

INTRODUCTION TO THE CANADIAN CHRONOLOGY

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Abstract

This introduction provides a brief discussion of the limitations of the Selected Chronology of Adult Education in Canada. It also highlights the importance of valuing history, and raises questions, in keeping with those of Welton's preface, on the nature of history. Finally, it provides structural guidance to the reader and encourages others to build upon the chronology.

Résumé

Cette introduction identifie certaines limites au texte Selected Chronology of Adult Education in Canada. On y discute en outre de l'importance de l'histoire en tant que valeur, tout en soulevant certaines questions, comme l'a fait Welton dans sa préface, quant à la nature véritable de cette science. Enfin, on offre certaines balises structurelles et on encourage le lecteur à compléter la chronologie de façon autonome.

Since 1967, when I first joined Roby Kidd in the Department of Adult Education at OISE, I have made a point of developing chronologies for each of the graduate courses which I taught over the years: community development, adult basic education, social history, cross-cultural studies, and comparative/international adult education. An annotated chronology was, I thought, a good way to give students an overview of the content of the course, illustrating the issues of the day, the innovative programs which were developed, the organizations created, the values and philosophies expressed, and some of the leaders of the day.

While attending the third World Assembly on adult education in Thailand in 1990, organized by the International Council for Adult Education, I presented the idea of a project which would develop adult education chronologies within Commonwealth countries. The response was highly encouraging and the project began in earnest in 1990. This Canadian chronology is therefore part of a larger international project entitled *Chronologies of Adult Education in Commonwealth Countries*. The

chronology on the Africa region was published in the Spring of 1998, by the University of the Western Cape, South Africa. As I complete this Canadian chronology, I am now working on a chronology covering the South and East Asia region. In addition, I have encouraged colleagues to undertake chronologies in the Caribbean and in the South Pacific regions. My anticipation is that the various publications arising from this project will be especially useful in the training and education of adult educators (including graduate study programs), helping to give them a historical perspective of their chosen field of practice.

Thus far, presentations on the project have been made in Nottingham, United Kingdom; Slovenia; Egypt; and at CASAE meetings in Montreal, Toronto, and Winnipeg.

The following sections in this introduction are intended to provide a context for others in their use of the chronology.

Limitations of the Canadian Chronology

This chronology focuses on English speaking Canada. Only English language literature and material were referred to in selecting materials for this chronology. This is a substantial limitation, missing the richness of the French language literature, leadership, and innovative programs. Furthermore, many decisions had to be made as to whether or not an item would be included. The main criteria for selection was that the event be of national importance, directly or indirectly. In some cases, an event has been included because it was the first of its kind.

It would have been naive and totally unrealistic of me to think that the chronology would be all-inclusive. What is presented illustrates only part of the Canadian heritage of adult education. It is regrettable that some fields of practice may be omitted and that others are minimally represented in this document. This is a working and evolving document. Others are encouraged to add to it. In addition, to complement this chronology, I encourage that provincial and regional chronologies be constructed.

In compiling the material for the chronology, I found that the literature did not always agree on the exact dates of an event. Hence, there may be occasional inaccuracies in what is presented. It is much regretted if references and events have inadvertently been omitted.

Acquiring a Historical Perspective

Valuing History

Looking backward is an appropriate place to begin when trying to understand the present as well as the future trends in the field of adult education. The history of adult education forms the foundation for understanding present day programs, agencies, philosophical values, and the teaching and learning methods used. A natural progression occurs from the past to the present and to the future. History is not a subject which is studied in isolation but is a point in time on a continuum.

From the history of adult education comes the basis for examining the philosophy which guides practice. The meaning and the practice of various concepts, the extent to which adults participate in meaningful learning activities, the various factors which encourage or prevent participation, the psychology and development of adults, the specific programs conducted by particular agencies, and the development of adult education and its network as a specialized field of study and practice—all these have deep historical roots.

Apart from helping us as adult educators to understand present day practices and philosophies, a study of history also helps us to better understand the social, political, economic and cultural forces and context within which adult learning occurs at a given point in time. It is this context which determines not only *what* people learn at a given time or given phase of an individual's life, but also *how* and *where* people learn—for example, contexts which have been dominated by economic depressions, wars, and the introduction of new technologies. Furthermore, one must acknowledge an individual's personal *context* which influences, for instance, preparation for parenthood or for one's first job. It is the context which influences our thinking and planning in adult education.

The many reasons for one to have a reasonable grounding in the history of adult education include (a) to satisfy one's curiosity about why certain things happened in certain ways; (b) to understand the roots of our values, thereby providing a more comprehensive perspective on present day programs, practices, and beliefs; (c) to have an appreciation of some of the leaders who have helped to articulate our values, to lay the foundation of our programs, and to create a uniqueness in the field of adult education; (d) to give us a greater professional identity as a result of knowing our roots; (e) to understand the various forces which brought about unique and innovative approaches to dealing with societal problems and needs; and (f) to appreciate

the struggles and forces which led to the formation of present-day organizations and practice.

Having a historical perspective is a way of stretching our identity. There is an obvious interconnectedness between the three time components, although the difference among them is really a matter of moments.

What Is History?

There are varying opinions about what constitutes history. In spite of this, it is important for the reader of history in adult education to have some appreciation of what history is and the limitations of what we presently have available. In his book *What Is History?*, E. H. Carr (1961) makes a number of observations about history:

History is a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his or her facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past.

It is a social process in which individuals are engaged as social beings and is therefore a dialogue between the society of today and the society of yesterday. Both science and history are engaged in the study of humans and their environment and the effect that one has upon the other.

Besides pursuing the question *why?*, the historian must also ask the question *whither?*, thus implying not only that there is an interconnectedness between the past and the future but also an acceptance of a sense of direction in history. History has a direction and a continuity—a belief that we have come from somewhere and that we are heading somewhere.

Having anxiety about the future often leads us to understand the insights of the past.

The "facts" of history are simply those which the historian has selected to scrutinize. That is, all historical facts come to us as a result of interpretive choices by historians. It is not the fact itself but the value put on it that accounts for historical interest.

One can see from these and other statements that it is our present day questions which guide us into the past. As well, one can conclude that both the reader and the writer of history have their own particular points of view and biases. It is therefore important to know who wrote and interpreted the facts upon which historical documentation is based. One must differentiate between *fact* and *interpretation*. Given the interests in adult education—in

the learning of individuals and the development of institutions—often we must infer the kind of learning which occurred historically for average people (the masses). Such persons seldom recorded their thoughts or living conditions, partly because their main preoccupation was survival and also because few were literate. Theirs was essentially an oral tradition and, for these reasons, one must value folklore, ritual, tradition, and mythology as part of the context for understanding the lives of the masses. Much more work needs to be done in writing the social history of adult education.

Both the writing and the interpretation of what is documented are selective and to this extent history is never neutral. Adult educators assume that each human condition and each human event has a historical context and therefore an explanation for its occurrence and condition. The challenge is to gain as much insight as is possible about the influence which learning has had in directing and enriching the development of individual men and women.

The Heritage and Profession of Adult Education

Adult education has a rich and diverse heritage, including the cross-cultural sharing of ideas, values, and programs. In the past and in the present adult learning is synonymous with living. Adults have always been learners in order to survive, to create, to understand, and to pass on their culture and language. Learning and education are both timeless, rooted in the earliest years of human development. Learning occurs in any imaginable setting: under the shade of a tree; in agricultural fields; in churches, temples, mosques, and other traditional centres of learning; through theatre, ritual, and folk music; as well as in homes and work places.

To a great extent, what people learned was dependent on the resources and opportunities that were available as well as the coercive or voluntary forces which led them to learn. The reasons for learning are as diverse as the number of learners. Learning often centred around moral education, becoming literate, the learning of a new language or a new trade, or trying to find meaning in one's life.

The history of adult education is the story of men and women; of agencies and institutions; of values, causes, and movements; of beliefs; and of relationships between individuals and nations. One can see that the history of adult education has consisted of continuing attempts to increase individual choices, empowerment, and the improvement in the quality of life.

The education of adults is not limited to the content being learned, to any particular method for teaching and learning, or to time and place. Adult

education is not just the process of acquiring knowledge but of creating and applying it as well. The provision for learning is based on a fundamental system of values (a philosophy) and a number of basic assumptions, including the ability of people to learn and their willingness to take responsibility for their own learning.

An understanding and appreciation of the history of adult education is a major factor which distinguishes the professional from the non-professional educator. A historical overview should be part of all training programs for adult educators, as a way of professionalizing the field of adult education. The professional is expected to have a detailed grasp of the body of knowledge within the field of adult education, based on research and critical reflection; a historical perspective and understanding of the field; and a grounding in the theory of adult learning. Hence, the adult educator is better able to understand *why* things work in practice rather than only being able to describe *what* is being done.

A Note to the Reader

Chronologies are not in themselves histories, but they can form the foundation to acquiring a historical perspective. In no way do the chronologies in this publication reflect a complete documentation of adult education activities in Canada. Much more could have been included and the reader is invited to accept this as a challenge, building on what is presented. For example: What events, educational programs, and agencies would you add to this chronology? The reader is invited to:

Discuss the chronology with colleagues and *add to the chronology*, possibly resulting in a special provincial or regional publication.

Develop a classification system of agencies, based on what is presented in and added to the chronology. This is almost a natural next step in conceptualizing the information presented. That is, to develop a taxonomy or classification of agencies which offer non-formal education and training programs. There are many benefits to such a classification system, including a further professionalizing of the field of adult education.

Use the chronologies in *the education and training of adult educators*. For example, when used as a working document, trainees might be asked to select an issue or a special group or program and document how this is reflected in a chronology (and what is missing). Or, compare one's regional chronology with those for other regions. The

chronologies can make an important comparative and international contribution to adult education.

Note the political, social, economic, and other forces which determined the *context* within which an event took place at a particular point in time (and compare these with other points in time).

Plan a piece of historical research which you would like to undertake (or see someone else undertake). For example what research questions do you think should guide the research? Remember that it is our present day questions which guide us into the past. Developing a chronology is often the first step in undertaking further enquiry (that is, research).

Formulate *other ways* in which the this chronology (and any additions made) can be further used for broadening our understanding of history, for purposes of training, for planning programs, and for influencing policies.

Observations

Although the chronology is not complete, it does offer rich data about our heritage of adult education in Canada. The tradition of adult learning, in any culture at any point in time, has always been evident. People have always learned, throughout their lives, in order to survive, to create, and to understand. Being familiar with the history and traditions of the past is one element which characterizes a profession. How many adult educators in Canada have a full awareness of our past?

A number of observations can be made about the information and sequence of events presented in this chronology—for example:

The social, geographical, political and economic context at any given time greatly determines not only *what* people learn, but *why* and *how* they learn. From the chronology, it is evident that adult learning took place in countless and diverse settings, in kitchens, the workplace, town halls, and church basements.

Learning has always been a lifelong process, even though it has been only recently that we have articulated the continuity. For each event mentioned in this chronology, it is important to reflect on the context in which the event took place. For instance, the context of war, the great depression of the 1930s, westward exploration and settlements, immigration, industrialization, new technologies, agrarian reforms, environmental degradation, and globalization, to mention only a few

contexts relevant to the scene in Canada. Context can change the lives of nations and individuals. Consider, for example, the comparison of the influence on adult learning induced by the employment changes from labour intensive to mechanized factory production at the turn of the 20th century with that to computerized usage at the turn of the 21st century.

In response to changing contexts, institutions were created in order to respond to the changing times. Apart from private libraries (some of which were opened to a larger audience), public lending libraries were important innovations; cooperative societies were created, which also provided educational opportunities to their members; special institutions such as experimental farms and farmers institutes were created to deal with the concerns of farming communities; and schools, initially created to educate children, began to open their doors to adults.

Universities in English speaking Canada also responded to the changing times, through their Settlement Houses, continuing education and extension programs, innovations such as the Banff School of Fine Arts, and the innovative use of radio. Universities in the four western provinces were, generally speaking, built on a very different philosophy from universities in the eastern part of Canada. Western universities, generally, were modeled after the "Wisconsin Idea" in the United States, guided by the idea that "the boundary of the university was the boundary of the province." This meant that the university was expected to reach out to where-ever people were living in the province. This was quite a different approach from the earlier universities in the east which were initially elitist, private, insular to the larger population, and founded on the model of the British universities.

Increasingly, educational opportunities for women increased through such institutions as The National Council of Women, the Women's Institutes, Homemaker's Clubs, the Anigonish Movement, and the Canadian Committee on Learning Opportunities for Women.

Federal government legislation also helped to facilitate educational opportunities for men and women, such as the Veterans' Rehabilitation Act, the Technical and Vocational Training and Assistance Act, and the Agricultural Rehabilitation and Development Act. Although many of these and other programs were initiated for economic purposes, they did provide an educational component as well, linking education with economic needs.

Along with the expansion of educational opportunities came numerous methods of teaching and learning, going beyond the lecture approach, to the use of group discussions, study-travel, simulation and role-playing, distance education, and other variations such as participative and non-authoritarian ways of working with people.

Changing philosophies, reflected in new concepts and values, also paralleled the expansion of adult education concepts, such as the social gospel, lifelong learning, non-formal education, social action, as well as combinations of various philosophies—liberal, humanist, behaviourist, progressive, and radical. Practice and the explanation and description of practice evolved together. The idea of working with people, not for them, was a powerful one as was the idea that all people can both learn from and also teach each other. The idea of taking knowledge to the people was an impressive innovation, thus helping to break the traditional monopoly on knowledge.

The programs and events illustrated in this chronology also reflect the great efforts that were made to meet the specific needs, and to deal with the crucial issues of the times—for example, second language teaching, literacy and basic education, community development, skills retraining, vocational education, health and recreational needs, and the need for self-understanding and empowerment. These needs were reflected by countless special groups—women, immigrants, the elderly, the handicapped, the unemployed, self-help groups, and adults marginalized in society.

The activities of practice were also paralleled by the expansion of theory and a body of knowledge unique to the practice of adult education. This is witnessed by the establishment of graduate programs in adult education, which focused on the creation and dissemination of knowledge. Theories and ideas were tested in practice.

Following from the above, adult education as a field of practice was organized in numerous ways, including the Canadian Association for Adult Education and the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education.

The history of adult education in Canada reflects the continuing redefining of “frontiers.” Frontier College, for example, went from helping to reach those living in geographical frontiers, to helping to overcome social and psychological barriers in society, barriers which

discourage or prevent adults from having access to opportunities for learning.

A national concern, evident in the chronology, is the effort made to build national unity and create citizenship awareness—for example, through the use of radio (the National Farm Radio Forum and the Citizen's Forum) and the use of film (the National Film Board of Canada, including the NFB's *challenge for change program*). These illustrate some of the educational efforts made to unify and build a Canadian identity. An essential factor for building a multicultural society was to overcome prejudice and racism.

Leadership development and the idea of service to others came with reflecting on the practice of working with people. The YMCA and the church ministries provided, for example, training ground for many of the early leaders of adult education in Canada. Many of the earlier programs for adults had a strong moral overtone to them.

The history of modern adult education has a very strong international character, which is evident in the chronology. New concepts and programs were shared and appropriately adapted to new cultural contexts. For example, from England, Canada benefited from the Mechanics' Institutes, which greatly influenced the idea of public libraries and museums to the present day. Other innovations from abroad were the Workers' Educational Association, the YMCA, and the Danish Folk High Schools. On the other hand, Canada has "exported" many of its innovations and programs, such as the Women's Institutes, Farm Radio Forum, and the use of documentary films for educational purposes. It was J. Roby Kidd who initiated the idea of the International Council for Adult Education.

The presence of the voluntary sector is another formative character of adult education in Canada, witnessed by the initiatives taken by people to create their own non-governmental organizations, in response to meeting their needs and the needs of their communities. The NGO tradition of adult education is a particularly strong one in Canada, reflecting both individual and social commitment.

In sum, this chronology reflects the evolution of a nation and the men and women, as learners, within it. The reflection includes political struggle, determination, disappointments, joy, faith, self-discovery, the fulfilment of

dreams, and a continuing attempt to respond to the human condition with the goal of humanizing our society.

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Finally, I somehow want to reach out and thank all of these who over the years have lived our rich history of adult education, through their leadership, creativity, dedication, faith, and dreams.