

## The New Millennium as a State of Mind

The first thing you may have noticed about this issue is that our journal has a new look. Ruth Young, graphic designer and adult education masters student here at St. Francis Xavier University, came up with the new cover. It went through several revisions among the editorial staff and was chosen by a vote among the CASAE executive using the listserv. We offer this new design as one of the many commitments to renew that follow in the pages of this special issue.

Actually, the idea of this special millennium issue came up at our June, 1998 CJSAE Board meeting, held at the CASAE conference in Ottawa that year. The theme that was chosen appeared in our fall, 1998, Call for Papers: "The New Millennium: Realities, Possibilities, and Visions for Adult Education." The response was quite overwhelming. We received so many manuscripts that we soon exhausted our list of Consulting Editors (if not the Consulting Editors themselves) in getting the manuscripts reviewed, and we soon turned to other adult education researchers across North America to help us out. The lengthened list of Guest Consulting Editors in this issue shows who helped out, often on short notice. Although we initially had fears that we might not receive enough submissions to make up an issue on this theme, the Antigonish Editorial Co-operative is now in the enviable position of being able to express our sincere thanks to our Consulting Editors and those colleagues who gave us a helping hand in making this issue possible.

But why *do* adult educators seem to be so interested in the new millennium? John Ohliger, in his article in this issue, points out how the majority of people on the planet—Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, members of Japanese and Chinese religions—are much less excited about this event because it derives from Judeo-Christian traditions. In fact, "The Millennium is a Western conceit," (Sheppard, 1999, p. 42). Year 2000 will be 1420 on the Muslim calendar. It will be 5760 in the Hebrew world. And, next year marks the year of the rabbit across China. In fact, year 2000 arises out of at least five major revisions through time leading up to the Gregorian calendar used in the west today.

Nevertheless, Christians have had an intense—almost obsessive—interest in the concept of millennium. Biblical scholars tell us that the end of the first 1,000 years was anticipated by early Christians with stark terror, or as cause for jubilation. Nineteenth century writer Charles Mackay explains that "buildings of every sort were suffered to fall to ruins [because] it was thought useless to repair them, when the end of the world was so near" (cited in Abel, 1998, p.

50). There was good reason for this terror. Early Christian mythology held that the devil would rise up exactly at the end of the 1,000 year reign of Christ and, as promised in Revelations, a titanic battle for supremacy between good and evil would ensue. Historians tell us that the Crusades were launched, in large measure, to "cleanse" Jerusalem of "infidels" in readiness for the Second Coming. At roughly this same time one thousand years ago, there is no doubt that a great many Christians faced the *fin du monde* with deep foreboding.

On a happier note, history is replete with examples of joyous anticipation of year 1,000. Historian William Robertson explains that "many relinquished their possessions, and abandoning their friends and families, hurried with precipitation to the Holy Land, where they imagined that Christ would quickly appear to judge the world" (cited in Abel, p. 50). Numerous extremist groups welcomed the end of the world for their long-awaited entry into heaven. However, "It is one of history's ironies that the year 1000 passed with relatively little apocalyptic fervour" (Sheppard, p. 45). With the exception of a few "crazed peasant rebellions in parts of Germany and central France" (Sheppard, p. 45), "there were no...terrified crowds huddling in soot-blackened chapels as the clocks tolled the knell of Doomsday on New Year's Eve, 999" (Abel, 1998, p. 50).

Nevertheless, the concept of millennium has been more than an external phenomenon for many in the west. Fourth century cleric, St. Augustine, wrote copiously to religious leaders throughout Christendom on this issue. In a letter to Archbishop Hesychius, for instance, he noted that "It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority" (cited in Daley, 1999, p. 2). In a second letter to Hesychius, he explained that "We must live always prepared to meet the Lord, whether at the final judgement or at the time of our own death" (Daley, p. 3). As a result of his biblical interpretations, Jane Toswell, a professor of Old English and millennial studies at the University of Western Ontario, concludes that it was St. Augustine who gave Christians the conception "that the millennium is with us all the time. That we live it all the time because the millennium is our internal balance between good and evil" (cited in Came, 1999, p. 40).

It is possible, therefore, to see the high level of interest in the millennium in the west as part of well established cultural traditions to renew both ourselves and our culture. In fact, those of us in the western world are presented with numerous religious and secular opportunities for personal renewal. From New Years Day to Remembrance Day to Labour Day, pledging has a long history in the west. These pledges often occur during the celebration of quasi-historical events that we barely understand and know to be arbitrarily set on our

calendars. Nevertheless, we are celebrating ideas—not absolutes—as we renew the beliefs we have chosen to live by in our diverse North American culture.

For adult education, the new millennium brings challenges and pledges to renew. In both Anglophone and Francophone Canada, Canadian adult educators are working to renew CASAE/ACÉÉA with new members and new ideas. In the U.S., academics and practitioners are entering year 2000 with a pledge to renew and rebuild the American Association of Adult and Continuing Education, AAACE. On both sides of the border, North American adult educators face unprecedented challenges for our two major, professional associations.

This special edition of *The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education* follows in the rich tradition of renewal and, we hope, will contribute to the visioning of a better world and a stronger field in the next millennium. Our new Francophone Editor, Mohamed Hrimech, and six authors share their views and recent research as they look forward to the new millennium. John Ohliger begins this issue with a “Cautious Welcome,” giving a fascinating overview of some of the obsessive, cynical, and bizarre activities that are occurring. Michael Welton takes us to the adult education research, arguing that we are at a “crossroads” in our field. He advocates for new, imaginative commitments and the need to be better informed by our field’s past. Carolyn Clark effectively picks up this challenge as she brings the issues of feminist theory and adult education together in a carefully considered case for nonunitary subjectivity in our field. Ron Cervero and Arthur Wilson argue for imaginative steps to address power and society through our practice, and Jennifer Sumner warns against the problems that globalization bring to society and adult education. David Livingstone presents the results of an exciting, new national study on the profound extent of informal learning among adults in Canada. These diverse perspectives and research articles, together with the CJSAE/RCÉÉA annual list of new graduate theses and dissertations, speak to the need and the resolute willingness of adult educators to renew. In his review of Smith, Willms, and Johnson’s recent book on participatory action in this issue, Adrian Blunt quotes their statement that participatory action research “is about movement from the way things are to the way things could be” (p. 8).

Reflecting on our collective experience in producing this issue, the research and opinions that readers will find inside, and the mood of our field as I see it within Canada and the U.S., I believe there is a renewed “movement from the way things are to the way things could be” (Smith, Willms, Johnson, p. 8) across North American adult education. I believe this issue is one indication of the capacity of people in this field to critically reflect on where we have been,

to assess where we are now, and to articulate where we should be going. It reinforces my belief that the field will survive on the sheer strength of its collective will to fulfil its historical social contract to society. I also think we can take pride in the strength of the selfless willingness of so many in this field to help others, as witnessed in the production of this issue. Finally, I believe, we can flourish if we can continuously renew this field, and ourselves, by sustaining and enhancing our capacity to reflect and to act. This special issue is offered as a testimony to these beliefs.

### References

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## Quelle éducation des adultes pour le nouveau millénaire ?

Plusieurs questions préoccupent les éducateurs d'adultes à la veille du nouveau millénaire. Quelle sera la place de l'éducation des adultes dans les années à venir sur le plan social, scientifique économique? Lorsqu'il s'agit de faire des projections dans le futur, les esprits les plus vifs se trompent souvent de manière lamentable. Qui a prévu, par exemple, l'effondrement de l'Union soviétique ou l'avènement de la micro-informatique et de l'Internet il y a seulement trois décennies? Nonobstant le nouveau millénaire, l'éducation des adultes au Canada est à la croisée des chemins et est confrontée à un certain nombre de questionnements et de dilemmes dont les réponses et les issues détermineront son avenir, voire sa place au soleil. Ce texte passera rapidement en revue un certain nombre d'interrogations majeures dans le débat sur l'éducation des adultes au Canada. D'autres questions tout aussi importantes auraient pu être soulevées.