

Volume 27 Issue 2 (Special Issue)

cjsae

the canadian journal for the study of adult education

la revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes

rcééa

A Critical Engagement with the Current Place of
Feminism in Canadian Adult Education

Editor's Introduction

Nancy Taber

*The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education/
La Revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes*
Editor-in-Chief: Donovan Plumb
www.cjsae-rceea.ca

27,2 March/mars 2015, iv-vii
ISSN 1925-993X (online)

© Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education/
L'Association canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes
www.casae-aceea.ca

A Critical Engagement with the Current Place of Feminism in Canadian Adult Education

Editor's Introduction

Feminism is not dead. This is not a postfeminist era. Feminism is still vibrant, despite declarations that it is over. Feminism is a success, although many gender inequalities remain. Feminism is taking powerful new forms, which make it unrecognizable to some. (Walby, 2011, p. 1)

So begins Sylvia Walby's (2011) book, *The Future of Feminism*, which explores the challenges and opportunities of feminism in contemporary times. She examines various feminist types, aims, movements, and contexts. She also explores the complexities of neo-liberalism and gender mainstreaming related to feminism. The book takes a comprehensive perspective, looking at feminism with a wide lens. After reading Walby's book, I began thinking about how her argument related to the Canadian adult education context. Is feminism "still vibrant" for Canadian adult educators? The answer to this question (unsurprisingly for me) is a resounding "yes," as evidenced by this special issue, which uses Walby's book as a backdrop against which the authors assembled here theoretically, conceptually, and empirically explore the state of feminism in Canadian adult education.

This special issue is not intended to be representative of all feminist adult education in Canada. As a whole, the authors explore gender as it intersects with race, colonialism, indigeneity, religiosity, and class; discuss urban and rural experiences; and, often taking an international perspective, focus on geographical contexts in the Maritimes, central Canada, the Prairies, and the West Coast. However, there is little to nothing on Aboriginal, queer, disability, northern, or French perspectives. As an editor, I attempted to find authors to contribute articles in these areas, but due to time constraints and prospective authors' various commitments, they are not addressed here. Indeed, no single issue could address all these topics, so it is my hope that future issues will bring such important viewpoints to the forefront.

The articles in this issue fall into three main themes, which overlap in several contributions: policy making and politics, colonialism and transnationalism, and feminist organizations.

Policy Making and Politics

The issue begins with Leona English and Catherine Irving's article, *Feminism and Adult Education: The Nexus of Policy, Practice, and Payment*, which would arguably fit into all three themes outlined above. They argue that taking an international perspective with respect to policy and women's organizations can help inform Canadian feminist adult education, as they explore "what partners in the Global South can teach about learning, policy, and critical decision making" (p. 13). English and Irving argue that feminism and adult education need to be linked in policy and situated in ways that lead to concrete action. They highlight exemplars in the Global South of gender-based participatory budgeting and three

international NGOs that effectively implement policy to make societal change. English and Irving also caution against gender mainstreaming, which the next article examines in detail.

In *Gender Mainstreaming, Women, and Politics: A Case for Feminist Adult Education*, Darlene Clover explores the gendered discourses circulating in the non-formal training and informal learning of 133 women (prospective and present) municipal politicians. She critiques the ways in which a gender-mainstreaming focus privileges the masculine status quo of political identity and action. Clover argues for "new, critical practices based on the principles of feminist adult education that can challenge the limitations of discourses of equality and meritocracy, render visible biases and stereotyping, destabilize normative political insider identities, and tap into the activist imaginations so many women bring to the political table" (p. 18). Her article emphasizes the need to apply feminism to the political sphere with "passionate defiance" (p. 28) to engage in societal change.

Colonialism and Transnationalism

Shahzad Mojab and Nancy Taber analyze women's memoirs of political imprisonment and residential schooling in *Memoir Pedagogy: Gender Narratives of Violence and Survival*. Using the lens of public pedagogy, they thematically connect the experiences of women political prisoners in Morocco, Iraq, and Iran with that of a woman who attended an Indian Residential School in Nova Scotia, Canada. They state that "this cross-reading contemplation is intended to trouble the liberal notion of multiculturalism, settlement, and integration and to connect transitions in the lives of women who deal with war, militarism, racism, violence, and poverty" (p. 32). Mojab and Taber's transnational perspective aims to connect the lives of women in Canada and abroad, a goal that the next two articles also reflect.

Hongxia Shan's article, *Women, Gender, and Immigrant Studies in Canadian Adult Education: An Ethnographic Content Analysis*, explores how Canadian adult education and immigrant studies have informed each other. She engages in an ethnographic content analysis of "how adult education research in Canada has addressed the intersections of women, gender, and immigrant studies" (p. 49). In her analysis, she found a deep engagement with critical and feminist adult education contexts and theories as well as with a variety of feminist methodologies. Shan concludes with a call to go beyond an exploration of women immigrants' learning experiences to an institutional gendered analysis of the experiences of men and women.

In *Between Conformity and Contestation: South Asian Immigrant Women Negotiating Soft-Skill Training in Canada*, Srabani Maitra problematizes the racialized and gendered nature of soft-skills discourse. Based on her doctoral research with 25 South Asian immigrant women (from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan), she explores how her participants exercised complex forms of agency as they negotiated the ways in which soft-skill training functioned as a colonial project aimed to shape them into *real* Canadians: "the focus of the training was primarily on socialization to certain pre-existing values, behaviours, and bodily deportments" (p. 75). Maitra found that her participants, "while internalizing certain normative cultural messages imparted as part of the soft-skill training, also ended up contesting those very discourses—contestations that emanated from their own racial and gendered positions" (p. 69). In the next section, Shauna Butterwick, Marilou Carrillo, and Kim Villagante discuss how feminist organizations can support immigrant women's learning to contest neo-colonialism.

Feminist Organizations

Butterwick et al.'s discussion of their collaborative community research project in *Women's Fashion Shows as Feminist Trans-Formation* centres on the experiences of immigrant Filipino women with a feminist organization. They conducted a retrospective case study on the experiences of members of the Philippine Women's Centre of British Columbia (PWCBC) in developing, conducting, and reflecting on three feminist fashion shows. These shows, conceptualized through the lens of feminist popular education, focused on the struggles of Filipino women with respect to colonization and migration to Canada. Their article demonstrates the links between historical and contemporary neo-colonial practices, particularly with respect to Filipino women working as overseas foreign workers in Canada. Further, it illustrates how "the genre of a fashion show created space for telling complex stories about the colonization of the Philippines and how it is lived in the body" (p. 86).

In the final article, *Situated Feminism, Rurality, and Women's Learning in Rural Manitoba, Canada*, Robin Neustaeter discusses her experiences working with a women's organization in rural Manitoba. She argues that rurality is an important feature of women's lives and of how they engage with the concept of feminism. Combining theory with personal reflection during her dissertation research, Neustaeter explores her own engagement with feminism. She then moves to examine the complex ways in which feminism was taken up in her community and by her research participants. Neustaeter argues for the need to "ask critical questions about how rurality and gender intersect within...learning and education" (p. 113).

Book Reviews

This issue also includes two book reviews. Sara Carpenter discusses Himani Bannerji's (2011) *Demography and Democracy: Essays on Nationalism, Gender, and Ideology*. Carpenter argues that the book is helpful in "two ongoing struggles in my classrooms" (p. x). In particular, she outlines its usefulness in deconstructing and critiquing the liberal positioning of feminism in Western society by "connect[ing] the dots between the specificity of local experience and the universal reality of patriarchy as a social relation of power formed through its relations to racism and capitalism" (p. 121).

Susan Holloway reviews an edited book by Catherine Carstairs and Nancy Janovicek (2013), *Feminist History in Canada: New Essays on Women, Gender, Work, and Nation*. Holloway argues that the book "endeavours to create new knowledge by consciously exploring women's lives at both the individual and structural levels through a variety of sources" (p. 123). The book is valuable for the ways in which it illuminates the complexity and agency of Canadian women from a historical standpoint.

Conclusion

It is worth noting that this issue was completed exclusively by Canadian women: special issue editor, authors, peer reviewers, copy editor, layout editor, and translator. The contributors range from PhD students to emerging and established scholars. The existence of this issue points to the continued vibrancy of feminist adult education scholarship and activism in Canada.

References

Walby, S. (2011). *The future of feminism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.