

TRENDS IN ADULT EDUCATION RESEARCH: A MANITOBA PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

What is the current state of Adult Education research in Manitoba? The paper attempts to answer this question by examining adult education research from the following perspectives: definitions and types of research activities, organizational context, topics of research, populations studied, and methods utilized.

Résumé

Où en est la recherche en éducation des adultes au Manitoba? Cet article tente de répondre à la question par l'examen de la recherche en éducation des adultes sous les angles suivants: les définitions de la recherche et les types d'activités de recherche, le contexte organisationnel, les thèmes de recherche, les populations qui ont été étudiées et enfin, les méthodes qui ont été utilisées.

Definitions and Types of Research Activities

There were three definitions important to delineating the study: (a) research, (b) adult education, and (c) trends. Long (1983a) defined research as "systematic observation and interpretation of data associated with the process of problem definition, observation, data collection, interpretation, and conclusion" (p. 24). Others have suggested a broader definition of research that is not only based on empirical research as characterized by Long's definition, but includes the use of personal reports, and synthesis of experience. Given that no specific definition of adult education research was initially provided for the study, respondents were simply asked to focus broadly on their research activities in adult education (see Appendix A). Later, based on the discussion at the June Symposium (Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education [CASAE], 1993), three criteria were articulated that allowed decisions to be made about the kinds of research to be included in this study: (a) the research had to be reported in some form, i.e., published, presented at academic or professional conferences, or reported as research in progress; (b) the research had to deal with a topic within the defined field of adult education; and (c) the research had to involve a researcher in higher education. Since the project was to focus on adult education research in Canada from the professor's perspective, this last criterion was particularly important. Both faculty and graduate student research was considered using a broad interpretation of research.

The definition of adult education developed by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (1976) was utilized to establish a framework for research activities included in this study:

...the term "adult education" denotes the entire body of organized educational processes, whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities as well as apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, or turn them in a new direction and bring about changes in their attitudes or behaviour in the twofold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development. (p. 2)

The concept of a trend, for the purposes of this study, refers to current or recent research in adult education that covered a four year period (1989-1993). While the analysis focuses primarily on recent research, some observations are made on the changes in research activities over this four year period.

Organizational Context

A survey was sent to faculty and professional staff representatives in adult and continuing education at the three Manitoba universities and to the CASAE members in Manitoba. The responses varied. One university surveyed indicated that their staff were not engaged in adult education research, and no responses were received from either the second university or from the community college faculty who were surveyed. Consequently, research reported in this study deals only with adult education research activities done by professors, instructors, and graduate students at The University of Manitoba.

This situation may be explained, in part, by the organization of the three Manitoba universities as regards teaching and research in adult education. The University of Manitoba is the only university in the province to offer graduate programs, including graduate programs in education, specifically Adult Education. While the three universities have continuing education units, only the Continuing Education Division at The University of Manitoba is an academic unit.

The Continuing Education Division offers a wide range of programs for both degree and nondegree credit, including a Certificate in Adult and Continuing Education. In addition to administrative departments, the Division is divided into six departments that deliver programs to a broad range of students. Each department employs both academic and administrative staff who are responsible for the development and management of continuing education and degree programs. As well, most academic staff in the Division are required to perform in the areas of teaching, research and service. Estimated time allocation of academic staff for their various assigned duties were reported by Hartman (1982). As we can see from Table 1, the proportion of time allocated to research is relatively low. Even though the desired time allotment for assigned duties indicates a greater allocation of time to research, the amount remains low. Given the on-going funding reductions to the University and the increased focus of the Division on program development and management, it is fair to assume that little has changed in the 11 years since the study was completed. This suggests that the situation continues

to afford academic staff in the Continuing Education Division limited time to engage in research, despite the Division's commitment to leadership and excellence in teaching, research and service, and the fact that it is a requirement of academic staff appointments.

Table 1
Time Assigned to Academic Staff Activities

Activities	Time Assigned Actual		Time Assigned Preferred	
	Average (%)	Range (%)	Average (%)	Range (%)
Teaching				
Program Planning	24.1	0 - 75	27.0	5 - 61
Program Management	29.4	0 - 59	21.2	0 - 43
Formal Teaching	2.6	0 - 10	4.4	0 - 10
Informal Teaching	2.4	0 - 8	5.0	0 - 15
Course Counselling	8.0	0 - 40	7.5	0 - 30
Personal Counselling	<u>2.0</u>	0 - 15	<u>0.6</u>	0 - 5
	68.5		65.5	
Research				
Fundamental Research	1.9	0 - 8	4.8	0 - 15
Applied Research	3.8	0 - 19	8.2	0 - 12
Presentation	<u>1.6</u>	0 - 5	<u>2.6</u>	0 - 5
	7.0		15.0	
Service				
University Service	16.3	2 - 57	7.5	2 - 22
Community Service	2.1	0 - 8	2.8	0 - 6
Professional Service	<u>2.5</u>	0 - 7	<u>2.9</u>	0 - 7
	21.2		14.0	
Professional Development	<u>3.3</u>	0 - 10	<u>5.5</u>	0 - 10
	100.0%		100.0%	

From "Academic Staff Activities Questionnaire," by J. Hartman, 1982. Unpublished report, Continuing Education Division, The University of Manitoba, Winnipeg. Reprinted with permission of the author.

The Faculty of Education at The University of Manitoba offers programs at both the undergraduate and graduate level, including a recently introduced specialty in Adult Education at the Master's level. This new Adult Education program, consisting of 15 credit hours of courses, is staffed by a tenured, full professor. Previously, the Faculty of Education offered 9 credit hours of courses in adult education taught by adjunct staff. Since the introduction of the Adult Education specialty, no students have completed a Master's thesis in Adult Education. As a result, the research output in Adult Education of the Faculty of Education has been limited. Further, the fact that the Faculty is primarily committed to teacher education at the K to 12 level suggests that research efforts and resources available for Adult Education research are not likely to increase appreciably.

Topics in Adult Education Research

A list of research topics in Adult Education collected in the survey is provided in Appendix B. In total, there were eighty-four activities that met the criteria for inclusion in the study. These data were sorted into categories that were derived from those developed by Long (1983b): (a) adult learners, (b) adult education practice, (c) teaching and learning, (d) description of the field (of adult education), and (e) theory and critical analysis.

The first category, *adult learners*, identifies characteristics of learners, including motivation to learn, barriers to learning, participation, and adult development. The *practice of adult education* takes account of activities associated with program planning, needs assessment, marketing, evaluation, and adult education programs. Research activities concerned with models of the learning process, the context of learning, instructor-learner relationships, and learning activities and formats were included in the category of *teaching and learning*. The category that describes *the field of adult education* included topics related to history and philosophy, concepts and terminology, and research that, in some way, established the parameters of the field. Finally, research that focused on research methodology or critical analysis was sorted into the category labelled *theory and critical analysis*.

The 84 research activities were categorized as follows in Table 2.

Table 2
Research Activities

Category	n	%
Adult Learners	9	11
Adult Education Practice	26	31
Teaching and Learning	30	36
Field of Adult Education	16	19
Theory and Critical Analysis	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
Total	84	100

The high proportion of research reported in the categories of *adult education practice* and *teaching and learning* (67%, or 2 out of 3 research activities) is a reflection of the fact that the vast majority of academic staff surveyed were engaged in a practice-oriented, continuing education. To a lesser extent, the percentage of research activities related to the *field of adult education* may be attributable as well to the practice-oriented context within which the researchers work. As may be expected, the research that was done largely informs continuing education practice. A further result of this orientation appears to be that research characterized as *theoretical* was carried out to a relatively limited extent (4%). On the other hand, given the nature of continuing education practice, it is surprising to find that a rather limited amount of research dealt with *characteristics of adult learners* (11%).

Populations Studied

While about one third of the research activities were not specific to any adult population, a number of projects focused on particular groups, as outlined in Table 3. Literacy workers, farmers, and prisoners were also the focus in three separate studies. As well, several studies, while not focusing on a population per se, examined adults in universities and colleges (2 studies) and distance education programs (5 studies).

Table 3
Adult Populations Studied

Category	n	%
Aboriginal	12	14
Business/Management	10	12
Adult Educators & Teachers	7	8
Professionals	5	6
Women	4	5
Older Adults	3	4
Disabled Adults	3	4
Nonspecific population	40	48
Total	84	100

Once again, the link between research and practice can be recognized. For example, the interest in aboriginal populations appears to be a direct result of the existence of an aboriginal access program within the Continuing Education Division of The University of Manitoba. Similarly, there is a heavy concentration of continuing management education programs within the Division which may explain the interest in this population. As well, these two populations have attracted a good deal of attention from adult and continuing educators generally, and the research interest in Manitoba seems to reflect this general trend.

Research Methodology Utilized

Using the research categories suggested by Merriam and Simpson (1984), the research activities were reviewed in terms of the evident research method, design, or strategy utilized. Given the limited information available about the research methodologies, there was some difficulty sorting the data. This may explain, in part, the lack of differentiation in the analysis. The activities are categorized in Table 4.

Table 4

Research Methodology

Category	n	%
Descriptive	71	84
Interactive or Action/Participatory	5	6
Analytical Review	3	4
Ethnographic	3	4
Historical	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>
Total	84	100

These findings support the earlier comments that the research activities reflect continuing education practice. A very high proportion of descriptive research (84%) indicates that researchers were examining their practice in efforts to improve and refine it. For example, research of this type often takes the form of comparative studies, surveys, program evaluation and assessment.

Researcher Orientation and Initiative

Most research activities were carried out by individuals (78%) working on their own. A number of projects were done by a team of two researchers (19%), while only 2% of the research activities involved a larger group or a network of researchers working on the same project. The initiative and inspiration for the research activities reported came from both the individuals themselves and the context within which they worked. While researchers reported that they were primarily self-motivated, colleagues, students, instructors, professional associations, and professional development expectations were identified as stimulating and supporting their research activity.

Research Funding

The majority of the research was not funded (approximately 70%). Sources of funding for the other 30% of the research came from various sources, including university and faculty research funds, government, and interest groups such as organized labour.

Benefits of Research Activities

Overall, the researchers indicated that the benefits of their research varied. As mentioned earlier, much of the research was done to improve professional practice in

continuing and adult education through models of best practice, critique, and evaluation. As well, researchers felt that adult learners or students and teachers of adults would gain from the research in a variety of ways such as access to better teaching materials, and improved teaching and training strategies.

Conclusion

Given the restricted context in which the Adult Education research was carried out in Manitoba, there was a considerable amount of activity. The research, for the most part, was descriptive and focused on Adult Education practice and the teaching-learning process. For the most part, it appears to inform the practice of adult and continuing education.

In terms of trends in research activity, there seems to be no notable differences from year to year in the populations studied, methodologies used, or the number of research projects funded.

Over the period of review, the amount of research activity increased each year with the most dramatic increase occurring in 1992-1993 (a 100% increase over the previous year). The increase in activity does not appear attributable to any single factor, but rather several reasons may help explain the change, including more qualified researchers (in terms of research skills), a greater emphasis and value placed on Adult Education research within the University, and an increased interest, generally, in Adult Education research.

The factors that appear to have stimulated increased research activities over the last 4 years in Manitoba are likely to continue to be influential. As interest in the Master's degree program in Adult Education grows, research activities by graduate students should increase accordingly. The greatest potential for increased research activity could result, however, from a shift in the assignments of academic staff within the Continuing Education Division such that there would be an increase in the time available for and the value placed on research activities. This group represents the greatest pool of academic and research expertise in Adult Education in Manitoba.

The type of research activities, methodologies, and populations that will be of interest in the future are difficult to forecast, but likely the context in which researchers are working will continue to influence their decisions in this regard.

References

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Appendix A**Adult Education Research Survey/Questionnaire**

Nature of your Position (e.g., university professor, training consultant).

Type of Institution (e.g., university, provincial government).

A. General Trends in Adult Education Research in Manitoba

Please answer the following questions based on your own research activities.

1. What research projects are you currently conducting, including research conducted in the past 2-3 years?
2. What are the themes/topics of your research?
3. What are the purposes/goals of your research?
4. Who initiates and who/what inspires your research activities?
5. Who stands to gain from these research activities? Do they affect practices or policies in Adult Education?
6. Are your research activities being funded? by whom? and how?
7. How do you carry out your research activities? As an individual, within groups, as part of a network? Please explain.

B. Social Demand for Adult Education Research in Manitoba

Please answer the following questions from your general understanding of Adult Education research in Manitoba

8. Is there a demand for research in Adult Education?
9. If so, who is the demand voiced by? How are the needs of Adult Education Research made known?
10. Who responds to the demand? By what means?
11. Please provide additional comments on any of the questions.

Appendix B**Adult Education Research Activities—1989 to 1993****1992-1993:**

- Barriers to Adult Education Participation in a Winnipeg Sample
- Factors Accounting for Withdrawal/Incompletion in Adult Education Courses/Programs
- Towards Meeting the Needs of Psychiatrically Disabled Adult Students
- Recognizing Issues of Power and Resistance in the Mundane: A Critique of Needs Assessment in Manitoba
- Schooling in a Total Institution: Critical Perspectives on Prison Education
- History of Adult Education in Manitoba
- Adult Education in Manitoba: Trends in Educational Policy and Procedures 1943-1991
- Collaborative Community Research and Change in an Aboriginal Health System: A Case Study of Participatory Education and Inquiry for Introducing System Change in a First Nation in Northern Canada
- Social Interaction and Academic Success of Aboriginal Students From Northern Manitoba
- Computers, Teaching, and Curriculum in Farm Business Management
- Participatory Planning of Orientation Sessions for Aboriginal Adult Students
- Developing Effective Practices in Continuing Education
- A Practical Approach for Teaching Working with Learners Being Treated for Mental Disorders
- Literacy Workers Working with Adults Being Treated for Mental Disorders
- Making Needs: Toward A Sociology of Needs and Needs Assessment in Adult and Continuing Education

- Preparing Aboriginal People for Health Studies: Special Pre-Medical Program at The University of Manitoba
- Social Interaction and Academic Success for Northern Aboriginal University Students
- College and University Academic Development Programs
- Equity in the Classroom
- From Technical Proficiency to Personal Mastery
- Beyond Competence: Continuing Education and the Evolving Self
- Towards a Full Spectrum Model of Learning, Knowing, and Development
- Workplace Learning: Some New Perspectives on Management Development
- Self-Planned Learning Efforts of Managers in an Organizational Context
- Managers' Self-Planned Learning in Organizations
- Results of a Preliminary Survey of Self-Directed Learning of Part-Time Continuing Education Faculty
- The Effects of Computers on Teaching and Curriculum in a Post-Secondary Program, Technology: Windows and Walls
- Distance Education Alternatives
- Media in Distance Education
- Outreach Counselling Approaches
- Research Initiatives in Aboriginal Focus Programs
- Reframing Program Planner's Practice: An Interpretive Study
- Empowerment and Aging
- Home-Based Support in Adult Day Care Programs
- Support Network in a University Program for Aboriginal Students
- Distance Education in the Bahamas
- Overcoming Institutional Barriers to Distance Education

1991-1992:

- The Executive Information System: A Manitoba Study of the Decision Making and Information Requirements of Community College Administrators
- The Impact of a Collaborative Workshop Based on Feminist Pedagogy: A Case Study
- Transformation and Self-Renewal at Mid-Life: Change, Patterns, Curriculum Possibilities
- Personal Transformation and Professional Ways of Knowing
- The Special Pre-Medical Studies Program at The University Of Manitoba: Teaching Conventional Science to Non-Conventional Students
- A New Look at Life On Earth: A Non-Traditional Planning Process
- Impact Evaluation: Does It Work?
- Anti-Racist Education: Trends and Issues
- Adult Development Through a Spectrum of Consciousness
- Strategize for Success: Participatory Orientation Sessions for Aboriginal Students
- Reframing Human Resource Development in Organizations
- The Collaborative Model of Instructional Design
- Business Managers in Crisis and the University
- A Study of Preferences, Motivations, and Financial Support in a Winnipeg Sample
- Teaching Styles in Adult Education
- Teaching Styles in Nursing Education
- Adult Educators' Ways of Knowing
- Program Planners' Ways of Knowing

1990-1991:

- Cross Canada Survey of Continuing Professional Education
- *Social Workers at Mid-Life: An Interpretive Study of Their Patterns of Developmental Change with Implications for Continuing Professional Education*
- *The Focus Group Interview: A Research Technique for Program Planners*
- *Distance Education as Social Policy in Thailand*
- *Satisfactions and Strains of Middle-Aged Women Who Return to University*
- *A Comparison of Supports of Younger and Middle-Aged Women Who return to University*
- *Social Interaction of Northern Aboriginal Students*
- *Disabled Women and Literacy: Writing as a Tool of Empowerment*
- *Planning, Assessment, and Partnership Programs: The Case of Affecting Change in the Workplace*
- *Transformation and Renewal: Change Patterns and Continuing Professional Education for Mid-Life Professionals*
- *Transformation or Self-Renewal: Is There a Choice at Mid-Life?*
- *Being and Becoming: Development and the Adult Educator*
- *Continuing Management Education in the Coming Decade*
- *Two Types of Consortia*
- *Ethical Considerations for Practitioners in Higher Distance Education*
- *Assessing Your Teaching Style*

1989-1990:

- *A Profile of Practising Professionals*
- *Educational Dependency in Higher Education: Fact or Fiction?*
- *Racism and Sexism: A Comparison of Two Ideologies*
- *Adult Education as Socialization: Implications for Personal and Social Change*
- *Cross Cultural Issues in Working With Aboriginal Clients*
- *Lifelong Learning Opportunities for Personal Growth*
- *Breaking the Barriers Between the Native Communities and the University: Community-based Approach*
- *Meeting Education and Training Needs of Isolated Native Communities: A Challenge for Continuing Education*
- *Community-based Approach to Program Planning: The Participatory Model*
- *Enhancing the Value of Continuing Management Education: A Model for the 1990s*
- *Building Bridges: The Interdisciplinary Approach*
- *Financing Higher Education in the 1990s: The Case for Individual Entitlements*
- *Instructional Design Principles Derived from Cognitive Psychology: Implications for Distance Education*
- *Targeting Programs to Middle-aged Women Returning to University*