

media. On the contrary, media images (e.g., American advertising) and durable goods (e.g., Italian scooters) become the basis of a rich iconography that is mined in different ways by different sub-cultural groups. In Section Three, Hebdige analyses two notable postmodern texts: the Cartoon *Bif*, and the magazine *The Face*. While he commends their creativity and power, Hebdige worries about the refusal of these texts to pursue issues any deeper than that permitted by a flashing image.

Together, Hebdige's various analyses, with their plethora of photographs and graphics that underline the heterogeneity of the popular, constitute a veritable feast of the postmodern. At the very least, from these analyses, adult educators will deepen or renew their awareness of the complexity of postmodern times, of the vast differences that exist between cultures, of the unpredictability of meaning formation in subcultural contexts.

VI

Postmodernism stands as a dramatic challenge to adult education. Adult educators may want to dismiss it as a fad or to avoid its dramatic implications but it is unlikely that postmodernism will disappear. Unfortunately adult education has not yet developed a body of literature to help meet postmodernism's challenges. The task then is difficult, that of exploring without familiar landmarks a strange and confusing terrain. It is my strong sense, however, that for many adult educators this will not prove too daunting a task. With excellent books at hand, like those reviewed above, it should be possible over the next short while for adult educators to develop a firm postmodern sensibility.

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BLACK AND BLUE ALL OVER

ADULT EDUCATION: EVOLUTION AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN A DEVELOPING FIELD OF STUDY

John M. Peters, Peter Jarvis and Associates (Eds.). 1991.

San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

The publication of *Adult education: Evolution and achievements in a developing field of study* has sparked a furor on the North American scene. What appeared to be a straight-forward symposium on the new "black" book at the AERC meetings held in Saskatoon in May ended up in a donnybrook. Symposium participants, each a chapter contributor, were subjected to angry criticisms. How was it possible, at this historical moment, that only **two** of the essayists were women, and white women for all that? How was it possible for the multiple voices of African-Americans and Hispanics to be excluded from these hallowed pages? The critics were outraged, one man even suggesting that the

new black book was disgraceful. Several women were noticeably agitated that the old boys were still controlling the scene. Some of the symposium members, not surprisingly, were a little defensive, unwilling to entertain the notion that Adult Education as a field of study was, well, in a mess. Had the old guard been nailed to the wall?

Many people in North America will no doubt continue to debate the meanings of this text for some time to come. Reviews have already appeared and E-mail conversations travel around the learning circuit. Robert Carlson, while happy that the old guard is struggling for breath, is clearly worried that the insurgents pressing Jossey-Bass to “develop a process for publishing a book to reflect these [silenced] voices” (Saskatoon Resolution, AERC, Saskatoon, May 1992), could be careerists lurking behind emancipatory rhetoric. He also worries that a kind of thermidorean counter-revolution could set in—with feminist or Marxist adult educators emerging as new politically correct gatekeepers and power brokers. Budd Hall, on the other hand, believes that the complacent climate of adult education has been thoroughly shaken up by the massive global changes. The intensification of late modern capitalism—its manic market drivenness—forces academics to speed up their production. This process creates a more intensely competitive arena, with professors jostling for control of “print space and air time.” But that’s only one factor. Adult educators are becoming excruciatingly aware of the inadequacies of the adult education theorizing of the 1950s-1980s, the explosion into the stuffy academy of “alternative voices,” the limitations of our enlightenment heritage, and increased awareness of developments elsewhere (popular education, participatory research, etc.).

Unlike Carlson who celebrates “idiosyncratic individualism,” Hall thinks that “we need to keep our visionary tradition, step aside for new voices, create spaces for other points of view, open our windows to the deep and transformative paradigm debates...” Alan Thomas, one of the original contributors to the 1964 black book, calls for a less hysterical and more measured historical understanding of *Adult education: Evolution and achievements of a developing field of study*. Thomas wants us to appreciate that the “old guard” helped to create space for the study of adult education in an educational world indifferent to adult learning. He also thinks that the new book reflects the end of an era: the end, perhaps, of a “particular attitude to adult education.” He concludes that “there is much work to be done to celebrate these new voices around the table, there is also work to be done in changing the nature of the table itself” (CPAE Newsletter, Fall 1992). There are, indeed, many issues worth probing!

Among the many topics worth pursuing are the politics of **text production** and the process of **knowledge creation**. What role does Jossey-Bass play in legitimizing knowledge production in the field of adult education and shaping the language of adult education discourse? What is the relationship between gatekeeping and status allocation in our field? How do persons like Peter Jarvis, Alan Knox, Sharan Merriam and Ralph Brockett come to be important gatekeepers in the field? How do they work and select who gets in and who

stays out of texts? Are they ideologically neutral watchdogs of “good” scholarship? How do we make sense of the triangular relationship between gatekeeper, publishing house, and audience? The question of the field’s relationship to publishers is of particular significance in Canada. There are very few Canadian publishing houses willing to publish adult education texts, and there is a pretty widespread perception amongst Canadian academics that unless Jossey-Bass blesses your text, you are cast out of the mainstream.

Text production is an important dimension of the larger process of knowledge creation. But theory and research obviously must refer to social practices. And it is clear that the “black and blue” book, whatever one might think about individual essays, refers to the social practice of the professionalization of adult **learning**. How else could we account for the persistence of the six popular topics in our graduate schools: adult learning, program planning, program area, adult education as a field of study, institutional sponsors, and materials and methods? Literary critics, historians and anthropologists are very interested these days in the way a text actually gets constructed. They emphasize the constructed, or fictive, dimensions of narrative creation (all books are partially invented stories, replete with rhetorical moves, tricks, displays). One of the more interesting rhetorical devices in this book is the way Cyril Houle begins (one of the field’s saints blesses the text on its journey) and Malcolm Knowles ends it (another of the field’s saints greets the voyagers on safe completion of their turbulent travels). It doesn’t matter if one or two critical articles appear somewhere in the text. Everyone is on the same ship, travelling in the same direction. By choosing Cyril to bless us and Malcolm to welcome and cheer us on, co-editors Jarvis and Peters establish decisively that the study of adult education, whatever its internal conflicts, is to be understood as **continuous** with the field as it was staked out in the 1950s by Houle, Knowles and others (Adult Education is a practical discipline). It is the inclusion of these two men that is significant, and not what they say (it is quite tempting to wonder why Jarvis and Peters let Knowles get away with his nonsense on drugs and learning). Well, no matter, this is about myth-making and not scholarship.

So, Houle and Knowles box this text in and reveal its true meaning. However, those very same literary critics, historians and anthropologists note that no matter how hard editors and authors try to produce a unified text, ideas and language escape our control and may even threaten the text’s proposed unity. As one moves along through the mostly bland and homogenized prose of **Adult Education**, discordant notes keep appearing. Sharan Merriam speaks of the “amorphous, boundary-less field of adult education...” (p. 42), Huey Long writes of a field that “continues to be characterized by its undisciplined nomenclature and its phenomenological, subjective orientations and preference” (p. 88), and Peters and Jarvis fumble around, never quite figuring out how the field of study ought to be related to the particular disciplines (p. 3, 157, 159, 186). The uneasiness of these remarks is fully manifest in “Part Two: Multidisciplinary Dimensions of Adult Education” (chapters 8 through 13).

In the original black book, authors borrowed concepts from the various disciplines (psychology was favoured) in order to translate them into principles of adult learning and practice. This particular move seemed commonsensical. "Adult Education" was staking itself off as a separable territory, and was trying to construct itself as a distinctive **field of practice**. The distinctiveness of the field was not anchored in any disciplines, and a "foundations of adult education" approach was largely eschewed. Adult Education was constituted as an applied field, to be governed by its own logic (an adult constituency in particular settings requiring particular educational services). But this historical development harboured within itself a deep contradiction, namely, that reference to various disciplines at least suggested that it was possible to analyze adult forms and processes of knowing without reference to a particular social practice that someone might label conveniently "adult education." People have always faced learning challenges. They have not always been negotiating these challenges guided by an adult educator. Adult learning is broader and deeper than a specific practice called adult **education**.

It seems to me as I read through these chapters that the authors are confused about how to **theorize** the object of their study. I would argue that the current mess we are as an academic field is rooted in the attempt to mark out the boundaries of the discipline of adult education as an applied social practice. If one peers through the window of the transcripts of the Commission of Professors meetings in the late 1950s, one can see how a professionalizing sensibility pulled the professors like a powerful riptide away from deep and difficult questions of constructing a Discipline (an ontologically, epistemologically and normatively articulated conceptual framework) for adult **learning** towards a rather arbitrary piecing together of elements that might add up to a distinct methodology for teaching adults. Field was uncoupled from Discipline, and the Field's relationship with **particular** disciplines (like psychology or history) was instrumentalized. The Field now looked to particular disciplines like psychology, as Coolie Verner put it, for "bits of psychological knowledge pertaining to the adult." Verner was, however, puzzled about just how much psychology he "should be responsible for": what he should teach and what he should leave to Departments of Psychology (Hendrickson Papers, Syracuse University Adult Education Collection, Box 14, 1959).

The consequences of the uncoupling of Field from Discipline has been devastating. The Field of Adult Education Practice was constructed, then, as a "culturally bounded normative theory of 'good' practice" (Hake, 1992, p. 69) and thereby placed on very unstable ground. Meta-theoretical justification for these culturally bounded "theories" was not provided, and it was naively assumed that particular disciplines could provide a stable source of "bits of knowledge" applicable to designated areas of practice (program planning, teaching adults). It seems to me that those professors who were constructing Adult Education as a Field of Practice in the 1950s assumed uncritically that the "medical model" of the relationship of Science to Practice was applicable to

adult education, then in the early stages of understanding itself as an applied social practice. The Field will only be able to figure out an adequate relationship to the disciplines when it addresses the meta-theoretical problem of theorizing the object of our study (Discipline).

The authors of chapters 8 to 13 (with the possible exception, perhaps, of Griffin) take-for-granted that adult education is an applied social practice. In this sense, Alan Thomas is right when he says that this beleaguered text marks the end of an era. Kenneth Lawson, called upon once again to write about "Philosophical Foundations," wanders about reflecting haphazardly on the "concept of adult education." His murky thoughts do not help us to develop a new way of thinking about the relationship between knowledge, learning and our human condition. The fundamental task of a philosophy of adult learning is to understand the "knowledge-constitutive interests" (Habermas's phrase) of human beings, and how these interests correspond to an irreducible element of human society. Jurgen Harbermas's philosophical elaboration of generic learning domains is not the only way to construct the philosophical-anthropological foundations of adult learning. But he has asked the **fundamental** questions, and Lawson has not. What an irony! How is it that adult educators have not reflected deeply on human learning? Adult Education constructed as an applied social practice requires only analytic concept clarification (which it has never achieved), and social philosophy (that identifies different purposes of adult education [conservative, liberal, transformative]). But if one is constructing a Discipline of Adult Learning, then philosophical reflection on the different forms of human knowing and attendant learning processes is required.

In his chapter, "The Psychology of Adult Teaching and Learning," Australian Mark Tennant frames his salient questions within the applied social practice paradigm. How, he asks, has psychology influenced the shaping and articulation of the principles of adult teaching and learning? What areas of psychology can best guide and influence adult education practice? These are the same questions Verner asked in the mid-1950s; and, again, make sense only when the object of our psychological theorization is a social practice. But if our interest is in theorizing adult individuation processes in relational contexts, then our theoretical work takes a different direction. The problem, however, with opting for an instrumental relationship to a discipline like psychology (with its competing schools, paradigms, methodologies, etc.) is that we do not develop a systematic **learning** perspective on the human individuation process.

Similarly, historian Harold Stubblefield constructs his chapter as "Learning **from** the Discipline of History." That's old paradigm thinking. Stubblefield begs the question of just what the adult education historian ought to be writing about. This may not be a burning question for the everyday practitioner of adult education, or even historian, but it is a central question for the Discipline of Adult Learning. What should be included in a history of adult learning? If one works, implicitly or explicitly, within the social practice paradigm, one

writes about the emergence of the professional practice of adult education in the 1920s in the United States. That makes perfect sense, and is Stubblefield's tactic in his book, *Towards a history of adult education in America* (1988). But when Stubblefield constructs American adult education history as intellectual history of white males, he obviously rules out understanding how adults organized their learning in all historical times and places prior to the self-conscious emergence of "adult education." Interestingly, Stubblefield refers to social movements in his chapter. But, again, why should historians of adult learning write about social movements? Is this just an arbitrary decision on the individual historian's part? My argument would be that the identification of social movements as learning sites presupposes that we have a defensible meta-theoretical framework in place that includes social movements within its boundary, and secondly, that the inclusion of social movements presupposes that our framework enables us to understand the function of adult learning in the reproduction and transformation of social systems.

What interests me about Griffin's perspective on sociology and adult education is the way he moves uneasily between Adult Education as an Applied Practice (what do sociological studies offer to adult educators) and the Discipline of Adult Learning (learning understood as a social process). Griffin thinks that "adult education and adult learning are, in some respects, moving apart, and a sociology of adult education now needs to be systematically distinguished from a sociology of adult learning" (p. 277). Here Griffin appears to recognize that the primary task of sociological theory is to conceptualize the **educative** nature of our institutional life. How do institutions educate and form us? How do they enable or cripple our capacity to learn to be the persons we most want to be? By focusing on the educative nature of our institutional life, we have shifted away from thinking about what sociology has to offer to adult educators. Rather, adult educators are now challenged to see that their educational **practice** is irrevocably linked to institutional **learning environments**. An educator always intervenes in a preconstituted learning environment, and the meaning of this intervention is only comprehensible within the framework of a Discipline of Adult Learning. In other words, a sociology of adult learning would conceptualize the workplace as a complex learning environment. If an adult educator wants the workers to learn how to be self-directed, autonomous actors, then one would have to have a theoretical understanding of the institutional (or structural) constraints operating upon the individual workers and shaping how and what they learn in their prescribed roles and daily routines. Likewise in the realm of public discourse. Our political interactions in the public sphere can be structured such that we, as Canadian citizens, learn in distorted and ineffectual ways. If we do not understand how to conceptualize politics and our public life as a complex learning domain, we will have little or no idea what political education will, or could, mean.

There are many issues to comment upon in this text. Indeed, it is tempting, for instance, to examine if American adult educators think of Canada as America

North. Do expatriates like William Griffith believe that there actually could be significant adult education leaders and thinkers in Canada? Do our American colleagues imagine that our Canadian traditions could actually be quite different from those in the United States? I fear that a text like *Adult education: Evolution and achievement of a developing field* homogenizes Canadian into American experience, and represses the experience of so many people of colour.

On Friday afternoon, April 26, 1957, at a meeting of the Commission of Professors of Adult Education, Abbott Kaplan asked: "Are we all clear as to what the issue for discussion is? What is the content, the essential ingredient of adult education, that marks it off from other fields or disciplines?" (Knowles Collection, Box 18, October 1957). Kaplan's question continues to ring in our collective ears because we have not yet answered.

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