THE ROLE OF ADULT EDUCATION

Presented by: Leanne Woelke for: The University of the Fraser Valley
# Table of Contents

- Introduction .................................................................................................................................... 2
- Defining Adult Learning.................................................................................................................. 2
  - Adult Education as a Movement ................................................................................................. 3
  - The Purpose of Adult Education ............................................................................................... 4
- Foundations of Adult Education ..................................................................................................... 5
  - History of Adult Education ....................................................................................................... 5
- Sociology ........................................................................................................................................ 8
- Philosophical Approaches ............................................................................................................. 11
- Psychology ..................................................................................................................................... 12
- The Influence of Adult Education ................................................................................................. 13
- Factors That Shape Adult Education ............................................................................................. 14
- Conclusion .................................................................................................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.5
- References ..................................................................................................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.6
THE PURPOSES AND FOUNDATION OF ADULT EDUCATION

DEFINING PRINCIPLES & PRACTICES

The field of adult education is not easily defined, as many working in the field do not view the work they do as “adult education”. Instead, they characterize it as human resource training, workplace learning, or professional development (Spencer & Lange, 2014). One of the earliest definitions of adult learning was provided in 1919, by the British Ministry of Reconstruction. They defined it as “all the deliberate efforts by which men and women attempt to satisfy their thirst for knowledge, to equip themselves for their responsibilities as citizens and members of society, or to find opportunities for self-expression.” This definition has undergone several iterations through the years, with each version being written to encompass a much broader scope.

It’s been suggested that “education floats on a sea of learning” (Thomas, 1991), which is to say that learning is constantly taking place and that structured education, is just a tiny component of a larger process. Many arrive in the field of adult education, already well-established in a profession; having spent many years engaging in formal and informal learning. Education is planned learning (Spencer & Lange, 2014) and is derived from the Latin word educere, meaning to draw out or evoke something that is hidden or latent. A basic principle of adult education is that adult learners bring with them significant life experience and as such, adult education should draw from and build upon that experience.

DEFINING ADULT LEARNING

If all post-secondary education is considered “adult education”, how do we distinguish between the types of education being offered? One method is to classify where the learning takes place.

*Formal education* is accompanied by credentials and includes a set curriculum, provided by an educational institution such as a university, college, or technical/vocational institute. It is typically referred to as higher education or “post-secondary” education.

*Non-formal education* is usually non-credential learning, conducted on a short-term basis. It is offered through various institutions or groups and is designed to meet organizational, individual, social, or recreational needs.

*Informal education* is considered informal and typically unstructured learning and is often referred to as the learning that takes place for individuals and groups, daily.
Although non-formal education could be considered “adult education” in the conventional sense, it lacks the social purpose inherently linked to adult education. The ideas for social justice emerged long ago, most notably during the European enlightenment of the 18th century. The theory of social justice suggests the existence of a society that operates from a place of fairness and an equitable distribution of goods and services (Emmanuel, 2014). Therefore; the contrast between education for adults, versus adult education, is an important distinction to make.

ADULT EDUCATION AS A MOVEMENT

Adult education has been referred to by Selman and Dampier (1998) as a “movement”, and this theme has appeared in several literary references. These references date back to the earlier mentioned report of 1919, by the British Ministry of Reconstruction. The report findings argued that the impetus for the adult education platform should be to liberate, with a focus on “education for life”, not just “for livelihood.” The argument also emphasized social change goals such as personal enlightenment, active citizenship, and the promotion of democratic society (Spencer & Lange, 2014). Adult education emerged in response to widespread concerns of isolation, poverty, and exploitation. Strengthened by a common purpose, it gained the momentum needed to bring about individual and social change.

Today, there are numerous adult education and training opportunities, both credentialized and non-credentialized, facilitated in various learning institutes and organizations. However, the curriculum and learning objectives for the bulk of these programs are not focused on implementing social change. In fact, some of the learning objectives are in direct contrast to the original goals of democracy and emancipation.

Does this mean that we have lost sight of the original mission of adult education as a movement? It could be argued that this is evidence of the inability to support critical reflection, empowerment, and large-scale social change. While these are legitimate concerns that have no doubt been addressed many times by educators; we could also choose to view adult education through a different lens. Another perspective or approach, would be to assign new meaning to the role and purpose of adult education. Adult education has evolved through the years from a movement to a process; a process that can now be positioned to support other social movements.

THE PURPOSE OF ADULT EDUCATION

There are some commonly accepted beliefs regarding adult education. The first being that adult students already possess a considerable amount of life experience. Therefore, adult education should draw from existing experience and further enhance it. The purpose of adult education is not straight forward and opinions differ regarding what should be the rationale or justification behind educating adults.
Historically the objective of adult education was rooted in societal aspirations; commissioned for nation-building and unification. As noted by Spencer & Lange (2014), this was especially relevant with the influx of immigrants to remote Canadian communities in the early twentieth century. Today this has changed and it is the economic purposes of adult education that dictate and converge with personal advancement. This has prompted a shift in in the key players funding and sponsoring adult education. Some believe that this dramatic shift is in direct contrast to the original intention, which is rooted in social purpose.

Another angle is to review the functions of adult education. As explained by Selman et al., (1998) there are four functions from an individual perspective:

- Vocational
- Social
- Recreational
- Self-development

Other authors with insight into the functions and purpose of adult education are Jarvis (1985) and Darkenwald and Merriam (1982). The list provided by Jarvis, places an emphasis on social purpose in adult education. The list includes:

- To maintain the social system and reproduce existing social relations
- To transmit knowledge and reproduce culture
- For individual advancement and selection
- To provide for leisure time pursuit and institutional expansion
- To further development and liberation

The second list from Darkenwald and Merriam, combines individual and social functions of adult education; with an emphasis on the individual element. This list includes:

- Cultivation of the intellect
- Individual self-actualization
- Personal and social improvement
- Social transformation
- Organizational effectiveness

It is note-worthy to mention that these authors hail from Europe and North America respectively. These differences may be in perceived biases towards personal, versus social transformation. One could surmise that this difference reflects the cultural norms; with American society, heavily emphasizing individualism, and British society, viewing social forces as most powerful.
FOUNDATIONS OF ADULT EDUCATION

The theories, or foundations of adult education emerge from practice. When early practitioners and subject matter experts in the field, began writing about adult education; their knowledge was drawn from their own experiences. The Adult Education Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction followed suit, when releasing their 1919 report. It began with a discussion of “The History of Adult Education Since 1800” and included the creative works of Freire (1970) and Knowles (1973). There is also evidence of a connection to practice as demonstrated by some of the fine texts that the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE) has cultivated and contributed.

To better understand the foundations of adult education, we must first examine the associated foundation disciplines. History, sociology, philosophy, and psychology, all provide insight into the purposes and functions of adult education. We must also recognize how adult education fits into the bigger picture of education and as a communal event within social science.

HISTORY

Mechanics’ Institutes

Adult education in Canada was influenced by several conditions and as Selman and Dampier point out, those conditions were addressed in a manner that was quite specific to Canada. It began with the Mechanics’ Institutes, which had already been created in Britain as a method for supplying workers or skilled “mechanics” with scientific and technical information. These tradesmen possessed the knowledge and ability to execute the tasks, but rarely had an opportunity to acquire the theory or science behind the procedures. Despite early experimentation in 1800, the movement did not gather steam until the 1820’s, with the establishment of the London Mechanics’ Institution.

Toronto welcomed a Mechanics’ Institute in 1827 and the following year, Institutes were launched in Halifax and Montreal. It would take until the 1860’s for British Columbia (BC) to follow suit. Ontario was by far the most advanced, boasting 311 Institutes by 1895. The Ontario Department of Education considered the Institutes the principle agency for the provision of skills upgrading in the technical arts. These Institutes were the sources for what has become today’s public library.

Women’s Institute

In the 1800’s, the Women’s Institute (WI) in Ontario, was one of very few organizations that welcomed all women, regardless of religious or political affiliations, or language.
When the Women’s Institute was founded in BC by the Farmers’ Institute, it was a direct result of sourcing speakers and topics that would appeal to the interests of their members’ wives. Proving widely popular, the provincial government organized Women’s Institutes province wide. By 1909, a total of sixteen Institutes had been organized and 1911 saw them receive government funding and statutory authority.

While the focus of WI was on a wide range of “homemaking” topics, women also exchanged views on important world issues, including legal issues that concerned them deeply. At the time, women did not possess legal rights to their children, the right to own property, or the right to vote. It wasn’t until after World War 1, that mothers became legal parents to their children. As homesteads were not open to single women or wives, if their husbands died, wives did not have the right to stay on their home farms. They had to be deemed the head of a household before they could then earn a quarter section of land by farming it.

Activists within the Women’s Institutes recognized the gross injustices in these and other laws and worked with other supporters to bring about change. The popularity of the WI spread across Canada and then to the United Kingdom; resulting in an international organization being formed in the 1930’s under Canadian leadership. Today in BC, there are branches in 14 districts of the province. All are aligned in the common goal of “Women interested, informed and involved in building a better tomorrow”, and the establishment formed the roots for today’s Sprott Shaw college.

Frontier College

In 1901, the Reading Camp Association was established and later evolved into what became known as the Frontier College. The Reading Camp was created by Alfred Fitzpatrick, a Presbyterian minister-educator, to address the unmet human needs on the frontier. Fitzpatrick believed the government had abandoned the frontiersmen, leaving thousands to labour in isolation, cut off from the most basic social and educational services, without bearing responsibility. Between 1900 – 1930, more than 5 million immigrants arrived in Canada, eager to work in the factories, set up homesteads on the prairies, or work seasonal jobs in resource extraction (Walter, P., 2003). At the time, most of these immigrant workers did not match the preferred profile, of “white” men from Britain, Scandinavia, Holland & Germany. Those emigrating from China, or from south or eastern Europe, were viewed unfavourably and were sent to labour as “camp men” in the logging, mining and railway building industries.

It was these “non-desirable foreigners” that Frontier College hoped to reach and model into the desired likeness of “proper Anglo-Canadian citizens.” Convinced the men would pursue an education if the means were provided; Fitzpatrick introduced the role of the labourer-teacher.
A university educated professional who would live and work with the students in these work camps and show them how to be more “Canadianized”. In 1913, at the peak of operations, 71 labourer-teachers had been placed in camps. By 1919, more than 600 instructors, including a few women, had served in every province and territory apart from PEI. While Frontier College initially sprang from questionable motives, today it functions as a service provider of literacy programs for inner city residents and immigrant newcomers.

**Antigonish Movement**

Considered one of the most significant adult education projects in Canadian history, the Antigonish Movement was viewed by many as an alternative to “socialism”, despite the components of progressive social change. After a stalled recovery from years of recession and depopulation, people in the Maritimes were ready for change and open to alternative solutions. Having developed strong, established communities, citizens relied upon family members to form co-operative organizations to assist with purchasing farming equipment and supplies. It seemed a natural segue to expand these co-operatives to include entire communities of neighbours.

One of the founding members of the Antigonish Movement was Jimmy Tompkins, an educator who believed in the concept of a university for the people, with resources made available to ordinary men and women. He established “Peoples’ Schools”, where classes were comprised of traditional liberal adult education. In short order, the leaders of the Movement recognized the value of having locals reinvest in their neighbourhoods, expediting the establishment of credit unions.

The event that really ignited the Movement was the organization of the fishermen by Moses Coady, in 1929. Coady, a Catholic priest, preached about collective values; convincing the fishermen to form their own co-operative organizations. Later, Coady and others organized public meetings and lectures, followed up by community study groups that identified community issues and potential solutions, through collective actions and co-operative work. Coady went on to publish “The Antigonish Way”, in which he wrote about the technique of addressing real-world issues and strategizing how the members could be empowered to analyze, understand and gain insight. He noted that the discussion circle was founded without the involvement of teachers, aligned with the co-operative idea, and wove education into the fabric of the self-help movement. The Antigonish Movement began by recognizing people’s economic issues and then formally organizing the solutions to address those issues.

Other significant contributors to the Antigonish Movement were the Sisters of St. Martha and the many lay women who worked alongside these influential women.
Together they created all the educational and communication materials, established libraries, facilitated public speaking events, organized co-operatives and credit unions throughout Nova Scotia, and organized the male leaders’ activities.

**The Newfoundland Adult Education Association**

In 1929, the Newfoundland Adult Education Association (NAEA) was established in an area now known as Canada. Its goals were to increase basic literacy and to rebuild the economy. The organization’s educators were pioneers in the field of creating a new profession for women in Newfoundland. At the time, the Antigonish Movement in Nova Scotia was generating extensive educational and development activity. Women played key roles such as hosting radio programs, editing co-op newspapers, running study clubs and facilitating arts and crafts (English, L., 2011). Meanwhile, many of these same activities were being carried out in Newfoundland under the umbrella of the NAEA, where unlike Frontier College, it was primarily women who were employed as teachers.

**SOCIOLGY**

Dating back to the eighteenth century, sociology has developed to promote awareness of societal principles that are hidden, or taken for granted; principles we simply accept without any further reflection. Derived from the Latin words logos – the “study of” and socius – “being with others”, comes the term sociology – the study of being with others.

According to Collins & Makowsky (2005) it is how we think, move and behave, in accordance with a sophisticated network of cultural habits, hidden rules and formal institutions, that oversee our actions and infiltrate our minds. The study of sociology is designed to reveal these principles and question them from both the societal and interpersonal perspectives. Sociology originated as a discipline during a period of tremendous political and social change, attributed to the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. Societies struggled to shift from feudalism and agrarianism, to the modern ideas of the Enlightenment; some of which included democracy, capitalism, economic growth and industrial production. Most of the world we know today, is a byproduct of these changes.

Most individuals expect to participate in various educational pursuits over their lifetimes, but a considerable amount will be influenced by their initial schooling experiences. In the 1960s and ’70s, UNESCO recognized lifelong education as the expansion of learning “from the cradle to the grave.” With a focus on adult education and basic literacy, their impetus was to support the educational needs of those who had been done a disservice through schooling. In the 90s, a major shift took place; promoting learning and innovation as the primary method to promote economic wellbeing in a competitive global economy.
Education became focused on the job market and the linking of adult education with workplace skills has sparked debate in the field amongst those who believe strongly in the sociology of learning.

There are three well known classical theorists from this era who stand out: Emile Durkheim (1858 – 1917), Karl Marx (1818 – 1883) and Max Weber (1864 – 1920). Durkheim was driven to understand how social order and morality could be maintained in a modern industrial society, without religion as the key principle. Marx was concerned with determining the causes of inequality and injustice in a variety of economies, but capitalism in particular and methods for establishing justice and equality. Weber was focused on analyzing the beliefs, values and approaches, that promoted the rise of capitalism and the collapse of traditional societies, and to determine what were the new “chains of command” in modern society.

The sociology of adult education recognizes the objectives and behaviours of education and the methods through which knowledge is shared with members of a society. It also recognizes the structures and systems of adult education, what is classified as “authoritative” knowledge; how this knowledge becomes a source of social power and economic mobility; access to and participation in adult education; and how the expectations of adult education for both reproduction and transformation, often conflict. Classical theorists in sociology constructed three prominent theoretical paradigms, with each one based upon a unique perception of society.

Each paradigm is equipped with questions that focus on pivotal issues in sociology; individual versus society, function versus organization, and balance versus struggle. These were structural functionalism (Durkeim), symbolic interactionism (Weber) and the conflict / critical school (Marx).

Structural functionalists believe strongly in the natural order of society and the importance of sustaining balance and unity. In their view, a society is far greater than the sum of its parts – the individual members. It is more powerful and it molds individuals and how they live their lives; supporting the notion of leaders managing the masses through strong moral codes, legislation and policies that support ongoing social stability.

Critics suggest that this approach only emulates what already exists, rather than suggesting more progressive or visionary planning.

Symbolic interactionism is focused on the way systems of ideas and beliefs, influence economic and political behaviour. Weber viewed bureaucracies as a new means of establishing governing bodies. Educational institutions would be converted into innovate shelters for housing “red-tape”. He believed that the purpose of large-scale education, was to shift people’s traditional world-view. To have them focus on technology, science, reasoning, and calculation, with the goal of supporting the expansion of capitalism and the industrial revolution.
To accomplish these goals, education en masse would be required and facilitated by specialists, trained in how to manipulate the system to give the appearance of fairness. Education as a system of bureaucracy is justified further through the addition of credentialization. This provides another layer of confirmation that acquisition of key attributes and knowledge has occurred.

Critics of this paradigm, propose that interactionism does not heed context; assuming adult education principles are universal and that no social limitations exist on individual choice. Interactionists operating from this paradigm, view learning and group issues as individual deficiencies, rather than related to the larger dynamics of race, gender, and class. The belief is that a simple attitude change, or provision of information, will alter the group behaviour.

Conflict / Critical is the paradigm associated with inequality and the ongoing conflict over resources such as power, privilege, wealth, goods and services. In this paradigm, conflict is viewed as a positive, as it can be the catalyst for change in society. This view emerged from Marx’s concerns over the dehumanizing, and treacherous living conditions of the factory workers, early in the Industrial Revolution. A stark contrast to the luxurious mansions and servants, enjoyed by the industrialists. Marx was both perplexed and furious that poverty could even exist, despite the obvious wealth and available resources. He studied different economic systems and how they bred different kinds of human behaviour and societies. For Marx, capitalism was based on exploitation; industrial capitalists forcing workers to live in poverty, hunger, and misery. These capitalists overtook the aristocracy in power, by focusing on amassing great wealth. They stole the land of these farmers, forcing them to become labourers in the city, in the new industrial factories.

Marx considered human nature as essentially good and looked upon work, as providing people with dignity. However, he viewed society as structurally unjust and capable of drawing out the worst in human nature: greed, selfishness, and self-serving behaviour. He advocated for workers to develop class consciousness, to use social analysis to understand the system, and to formally organize for change. He wanted them to see how their labour power would eventually benefit the collective and society could be overhauled to put an end to exploitation and injustice.

Ironically, the Occupy Movement of 2011, that originated in NYC and spread to 1,500 cities globally; was protesting similar issues. The major concern, was the wealth gap between the elite 1%, whose income had risen ten times faster since 2000, versus the other 99% of the population.

Critics of some elements of neo-Marxism, focus on the assumptive nature of the theory, without holding much optimism for change and the presumption that people are naturally inclined to act towards the common good and to cooperate rather than compete. Criticism extends to the abstract language that does not match the realities it discusses and the people it endeavours to work alongside. It is considered utopian and relegated to duplicate thinking and repetitive categories, such as wealthy/poor, bully/victim.
It masks the complicated methods in which people are stationed. Other concerns revolve around political overtness and too much emphasis placed on class and conflict.

PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACHES

While it is possible to identify the purposes of adult education through the preferred method of examination of practice; another method is to use a philosophical approach. Elias and Merriam (2005) identified seven philosophies of adult education:

- **Liberal** – emphasizing a concern mainly with the liberal arts and a “love of learning” and the development of intellectual powers of logic and rational discussion. For educators who embrace the liberal philosophy, their main goal is to liberate the power of the human mind and the acquisition of wisdom. They believe that their role is to develop the rational and moral powers of learners.

- **Progressive** – this philosophy encompasses other origins of learning such as experience, feelings, and curiosity, rather than just reason, as part of its learner centred approach. Education is viewed as a social activity and should serve the purpose of social reform. The focus is on granting access to learning particularly in the areas of science, problem-solving, and new technologies, for all learners. In North America, this philosophy has been the most impactful on adult education and was the driving force behind universal public education.

- **Behaviourist** – this has been linked to skills training, planning and evaluation. With a focus on observable and measurable behaviour, it is a competency based approach. Based upon the premise of human motivation being linked to the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain principle; the belief is that learning can be molded according to the nature of the stimulus used.

- **Humanistic** – focused on individual creativity and autonomy, the freedom and dignity of humans are considered sacred. This approach is highly “person-centred” in the way learners are supported in their quest for personal meaning and self-actualization. Often associated with self-directed learning, it is often the favoured approach of those within human resource development and has been highly influential in the field of adult education.

- **Critical / Radical** – views education as a vehicle for consciousness-raising, empowerment, and social change. The cornerstone of the philosophy is challenging injustice and lack of freedom and promoting social transformation, social justice, environmental sustainability and democracy. Learners are encouraged to conduct social analyses to better understand their position in society and recognize how and where power is located.
Analytical – focused on careful analysis of the words, concepts, metaphors, and principles commonly used in education and how the language and associated values shape practice. It views the goals of education in terms of function; especially the effect on the educator and the benefit to the learner, with less thought about social significance.

Postmodern – analyzes the fundamental principles of the modern age, handed down from the period of Enlightenment; such as power to establish universal truth, sureness of knowledge, pre-determination of growth, the opportunity for complete coherence, and other theories that strive to clarify societal patterns in a universal approach. It is intended to deconstruct and shed light on the vagueness and decentralization of the information. The goals of Enlightenment are freedom, justice and emancipation; a stark contrast to the basis of Postmodernism, which is anti-foundational; resisting the notion of essential ideas and concepts. Post-structuralism operates from a place of deconstructing beliefs and has lead to violence and divisiveness.

A basic tenet of belief is that a well-functioning society draws out the good in everyone and values their contributions. As such, education should be connected to social movements designed to work towards this social vision.

PSYCHOLOGY

Motivation is a key element in understanding students’ engagement, satisfaction, and level of achievement in learning (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002) and research has been conducted with respect to motivating traditional students. However, non-traditional learners seem to have been overlooked (Knowles, 1973) and their motivation for learning, has not been researched nearly as in depth as their counterparts. There is merit to studying the motivation of adult learners, given the important distinctions that exist between the two different groups of learners.

Teacher-student interaction plays an important role in the psychology of learning. The way teachers classify and categorize their students, can directly influence the behaviour and accomplishments of the students. The act of characterization affects the students’ educational successes and social standing. This interpretation by teachers may ultimately lead to “self-fulfilling prophecies” on the part of the students. Teacher assumptions either positive or negative, can have an impact on student performance, regardless of the student’s true potential.

While adult learners tend to possess a stronger ability to self-motivate and a greater emotional maturity than their younger counterparts, (Bye, Pushkar & Conway, 2007) adult learners also have the distinct disadvantage of receiving their childhood and education in a different era.
Their prior elementary and high school education took place during a time when students were not properly supported, encouraged and positioned for academic success, the way most young learners have been in the past two decades.

In fact, many adult learners bear the emotional and psychological scars from early traumatic learning experiences (Perry, 2006), when their needs were given little consideration. If students were fortunate enough to have caring and understanding teachers, time and budget constraints did not enable these teachers to provide extra help to those who really needed it. Worse still, the regulations governing the expectations and conduct of teachers at that time, were far more lax and ambiguous than they are today. Some teachers who did not have the best interests of their students at heart, went as far as name-calling and ridiculing students in front of their peers, accusing them of laziness and blaming them for their academic struggles.

These children have now become the adult learners of today. Some have rallied more readily than their peers, while others have really struggled to overcome issues such as learning disabilities, and feelings of inadequacy stemming from their childhood, or adolescence. These adult learners are learning to challenge their limiting beliefs by recognizing their talents and intelligence and reshaping how they self-identify as students.

THE INFLUENCE OF ADULT EDUCATION

In the 1950s, a young man named Paulo Freire was employed as a literacy teacher in Brazil. His job was to educate peasants and workers and he became known for his significant contributions, to a critical theory of adult education. Early on he came to the realization that schooling served as a primary tool for nurturing a “culture of silence” (Freire, 1970), among the poor; which was the bulk of the population. He referred to this top-down technique of dispensing knowledge solely through teachers to compliant, non-involved students, as “banking education”, and the term has gained in popularity over the years. Freire suggested that this technique creates an apathy that compels people to surrender to the power of the top levels in business, military, government and church. Critical adult educators usually work with marginalized groups, where they advocate for policies to increase access and involvement in adult education.

In Canada, while there has been growth in the number of educational opportunities for those learners in the middle and upper-middle-class; access for vulnerable groups has shrunk. For example, among low literacy learners, only 22% participate.

Conversely, of those with the highest literacy levels, 69% participate in adult education. For those lacking a high school education, only 26% participate; compared to 65% of participants that already have a university degree.
The most vulnerable groups consist of Aboriginal peoples, newcomer immigrants/refugees, the working poor, adults under the age of 30, and women. Whenever two or more categories intersect, ie – Aboriginal woman under thirty; vulnerability and lack of access increase.

Rubenson & Walker (2006), pointed out that adult education has been so focused on work-related education, that of the 83% of all adult learners, only 27% were attending for personal reasons. With government funding declining sharply, only 8% of learners were arriving with any form of financial aid to assist with accessibility to an education. Over the past two decades, the appearance of adult education has endured a dramatic shift. As such, it is important for educators moving forward, that each individual has a clear understanding of their role and ethical obligations, in providing educational access for all adult learners.

From personal observation, education holds the key to sustainable, positive results. When adults are granted access to opportunities and resources and supported in their educational journey; doors open for them. Learners are empowered with the capacity to execute positive, transformative change in their lives and to touch the lives of others, in their circle of influence.

**FACTORS THAT SHAPE ADULT EDUCATION**

Ideally, adult education would be built upon “critical foundations” of practice. However, in Canada, adult education has grown mainly via individual province’s efforts (Nesbit, 2013). Historically, it has been shown that Canada lacked cohesion at a governmental level, to align and establish standards and best practices for adult education throughout the country. Provinces determined their own educational requirements, based upon the respective needs they were addressing. Despite a lack of government involvement; or some might argue as a direct result of non-involvement; both eastern and western provinces successfully established organizations to meet their individual requirements. Many of these organizations, or a byproduct of them, still exist today.

Technology has introduced unprecedented flexibility to education through access, space, cost, content and timing. However, these elements were unplanned “ bonuses”. The drive to implement new technologies into education was underscored by the belief that it would be both cost effective and would simulate new technology usage in business; therefore, helping students prepare for the modern work environment.

With the use of electronic communications and telecommunications, it was believed that geographic borders would become inconsequential and the concept of a global culture, would be attractive to corporate interests.
This belief also views distance education as a process and method to accomplish these objectives. Institutions are channeling the power of digital technologies, particularly e-learning, to increase their competitive edge in a global education market.

The strategy enables post-secondary institutions, once considered geographically inaccessible, to develop a global student base. Many professional certificate programs can now be obtained completely online. There is evidence of increased interest in both open and distance learning, particularly with MBA programs. This level of expansion prompts the question of whether distance education is just about economic globalization, or if it has the capacity to attain a more versatile educational objective?

There are other initiatives that evolved from the “open source” online community, that bear consideration. Free exchange of information, software provided as open source, and leveraging the “community” to generate involvement in research activities and problem solving and to finance “kick-starter” campaigns. Financial support is received in the form of several small donations, as an alternative to traditional banking/financing options, with the goal of a community built on co-operation.

CONCLUSION

The term “adult education” is a simple descriptor for such a diverse and complex process. As previously stated, the education of adults takes place daily, in a variety of ways, and through multiple channels. The objectives and the purpose behind the learning process, create a significant distinction between the educational goals for traditional learners; those under the age of 25 and for those of adult learners.

Much of the learning that we receive as children and adolescents, creates the structure and the foundation for ongoing, life-long learning. We are initially taught how to survive and then how to thrive in our environments. Our families, schools, teachers, churches, and neighbours, all served different roles in our lives and influenced our learning and development.

The history of adult education in Canada is firmly rooted in societal aspirations, prompted by the need to develop and unify the nation. These development goals created a labour demand in several industries that could only be met through the addition of thousands of immigrant workers. The desire to preserve the “Canadianization” of the country, lead to the structured education and attempts to assimilate the immigrant labourers into the Hegemonic culture of Canada.

In addition to these educational efforts, a different form of education was taking place amongst the women of Canada, beginning with grassroot efforts in the East. Women were eager to gather together, share information, and educate themselves about the laws that affected them.
Concerned with the injustice of many laws and policies, they set change into motion, keeping with their founding purpose of “building a brighter tomorrow.”

Adult education as a “Movement” sprang from the desire for the social change goals of personal enlightenment, active citizenship, and the engagement of a democratic society. These goals were not arbitrary, they were developed with the intention of addressing the issues of poverty, exploitation, and isolation. Harnessing the power of citizens united in a common goal, the founders created the necessary momentum to spark change at both the individual and social levels.

Prior to these historical changes in Canada, the role of adult education had a very different purpose; one that originated with the introduction of the industrial revolution. The focus had shifted to vocational education, and the aim was to prepare citizens who were accustomed to farming and providing goods and services, to become labourers in large factories in the city. Most of these factory workers endured horrific and deadly working conditions and extreme hardship as a direct result. Concerned individuals such as Karl Marx, refused to sit idly by and watch the ongoing oppression of these workers and this concern lead him to advocate tirelessly for the rights and interests of workers.

After decades of social reform efforts, workers’ rights in North America were finally recognized and measures put in place to protect their safety and well-being. However, despite significant progress in many areas, there remained a prevailing mentality that the purpose of adult education was to provide would-be employees with vocational, skills-based learning. The primary objective was to prepare young adults for their future career, or enhance the skills of existing workers. While there was nothing inherently wrong with this directive designed to meet our economic needs; there was little consideration given to adult education in a much larger capacity. The distinction between education for adults and “adult education” remains an important one. To recognize and establish. The goals of adult education in their truest form have been to liberate, with a focus on “education for life”, not just “for livelihood.” With an emphasis on goals of social change and the promotion of a democratic society; adult education remains a powerful force.

The field of adult education was created with noble intentions; to respond to concerns of exploitation, isolation, and poverty. It has enhanced civil society on a global scale throughout history. The source of power behind adult education, lies in the collective belief that by uniting in a common goal, we can create the catalyst for positive change. With an eye to the future of adult education, we must draw from the lessons of the past. If we are to uphold the goals of life-long education, liberty, and democracy, then we must be aligned in our efforts and accountability, for together we are stronger.
REFERENCES


