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AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN ATLANTIC
CANADA

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RECLAIMING COADY: ADULT EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN ATLANTIC CANADA

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Abstract

This paper seeks to challenge the rhetoric of deficit that surrounds Atlantic Canada by employing an appreciative approach and discussing one key Atlantic Canadian, Rev. Moses M. Coady, adult educator and the founder of the Antigonish Movement. Coady's work was grounded in the Atlantic region, and his message of cooperation, community, and consciousness-raising pioneered the field of emancipatory education so often associated with the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. As Atlantic Canadians, we wish to reclaim Coady's work and celebrate his contribution to the culture and development of our region. This paper begins with an overview of the deficit discourse that permeates Atlantic Canada. The paper describes the life and work of Moses Coady and provides a brief biography of the life and work of Paulo Freire, both of whom approached their work from an appreciative perspective, to lay the foundation for our argument as to why the work of Moses Coady needs to be reclaimed in the teaching and practice of adult education in Atlantic Canada.

Résumé

Cet article cherche à remettre en cause la rhétorique du déficit associée au Canada atlantique en mobilisant une approche appréciative et en se penchant sur un personnage clé originaire de cette région, le révérend Moses M. Coady, formateur d'adultes et fondateur du Mouvement d'Antigonish. Alors que son travail était centré sur la région atlantique, son message de coopération, de communauté et de conscientisation a défriché le champ de l'éducation émancipatrice si souvent associé au formateur brésilien Paulo Freire. Vivant nous-mêmes au Canada atlantique, nous voulons récupérer le travail de Coady et souligner sa contribution à la culture et au développement de notre région. Cet article commence en offrant un aperçu du discours du déficit omniprésent au Canada atlantique. Ensuite, en décrivant la vie et les réalisations de Moses Coady et en fournissant une brève biographie de la vie et des réalisations de Paulo Freire, ces deux hommes ayant abordé leur travail à partir

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d'une perspective appréciative, nous jetons les fondements nécessaires pour soutenir notre idée selon laquelle le travail de Moses Coady doit reprendre sa place au sein de la pratique et de l'enseignement de la formation des adultes au Canada atlantique.

Introduction

The discourse that surrounds the provinces of Atlantic Canada, especially in the field of education, tells a sad tale. Our high unemployment and illiteracy rates and our low socio-economic ranking, as compared to the rest of Canada, dominate the news media and scholarly literature on the region. In February 2016, unemployment rates were high across the four provinces, ranging from 9.2% in Nova Scotia to 14.1% in Newfoundland and Labrador (Statistics Canada, 2016). With the exception of the cyclical nature of employment in the oil industry in recent years,¹ largely in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador (and specific jurisdictions within those provinces), unemployment rates have consistently been higher than the national average and the rates in other provinces (with the exception of Nunavut and, at times, Quebec) for decades (Newfoundland & Labrador Statistics Agency, 2016; Statistics Canada, 2015). Literacy is also an issue in many areas of the region, particularly in New Brunswick. In 2015, one in five New Brunswick adults had a below average literacy rate. The average literacy score in the province is level two (Province of New Brunswick, 2015). An International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS) administered by Statistics Canada (2005) in 2003 reinforced the sorry state of literacy in New Brunswick. Citing the same survey, the director of national learning policy research for Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (now Employment and Social Development Canada) determined that of New Brunswick's working-age population aged 16 to 65, less than half have the literacy skills required to succeed “in today's world” (Perry, 2006, p. 2). To New Brunswickers, and indeed Atlantic Canadians, these statistics will not be unfamiliar, nor will the rhetoric of failure that accompanies them in popular discourse. This deficit-based approach constructs an image of the Atlantic provinces as have-nots rather than celebrating the rich culture and heritage of the people and, yes, their economic successes.

Within the broader Canadian family, the Atlantic provinces are often seen as traditional, even backward—the yokel cousin at family gatherings. Scholarly and journalistic writing about the region refers often to its conservatism and backwardness; as Conrad (2003) noted, “such comments serve to consolidate second-class citizenship” (p. 84). In fact, the Atlantic Canadian provinces are underrepresented in national policy discussions. In 1964, in his book *The Image of Confederation*, Frank H. Underhill used the phrase “nothing, of course, ever happens down there” to justify excluding Atlantic Canada from the national narrative (as cited in Conrad, 2014). To be fair, the culture of dependency in Atlantic Canada is not without justification. Decades of federal and provincial policies have contributed to this dependency. As Higgins and Savoie (1995) noted,

Increasingly, one hears the view that a strong reliance on government transfer payments makes a region dependent on these to support current

1 At the time of writing, both Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador have been affected by the recent downturn in the oil industry.

levels of consumption and services, which are much higher than can be sustained by the economic output of the region. It is this dependence that in the end serves to blunt or sterilize the required long-term adjustment that would bring production and consumption back into line. (pp. 174–175)

Although this was written in 1995, the culture of dependency on outside investment and government transfer payments has continued for the region overall, despite some moderate economic successes.

As two Atlantic Canadians whose scholarly work and personal experiences have been shaped by the place in which we grew up and continue to work, we seek to challenge this deficit model. Both of us grew up in regions shattered by the collapse of natural resource-based industry—the coal mining of Cape Breton and the cod fishery of Newfoundland and Labrador, respectively. Our experiences with political responses to these devastating losses and media coverage of our region have shaped our research agendas and interests. Deficit-based perspectives of many in the region, including media and politicians, were heard in every corner during these closures. Our research aims to provide a more appreciative lens through which others can experience the Atlantic Canadian approaches to education, political agency, and community development.

This paper takes a more appreciative approach by discussing Rev. Moses M. Coady, adult educator and the founder of the Antigonish Movement. Coady's work was grounded in the Atlantic region and his message of cooperation, community, and consciousness-raising pioneered the field of emancipatory education, so often associated with the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. As Atlantic Canadians, we wish to reclaim Coady's work and celebrate his contribution to the culture of our region.

Atlantic Canada has experienced its fair share of recession, depression, and labour crises. Historically, the Atlantic provinces have relied on continually dwindling natural resources for their economic survival. The economic hardships and physical landscape of the region have created a people of strength, pride, and independence—survivors. While the people themselves might be independent, the idea of community and connection also permeates the Atlantic region. Geographically isolated from the rest of the country, Atlantic Canadians were forced to connect with their neighbours and communities for survival and companionship. The emancipatory nature of education is central to the Atlantic Canadian philosophy of education; increasing levels of education are seen as a means to economic prosperity and to a better life. We can both attest to this widely held sentiment from our own histories. Coady saw education as a way to move beyond our circumstances and to improve our conditions. In a region that continues to suffer economically and is plagued by out-migration, perhaps Coady's message, which celebrates the rich heritage of the Atlantic region and looks at it through an appreciative lens, can help to reconstruct this deficit model to one that appreciates the tenacity and determination of Atlantic Canadians and their ability to be the "masters of their own destiny" (Coady, 1939).

Moses Coady

Moses Coady was born on January 3, 1882, and raised on a farm in Southwest Margaree on Cape Breton Island. One of 11 children, he and his siblings and family maintained a small farm. Because of the demands of farming, and as is consistent with the historical period and

geographic location, Coady's schooling was sporadic, with his parents providing much of his basic education at home. That said, his aptitude for mathematics formed a foundation upon which his later expressions of logical thought and oration were based. At age 15, he began to attend the Margaree Forks school on a regular basis, where he was taught for three and a half years by an older cousin, Chris J. Tompkins (Welton, 2001). On graduating from high school, Coady attended teacher-training college and taught in his native Margaree for two years (Alexander, 1985). In the late 1800s in rural Cape Breton, teaching was often seen as a stepping stone to something more lucrative for a high-school-educated young man, and indeed, after two years of teaching experience, Coady was able to enroll in Normal School, located in Truro, Nova Scotia, from which he graduated on June 27, 1901 (Welton, 2001). After completing Normal School, Coady returned to Margaree Forks as principal.

Coady's educational pursuits were influenced by his cousin, Father James (Jimmy) Tompkins, a native of Margaree and an ordained Catholic priest (Mifflin, 1974) who was influential in the Antigonish Movement and who made his own community development mark in Reserve Mines, Cape Breton. While Coady was principal at Margaree Forks, Tompkins became a professor of Greek and higher algebra at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish. During Coady's two years as principal, Tompkins pushed for him to pursue higher education. Coady entered St. Francis Xavier in 1903. He graduated with a bachelor's degree and qualified for a Grade A teaching licence in 1905. That same year, he was chosen by the Diocese of Antigonish to receive further training in theology and philosophy in Rome. At the conclusion of his studies, he received his Doctorate of Philosophy and his Doctorate of Divinity (Alexander, 1985). He returned to Nova Scotia in 1910, was ordained on May 10 of that year, and was appointed professor of education at St. Francis Xavier. It was at this point when he and Father Tompkins (Father Jimmy) began to conceive of a community development movement to improve economic and social conditions for the people of eastern Nova Scotia.

Many factors influenced the philosophies of Moses Coady: his historical and social background, his relationship with Father Jimmy, his education, and his religious faith. Particularly relevant to the development of Coady's philosophy were the economic conditions found in central and eastern Nova Scotia in the early 1900s. Prior to the 20th century, Nova Scotia enjoyed economic success due to its abundant natural resources of fish and timber and as a world centre for shipbuilding. This success was to be short-lived. By the time Coady returned from Rome, much of Nova Scotia's population was experiencing economic crisis. The economic boom experienced by much of Canada during the 1920s was not felt in Nova Scotia (Mifflin, 1974).

One of the fundamental tenets of Moses Coady's philosophy was his belief in the achievement of "the good and abundant life" (Coady, 1941), the gradual realization of human potential. For Coady, human potential encompassed a myriad of possibilities that included the physical, economic, institutional, cultural, and spiritual. However, the achievement of the good and abundant life was, for Coady, not about amassing wealth and power. But neither was it to be achieved through poverty and sacrifice. Coady believed this good and abundant life could be attained only from a stable economic base. Thus, the people needed to regain control over their economic situation. He maintained that people had relinquished their control over their situation, that they had bowed to the pressures of consumerism and privatization and had allowed others to gain control over their lives (Coady, 1939). He advocated education as the means to regain control. The people needed

to realize their situation, address it, and take group action to change it. For both Coady and Tompkins, adult education was a significant component of the realization of human potential. This would be the foundation of their movement. “Education should, we believe, enable a man to realize his possibilities. It should enable him to live fully. For the full life is the gradual realization of human potentialities” (Coady, 1939, p. 111). Adult education as a tool for consciousness-raising and a belief in group action were the bases for the founding of the Antigonish Movement and subsequently led to the establishment of credit unions and cooperatives as a means to achieve social change.

The Antigonish Movement

Eventually, Coady’s work became more widespread, and his followers and co-practitioners became known as the Antigonish Movement. The Movement fostered economic change and independence through adult education, with the ultimate goal of “a full and abundant life for everyone in the community” (Mathie & Kearney, 2001, n.p.). Mathie and Kearney (2001) wrote, “The Antigonish Movement was a unique combination of adult education and activities of economic co-operation that mobilized producers and consumers in impoverished communities throughout the Maritime Provinces of Canada from the 1920s through to the 1950s” (n.p.). Drawing from the social gospel movement within the Catholic Church, which worked to respond to the poverty that accompanied the joint phenomena of industrialization and urbanization, and the increasing support for distributist socialism in Britain, the Antigonish Movement was adult education for the people.

Through small, community-based cooperatives and kitchen study groups, Coady and Tompkins brought adult education to the community and to the people rather than expecting or requiring the people to come to universities and other institutions of higher learning. These grassroots, localized efforts were much more accessible and less intimidating, and ultimately brought about great collective action and learning.

The underlying principles of the Antigonish Movement—accessibility and localization; the primacy of the individual; that social reform must come through education; that education must begin with the economic; that education must come about through group action; and that effective social reform involves fundamental changes in social and economic institutions—undoubtedly remain relevant to practitioners of adult education today. Indeed, Mathie and Kearney (2001) connected these principles to the more current practices and principles of asset-based community development popularized by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993). The field of community development is well theorized, practised, and taught in adult education settings, so again we return to the central premise of this paper, that Coady’s work and the Antigonish Movement have direct relevance to current practices and trends in adult education and that Coady deserves to have his vision and philosophies discussed as central to these fields.

When Moses Coady died in 1959, his virtues and contributions to the adult education landscape in Nova Scotia were extolled in many newspapers. In an obituary entitled “They’re Rejoicing in Heaven Today,” von Pilis (1959) described the many awards and notations received by Dr. Coady during his lifetime:

He received the Carnegie and the Marshall Tory Awards for Adult Education, was named “Co-operator of the Year” by the Co-operative Extension Service in Philadelphia, and made an honorary doctor of Boston

College and Ottawa University. He was invited to address the plenary session of United Nations, Scientific Conference on Conservation and Utilization of Resources. He was a president of the Canadian Association for Adult Education and a vice-president of its American counterpart. (p. X)

However, despite these many accolades, as Welton (2001) noted, Coady's legacy remains somewhat less impressive: "Although Coady was selected as one of a hundred most influential Canadians in *MacLean's* magazine ... he is scarcely a household name in Canada today" (p. 5). We would extend this argument to posit that Coady is lacking in recognition not only around the dinner tables of Canada (though perhaps less so in Cape Breton, where Coady and Tompkins are both remembered fondly for their contributions to the region), but also in the halls of post-secondary institutions, where Coady's legacy should be particularly resonant. Instead, the name Paulo Freire is ubiquitous on syllabi, in philosophies of education, and in the minds of educators in Atlantic Canada.

The Coady International Institute

Though Coady may not be the household name that we would like to see it be, his legacy continues to be perpetuated by the Coady International Institute at his alma mater and former workplace, St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. As an extension of Coady's work on cooperatives and adult education, the Coady International Institute was founded following the Second World War to respond to the needs of newly emerging nations by introducing them to Coady's methods of mobilization and consciousness-raising.

In an article written in 2001, Mathie and Kearney discussed the great success of the Coady International Institute: "During the past 41 years, 4,000 development workers, primarily from the South, have come to the Coady Institute to share ideas and learn new strategies for social leadership and community-based development. In the same period, 22,000 have participated in the Coady Institute's short courses held overseas" (n.p.). Though the Coady International Institute's work is undoubtedly important and makes significant contributions to the educators, community developers, and citizens who benefit from its programs, it is of concern that these messages of cooperation, community mobilization, and consciousness-raising are being delivered primarily in other countries. This would seem to presuppose the fact that Canada, and specifically Atlantic Canada, has already learned the lessons espoused by Coady's Antigonish Movement. We argue, however, that our post-secondary institutions and communities closer to home could benefit from the same type of focus on Coady's messages.

Mathie and Kearney (2011) also acknowledged the continued relevance of the Antigonish Movement and Coady's vision:

The basic tenets of Coady and Tompkins' philosophy are as relevant today as they were in the 1930s, and...these need to be reflected in the Coady Institute's educational programs. The forces of globalization—such as the centralization of capital in monopolistic enterprises and the vulnerability of producers to the vagaries of world trade—existed then just as they do now. Locally and internationally, individuals and communities continue to resist the pressures to yield control over their economic fate. (n.p.)

However, even Mathie and Kearney, both employed at the Coady International Institute, acknowledged the shift away from the Antigonish Movement as the current driving force behind the curriculum at the institute, and referred instead to the needs of the global South as the impetus for the institute's continued work.

Mathie and Kearney (2001) posited that the Antigonish Movement is a remnant of a particular historical period and that it is no longer as prominent even in the communities in which it was founded. However, we argue that this implies a need for a return to, not a departure from, the foundations upon which the Antigonish Movement and the Coady International Institute were built.

Paulo Freire

Much has been written about Paulo Freire's early life, the influences on his philosophies and approach, and, in turn, how he has influenced the work of others. There are numerous research centres, academic programs, and scholars devoted to Freire and his philosophy of education. His work is said to have heavily influenced several modern theoretical perspectives, including feminism, critical theory, and postmodernism (Dale, 2003).

Paulo Reglus Neves Freire was born on September 19, 1921, in Recife, Brazil, the capital city of the state of Pernambuco. Freire's family was solidly middle class. His father was an army captain and later police captain. His mother was a seamstress. By all accounts, Freire's early experiences deeply affected him. At home, his father often engaged the family in challenging topics, especially about politics and democracy. In school, the focus was on rote memorization and repetition, with the exception of one early teacher who encouraged him to engage with learning and to think for himself.

Family fortunes changed during the Great Depression and after his father's death in 1934. The struggle of his family with poverty, Freire has said, "instilled in him a respect for those who find themselves in a position of weakness or frailty" (as cited in Kirylo, 2013, p. 8). His early schooling also influenced his subsequent philosophies on education. Freire was not fond of rote memorization methods employed in school, and he was encouraged by an early teacher who fostered engagement with learning. Despite the family's financial struggles, Freire was able to attend a progressive private school, where he continued to pursue engaged learning. Initially trained for the law, he left the profession to take a job as a welfare officer, eventually becoming director of education and culture for the state of Pernambuco in 1946 (Flanagan, 2005). In 1961, Freire was appointed director of the cultural extension service at the University of Recife, and it was here where he developed and implemented his literacy plan. Freire's work in the 1950s and 1960s was rooted in education for development, but most particularly in the areas of education and citizenship.

Freire is identified around the world with critical pedagogy, conscientization, and his literacy programs. These literacy programs emerged from his work with the urban poor in what he termed culture circles. For Freire, school was a passive process in which students received the knowledge of the expert, the teacher. In this kind of schooling, the student was the empty vessel (Freire, 1974/2013). Freire did not believe people to be empty vessels, and he challenged these passive methods of instruction. In culture circles, people worked together to discuss problems affecting them and their communities to either seek clarification or action in relation to that problem. The topics of discussion in the culture circles came from the groups themselves, from their concerns and their problems. Freire's

literacy program and the work he did in the field of literacy were grounded in these culture circles and focused on “teaching adults how to read in relation to the awakening of their consciousness” (Freire, 1974/2013, p. 38). In his own words,

We wanted a literacy program which would be an introduction to the democratization of culture, a program which itself would be an act of creation, capable of releasing other creative acts, one in which students would develop the impatience and vivacity which characterizes search and invention. (Freire, 1974/2013, p. 39)

Baum (1980) described the similarities between Freire’s and Coady’s philosophies: “In a pamphlet written in 1920, entitled ‘Knowledge for the People’, [Coady] described a process that came close to what today, through the influence of Paulo Freire, is called consciousness raising” (p. 191). This consciousness-raising, a central premise of both Coady’s and Freire’s work, remains relevant in today’s educational landscape. Nesbit (2008) noted the need for “spaces for public debate and critical consciousness ... not just for the academic elite or already privileged but for all people, especially those labeled ‘disadvantaged’” (p. 28).

As described above, Atlantic Canada is marginalized from the rest of Canada through a discourse of deficit, exclusion, and ostracism. The potential for liberatory and emancipatory pedagogy to help lift participants out of poverty and improve their economic, social, and cultural communities is well documented in both Freire’s and Coady’s work. However, we still question how and why Freire’s work has become so ubiquitous while Coady’s memory does not have the same resonance in the field, even in the communities in which he worked.

Reclaiming Moses Coady

To borrow a colloquial phrase from the Atlantic Canadian vernacular, “come from aways”—that is, those who have not grown up in the region—and their knowledge are often seen as the saviours of Atlantic Canada and its people. In addition, the culture of dependency, which many ascribe to the region as the result of years of reliance on federal transfer payments, compounds the negative image of Atlantic Canada (McMahon, 2000). Similarly, the work of Paulo Freire is overwhelmingly more prevalent in the fields of adult and emancipatory education even in the region in which Coady and the Antigonish Movement saw such resounding success. A simple search of our institution’s library holdings for “Moses Coady” yields 17 results, while a search for “Paulo Freire” yields 1,148. Expanding that search to the broader scholarly community, “Moses Coady” results in 620 hits on Google Scholar, and “Paulo Freire” 151,000.² While Freire’s work is inarguably important and has had great influence in the scholarly community, we argue that Coady’s work deserves similar attention.

In 1939, Coady advocated that people needed to regain control over their economic situation. He maintained that the fishermen and farmers with whom he worked had relinquished their control over their situation by no longer having input into the costs of production or the prices received for their products. As noted above, they had bowed to the pressures of consumerism and privatization and allowed others to maintain control over their lives (Alexander, 1985). Similar phenomena continue to affect the educational and economic landscape of Atlantic Canada. Education and the economy in Atlantic Canada

2 As of April 4, 2016..

continue to be influenced by outside factors through globalization and neo-liberalism, which has resulted in the commodification of education and the almost exclusive emphasis on skills for employment and the labour market above all. However, as both Coady and Freire saw, education for economic development and prosperity does not have to be situated within a neo-liberal ideology, but can draw on local knowledges, experiences, and cultures to build a rich community-based approach to development and prosperity.

Anthropologist Jane McEldowney Jensen spent 10 months in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, a coal-mining town in Cape Breton, exploring connections between community development and post-secondary education. In politics, as in education, Jensen noted a resistance on behalf of citizens of the town to acknowledge and respect their own knowledge and political agency. Instead, though passionate debate and heated discussion flared around kitchen tables, “the sense of decision-making coming ‘from away’ was still there” (Jensen, 2002, p. 120). She also noted that “school knowledge and concepts of economic development... are distant, formal, and based upon abstractions beyond the experiences of local residents” (p. 133). Her book *Post-Secondary Education on the Edge* recognized the importance that Atlantic Canadians place on education as a means toward economic prosperity. She wrote:

According to an economic model of human capital, the higher the educational achievement levels in a region, the better the economic picture. Education holds the potential or promise of increased economic and social position relative to other individuals and/or communities... In doing so we imply that formal education can provide something more, something different and better, than informal practices of local knowledge.” (p. 4)

Rhetoric that constructs Atlantic Canada as backwards and helpless has permeated the psyche of the Atlantic Canadian populace and resulted in a dependence on external forces to help fix the problems in the region. This attitude also permeates discussions of education in the region. Emancipatory and liberatory pedagogies have been posited as ways for marginalized communities (like Glace Bay and others in Atlantic Canada) to address the problems facing their communities. What is key, however, is that the region draw on the rich, substantive local knowledge, like Coady’s liberatory approach to education, rather than relying on knowledge from outside the region, an approach that reinforces negative stereotypes about the region.

Though discussions about liberatory and emancipatory education often take place in the ivory towers of Atlantic Canada’s universities, overwhelmingly those discussions draw on Freire’s theories and writings. Post-secondary institutions in the region would do well to draw on Coady’s approaches to teaching and learning to respond to the region’s challenges and to recognize and celebrate local knowledges.

Conclusion

In the spirit of Coady himself, who fought the mentality that only “come from aways” could fix the “have-nots” of the Atlantic region, we seek to reclaim Coady’s message of the emancipatory power of education for educators and citizens in our own region. Perhaps by reclaiming Coady, we can help educators in this region, and beyond, to reclaim their own

power to contribute to the cultural and economic prosperity of Atlantic Canada and to resist the individualist ideologies and practices so prevalent today.

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