify future trends and needs. In many instances, such research projects are undertaken in isolation, after the program has been in operation for some time or under less than optimal time constraints. In short, then, while we teach about research at U.N.B. and actually engage in research from time to time, the role of adult education research in New Brunswick is very constrained.

Research Trends at Saint Francis Xavier

Research trends at St.F.X. are based on an analysis of the theses written by Master level students over a 20 year period. In Table 2, these studies have been grouped into three time periods because changes in faculty members resulted in a refinement of

the program's philosophical approach and a shift in research interests. The studies are grouped using the constructs of topic and focus: *topic* refers to dimensions in the field of adult education under study and *focus* to dimensions in the programming process under study.

Table 2

Research Trends in Student Theses at St. FX., Selected Time Periods

Research	1970-73	1974-80	1981-90
Topics			
Human resource development	3	16	27
Community development	3	7	10
Co-operative education	2	--	*
Literacy	1	*	*
Native education	1	*	9
Adult basic education	--	5	*
Health education	--	*	10
Communications	--	*	--
Counselling	--	*	*
Community colleges	--	*	12
Nursing education	--	--	13
Higher education	--	--	6
English as a second language	--	--	5
Women's education	--	--	5
Computer education	--	--	*
Vocational training	--	--	*
Religious education	--	--	*
Social services	--	--	*
Popular education	--	--	*
Environmental education	--	--	*
Agricultural education	--	--	*
Museum education	--	--	*
Nutrition education	--	--	*
Distance education	--	--	*
No well-defined area	4	2	--
Focus			
Program design	6 (43%)	29 (62%)	45 (36%)
Program evaluation	4 (28%)	7 (15%)	27 (22%)
Program implementation	--	5 (11%)	34 (27%)
Needs assessment	--	4 (8%)	18 (15%)
Not well-defined	4 (28%)	2 (4%)	--
Total Projects	14	47	124

Note. * = fewer than 5; exact numbers for fewer than 5 were not reported for 1974-80 or 1981-90.

Topic and Focus of Research

Changes in both research topics and the focus of the research over the years are important. Most research topics are dictated in large part by the work settings of the students. Since 1980, specialization has increased; it is no longer deemed wise or feasible to be a generalist. There are fewer students who share similar work backgrounds and research interests. Hence, research topics have become more diverse and more specialized; for many topics, the number of theses completed were too few to report. In addition, students now are concerned about becoming better instructors or evaluators within a speciality area. A focus on program design has decreased in importance because so many programs are already designed and pre-packaged.

These shifts are the result, in part, of government intervention in the job market. In the early 1970s, much government support was provided for the development of new programs and creative expansion. By the late 1980s, government focus had shifted to fiscal responsibility and the evaluation of program benefits.

The shifts are also the result of changes in government funding practices. In the early 1970s, governments were funding projects and programs in human resource development, community development and adult basic education. By the late 1980s, governments had become aware of the crippling effect of illiteracy among the adult population, of the need for a better trained work force, of the rising cost of health care, and of the disadvantages experienced by minority or marginalized groups. Funding targets shifted to related but more specific research topics. For example, adult basic education research shifted to literacy and English as a second language, and to the education of disadvantaged (i.e., minority and marginalized) groups such as Natives and Women.

Attitudes Toward Research

There are not very many organizations based in Atlantic Canada which are involved in conducting or funding adult education research. This lack of involvement seems to be connected with organizational unwillingness and/or inability to understand how one can investigate a problem through systematic inquiry activities, or how one can involve local adult educators in such research activities. For example, few practitioners appear to know how to formulate useful and researchable questions. Organizations, especially governments, want to know answers but appear to have no interest, time or patience in formulating the questions. For those who do know how to formulate questions, there is an attitude which seems to be something like: "We don't really want to know the answer to our questions since we are concerned that the answers might imply that we should actually do something to deal with the problematic conditions."

For many potential funders or practitioners, the term *research* seems to refer to some mystical process which is too complicated to understand, let alone conduct. We encounter similar attitudes in attempting to convert our practitioner students

into potential researchers. Since Atlantic practitioners, as with practitioners everywhere, quite rightly regard themselves as experts in their fields, they are reluctant to consult with an outsider, especially someone from a university. This attitude suggests a lay perception of university professors as dilettantes and poseurs who are impractical, ineffective and unreliable—the very antithesis, of course, of how we view ourselves.

Such negative attitudes toward research may relate to conventional attitudes in Atlantic Canada about the value of education. In general terms, education is valued instrumentally, as a direct means to an end. Education or learning which is not clearly linked to a short-term pay-off is viewed with deep suspicion. We are hopeful that these attitudes are changing gradually; but the change is very slow and suffers many setbacks. For example, the New Brunswick Commission on Excellence in Education recently published its report on post-secondary education, training and lifelong learning, *To Live and Learn: The Challenge of Education and Training*. Among the 39 recommendations, recommendation 10a, under the heading "Training in Industry," reads in part:

...that the [provincial government] pursue with the government of Canada the feasibility of requiring that U.I.C. benefits to seasonal employees who lack foundation education be tied to an obligation on the part of the beneficiary to register for approved training.... (Downey & Landry, 1993, p. 32)

We have a long history in Atlantic Canada of linking social benefits and educational programs, with the apparent intent of making people job-ready. The difficulty arises when people, armed with their new education and enthusiasm, actually seek jobs and find none. In such conditions, education and learning ultimately become a means to obtain social benefits; therefore, one can hardly blame people for having some cynicism regarding the value of education. Big brother is watching over our lifelong learning! The role of the learner is limited and empty—to keep big brother happy.

Involvement with Adult Education Organizations

Organizations in Atlantic Canada do not lack creativity when it comes to thinking up new ways to promote, organize and fund educational activities. What we lack in funding resources, we make up for in creative endeavors which spread the burden of funding among three levels of government and community-based organizations. One problem with these endeavors is that governments and organizations expend much effort in shifting responsibility for funding to each other and none seems willing to accept responsibility for the quality of the associated educational and training activities. Such activities lead us to question how we can be both honest in our research reports, critical of government policies and practices, and constructively evaluative of educational programs.

We are hopeful that the provincial governments, particularly in New Brunswick, may be poised to commit additional funds to adult education and to training activities. Unfortunately, we anticipate, as usual, that adult educators will

not be called upon to assist in the preparatory side of these endeavors, nor in testing new programs and services through experimental or pilot projects. We do anticipate that adult educators will be asked to look at outcomes, particularly if there are widespread complaints about the outcomes or if there are conflicts among the various organizations involved.

Atlantic Canadian organizations responsible for adult education and training—including federal-level partnership agencies—have a tendency to develop and implement programs and services without first testing and evaluating the ideas through pilot projects, and without thinking through the long-term implications of potential outcomes. Systematic inquiry and evaluative activities, which should precede or at least accompany implementation, often are done after the programs and services are in place. In the political climate of program development and evaluation, after-the-fact researchers and evaluators learn early that, when addressing problem areas in established programs, they must attempt to propose modifications which will not be costly, will not obliterate the original intent of the program (regardless of how ill-founded), and will not introduce new problems. Suggestions, if any, should be ones which can be implemented with a minimum of confusion and organizational change.

Electronic Database Access

Modern publication processes, and in particular, the rapidly developing area of electronic database access, mean that researchers in Atlantic Canada increasingly have broader and more immediate access to research literature from around the world. In a variety of ways, this access is being recognized and we are beginning to take advantage of it; however, we face at least two problems.

The first difficulty is that much of the research conducted in Canada, including Atlantic Canada, never finds its way into the international data bases; for example, while for many years we have published proceedings from the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE) conferences, these have not been sent systematically to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). We also lack a Canadian data base specifically oriented to Canadian adult education research issues and to which Canadian researchers contribute materials as a matter of course.

We are more likely to read about research which has been conducted in other countries. The second problem, therefore, is that in the face of "external" research, local issues and concerns related to Atlantic Canada become overwhelmed or swamped. Unfortunately, local organizations frequently tend to find the "answers" to their questions by reading reports of research conducted in the United States or Europe, and only rarely on research conducted in Canada, on the mistaken assumption that what works in non-Canadian contexts will be appropriate to the local context. As university educators, we can assist local research users to be effective in interpreting research for local conditions; but we are seldom asked, and when asked, we frequently find ourselves whirled away, across the dance floor, by our insistent partner and by the insistent rhythm of the music.

Reflecting on Our Circumstances: Three Research Stories

Doubts raised by the matters outlined above foster additional questions in our minds about the roles we ought to play as adult educators and as researchers. We are concerned about the degree of control we are able to exercise over what we research and how our research results are to be used. Issues related to personal and professional accountability are not widely debated in the field of Adult Education.

Since we have suggested that much of what passes for adult education research in Atlantic Canada is of an individual nature, we felt that it might be enlightening to conclude our contribution with three stories which we feel reflect at least some of the matters raised in our paper.

Are the Dancers and the Band Moving to the Same Beat? (Dorothy's Story)

In the past two years, I have completed two studies for the regional office of Human Resource Development Canada (HRDC; previously the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission or CEIC). One project involved the study of those academic upgrading programs to which the CEIC contributes funds. New Brunswick has declared that the level of adult illiteracy is unacceptable and that it must be corrected by the year 2000. In the past three years, three new programs have been put in place, each serving a different segment of the undereducated population. All three programs are extremely popular; adults and youth have been flocking to them, only to find that there are not enough spaces. Some individuals must wait up to one year to gain entrance to a program. Many who do gain admission receive full or partial training allowances from the CEIC. The regional office of the CEIC wanted to know if "we are getting our money's worth."

I found that francophone students take twice as long as anglophone students to complete what are supposed to be equivalent programs. Since CEIC traditionally only allows one year of funding for academic upgrading and francophone students require two or three years, the policy response to this finding will be important. Will francophone teachers be told to speed up the programs; or to teach only for standardized outcomes; or might they be harassed for not being as effective as anglophone teachers—a possibility clearly not borne out by our findings.

The CEIC appears to believe that financial support alone (and the threat of running out of funds) should motivate students. How can I convince them that motivation is based on positive factors such as success in a manageable program and teachers and counsellors who care about their progress as much as it is based on the absence of demotivation factors such as lack of funding.

The community-based literacy programs I examined operate under the direction of facilitators who were unemployed or on welfare when hired and who may or may not have training as educators. The plight of our economic situation is such that 95% of those hired were fully trained teachers (mostly women), although not adult educators. These dedicated individuals are shouldering the burden of

carrying out the provincial government's policy to eradicate illiteracy. They are expected to borrow or beg essential learning resources from friends and community agencies. They are paid \$13,800 each year and have no pension plan, no sick benefits, no health or dental plan, and no pay for statutory holidays. They are the new missionaries of a new economic system which is based on subsistence earnings from short-term government contracts.

How do I express my outrage in my research report? To whom do I express my concerns about this situation? The government has no funds; the programs are working and are effective; the politicians, the public and the students are delighted; and the facilitators are glad to have the work even though they know they are being exploited.

In the second project, I was asked to evaluate eight employment assistance outreach programs with a view to possibly reducing or eliminating funding to them. I began by looking for program objectives. They didn't exist. How can a researcher evaluate a program when the funding agency has never insisted that those running the program develop a set of program objectives? How do I report back to the government—without affecting any future involvement with them—that they are wasting their money evaluating programs for which no objectives exist?

Are All the Dance Band Members Playing from the Same Score? (Don's Story)

In 1989 I made a research grant application to the Strategic Grants Division of the SSHRCC. The proposal was for an interpretive study of the occupational experiences of nontenure track Canadian university faculty at two Canadian universities. Because of the nature of those who are on the margins of academia, the proposed study, in all likelihood, would have been a description of the employment circumstances of women in academia. The proposal did not explicitly state this, but the make up of nontenure track faculty made this a virtual certainty. The proposal requested approximately \$12,000 for costs directly related to the conduct of the study. In due course a seed grant of \$2,000 was received. SSHRCC did not provide any rationale for the reduced grant. In the absence of spare time to imagine how I might proceed on one-sixth of the original request, the funds have languished in a research account at U.N.B. for the past four years.

In October, 1990, the U.N.B. President's Advisory Committee on the Status of Women published their report, *Of More Than Academic Interest: Women at U.N.B.* One section of the report contained recommendations related to sessional and part-time faculty. In March, 1992, the president of U.N.B. circulated a response to this report, including specific suggestions regarding "possible courses of action." In part, the administration's response to the recommendations read as follows:

It is necessary to first find out more about this very diverse group of academic staff. It is timely that this year, for the first time, Statistics Canada...has requested information on part-time academic staff.... The

University undertakes to obtain further information about part-time and sessional appointments in order to be able to describe the group more accurately in terms of credentials, aspirations, expectations and experience at the University. (R.L. Armstrong, personal communication, March 1992)

I contacted the U.N.B. personnel office to ask about their specific research plans and to offer to participate by activating elements of my languishing SSHRCC proposal. The director of personnel expressed interest and requested a copy of my original proposal. The following September, I received a call from the director who explained that a new employment equity officer was being hired and that the matter would be referred to her. In November, I spoke with this person and explained that I felt I could be of service to the University by undertaking the descriptive part of their proposed research agenda, and that such activity might serve to move forward the research agenda I had proposed to SSHRCC. I explained that I was prepared to use the \$2,000 grant, but would look for equivalent support from the University, perhaps in the form of graduate assistantship funds which would allow me to hire a student assistant.

The equity officer indicated that, rather than the in-depth individual and group interviews I was proposing, a broadly-based questionnaire survey would be more in line with their thinking—something more “empirical.” To date, I am not aware of any research activity on the part of the university related to the matters raised in the above-quoted excerpt and the \$2,000 still languishes in a research account at U.N.B.

The Students are Dancing as Fast as They Can—But Without Partners (Marie’s Story)

There is a light at the end of the tunnel in that there is an underground, backdoor research world which does not get much press, operates on very little funding, and will eventually have some impact in the Atlantic region. In spite of the influence of funding constraints on students’ work, some work is being done that is practice-based and that fits into methodologies given little attention by many researchers such as action or participatory research and community mobilization.

The projects vary. One student worked in a university setting situated in an industrial area where the women’s drop-out rate from programs was 60%. She involved the women in her participatory research process from the start and was able to arrive at conclusions based on what the women told her. From this flowed recommendations which led to community mobilization to address the problems identified.

Another student worked in a half-way house for inmates on early release and became aware that many men in this facility were at risk of becoming wife or child abusers. Using some motivational ideas found in the literature, she developed and implemented an action research project which used selected educational strategies to help the men change their behaviours; she had a high level of success. Faced with the problem that the changes in behaviour might not continue after full

release, she attempted, with only moderate success, to convince Corrections Canada to do follow-up work with these men.

There are many such stories which illustrate this backdoor approach to research. Such research has a more practical than theoretical focus and uses action and participatory methods rather than statistical analysis. The approach is very exciting to academics like myself. Being involved is a great feeling because, throughout its history in Canada, adult education seemingly has operated on the fringes; and in spite of this, has survived. My frustration is that I must keep at arm's length from such projects because the lack of funds does not allow me to travel to the sites where this exciting work is taking place. I do not even have the funds to make telephone calls.

Based on historical evidence, the era of Moses Coady was more advanced; he was always out there with the people. Today, academics are expected to stay in their ivory towers, the assumption being that this is where they belong. Given this situation, many of our students are dancing as fast as they can—but without partners.

Conclusions

We were asked to address a series of questions in this paper. In our opinion, these questions may serve to misdirect our attention because they imply a positive impetus to adult education research. These questions were: What goals *are* being pursued by professors, students, etc.? Who *is* funding research? What types of research *are* being conducted? Who *is* asking that the research be done? Who *is* being asked to do the research? Who *will* benefit? All the questions seem to imply that, in the face of research needs, the adult education enterprise need not worry about whether the research will be done, but only about what, how, who and where it is done.

In Atlantic Canada, more revealing questions might be asked in the negative form: What goals *are not* being pursued by professors, students, etc.? Who *is not* funding research? What types of research *are not* being conducted? Who *is not* asking that research be done? Who *is not* being asked to do research? Who *will not* benefit?

The answers are alarming. In our estimation, there is a great need for adult education research in Atlantic Canada. No one is demanding that it be done and certainly there is little funding for scholarly inquiry. The local research that is being done relates to political issues, such as the distribution of limited financial resources rather than to social or learning issues. Those who need the information often reinvent the wheel in developing programs; certainly they pay little or no attention to any research findings.

Perhaps we have not done enough to report research findings in a form which is both comprehensible and practical and in a forum which reaches the potential user. Everyone—citizens and politicians, educators and learners—is an education critic and an expert in how best to conduct an educational enterprise. Because they do not know otherwise, they think they don't need research; and as a result, they are doomed to repeat mistakes.

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