

Refereed Article

Academic Adult Education in Canada and the United States (1917-1970): A Chronology of Their Emergence and a Conspectus of Their Development

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Abstract

This essay provides a chronology of the emergence of academic adult education in Canada and the United States (1917-1970), which indicates that each evolution was particularly rapid after World War II. It also provides a historical conspectus of academic adult education's struggle for space and place particularly as it developed graduate programs in universities in Canada and the United States in the postwar period.

Introduction

Academic adult education in Canada and the United States (1917-1970) emerged amid the larger field's desire for increased space (a recognized and useful presence) and place (a respected and valued position) in dominant cultural circles where its presence and impact were often judged peripheral in the institutional and larger sociocultural scheme of things. In this essay I examine this growth and development as well as academic adult education's own struggle to gain cultural status. I begin by presenting a chronology of the emergence of academic adult education in universities in Canada and the United States. I then discuss how higher adult education's historical image as extension impeded the advancement of academic adult education's desired image as a professionally valued university discipline. I focus particularly on academic adult education's struggle for space and place in the university in the post-

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World War II change culture of crisis and challenge. I take up program development in graduate adult education in the context of this struggle, and I reflect on issues and concerns shared by key academic adult educators working as postwar pioneering professionals in academe.

A Chronology of the Emergence Academic Adult Education in Canada and the United States (1917-1970)

Portman (1978), examining the growth and development of higher adult education from about 1920 until the end of World War II, described this period as a time of expansion and innovation. A sociocultural climate marked by increasing population growth, a trend toward urbanization, and the crises of depression and war increased the need for adult education and the concomitant need for the education of adult educators in Canada and the United States. Instrumental, social, and cultural forms of education for adults were seen as part of a solution to society's ills and a way to help adults deal with the ruptures that were occurring in the face of diverse change forces. These ruptures intensified after World War II as the economic and the cultural were radically reconfigured in what Jameson (1991) constructs as an emerging late capitalist society where the intrusions of government and big business became common and ostensibly natural occurrences in people's lives and in sociocultural arenas like adult education. He contends that technology underpinned this emergence and transformed capitalism. During this transformation the economic and the cultural intersected in a border zone where their transitions were neither particularly separate nor particularly synchronized. In this change-force milieu the need of citizen learners and workers for adult education appeared even more pronounced.

Liveright (1960) described the years from 1940 to 1960 as a tremendous growth period for higher adult education. In this period academic adult education, designed to give structure and purpose to the education of adult educators, emerged in a growing number of universities in Canada and the United States. University courses and professional degree programs grew rapidly in number during this period (Selman, 1978, 1995; Verner, 1978). However, Verner (1963, 1964) qualified this growth: While colleges and universities were more involved in adult education, their courses and programs were too traditional (read: insufficiently techno-scientized¹). These offerings were not conducive to meeting the broad range of contemporary adult educational needs generated by the evolvment of a late capitalist culture that gave primacy to method, de-

vice, and technique. Verner (1963, 1964) saw this tendency to uphold tradition as a barrier to the professionalization of adult education at a time when the enterprise remained on the periphery of higher education.

The question of adult education's legitimacy in academe persisted, as did its increasing financial problems as it tried to meet diverse needs in the face of change (Jensen, Liveright, & Hallenbeck, 1964). Nevertheless, a more professionalized kind of adult education did achieve a presence in the university. As the number of graduate programs grew, academic adult educators worked to provide leadership and direction. There was an increase in research in adult education, most of it arising from program growth (Selman, 1978). Houle (1970) recorded that, by 1968, at least twenty universities in Canada and the United States offered a doctoral program in adult education, and "by January 1, 1969, 726 Ph.D.'s [sic] and Ed.D.'s [sic] in adult education had been awarded at North American universities" (p. 116). Adult education had found a home of sorts in the university.

Teachers College, Columbia University, was apparently the first university in the United States to develop a curriculum for the education of adult educators; it had offered a course on the education of immigrants in 1917 (Verner, 1964). The term "adult education" was first included in the title of a university course at Columbia University in 1922 (Houle, 1964; Verner, 1964). Houle (1964) listed 1923-1926 as the birth years of the adult education movement in the United States. He recounted that Columbia University created the first department of adult education in 1930 and, by school year 1931-1932, had developed curricula enabling it to offer graduate adult education degrees. Verner (1964) added that Columbia conferred the first doctorate in adult education in 1935. Ohio State University (introduced in 1931) and the University of Chicago (introduced in 1935) followed Columbia's move and established their own programs in graduate adult education (Houle, 1964). The University of Chicago conferred its first doctorate in 1940 (Verner, 1964). While Syracuse University offered graduate study in adult education beginning in 1936, a graduate degree-granting program was not initiated until 1951 under the guidance of Alexander Charters (Houle, 1964). By 1962 fifteen universities in the United States offered full-scale graduate degree programs in adult education (Houle, 1964). However, some universities without a specific adult education program allowed students to specialize and write dissertations in the field. Thus by the beginning of 1962, thirty universities in the United States had awarded 323 doctorates in adult education (Verner, 1964).

Graduate adult education developed more slowly in Canada; different universities periodically provided special adult education courses (Houle, 1964). Sir George Williams College offered the first undergraduate, single-credit, adult education course in 1934 (Selman, 1995). By 1950 courses could be taken at Laval University, St. Francis Xavier University, Macdonald College, and Sir George Williams College (Kidd, 1950). J. Roby Kidd played an instrumental role in advancing academic adult education in Canada. He advocated formal training for adult educators, announcing that the Canadian Association of Adult Education had plans for a graduate adult education program to be given at one or more universities. He expressed concern with the uneven development of adult education in the country and called for coordination of adult education initiatives at the community, regional, and national levels. He felt that academic adult education could play a leading role in this process (Kidd, 1950).

The Ontario College of Education offered the first graduate adult education course in Canada in 1951 (Selman, 1995). By 1957 seven Canadian universities were involved in delivering some form of academic adult education (Selman, 1995). Nevertheless, the country could boast the existence of only one full-scale graduate-degree program in adult education by the late 1950s. It began under the direction of Alan M. Thomas at the University of British Columbia in 1957, with the first graduate degree being granted in 1960 (Houle, 1964). However, Canadian adult education strengthened its sense of vocation in the 1950s, and academic adult education expanded in the 1960s amid emphases on training adult educators and on institutional development (Selman & Dampier, 1991). In 1968 the University of Montréal became the first French Canadian university to offer an adult education program (Selman, 1995). By 1970 seven Canadian universities offered graduate programs in adult education with the University of British Columbia (introduced in 1961), the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (introduced in 1965), and the University of Montréal (introduced in 1969) offering doctoral programs (Selman & Dampier, 1991).

Academic Adult Education's Image and the Legacy of Higher Adult Education's Image as Extension

The history of the emergence of academic adult education in both Canada and the United States in the era of modern practice is a history of struggle for space and place in the university where adult education's

traditional image as extension impeded attempts to build an image as an academic discipline. The image of adult education as extension, reflecting the field's historical commitment to social education, served to relegate adult education to the realm of the undisciplined in the eyes of many academics working across university disciplines in both countries (Kidd, 1956; Liveright, 1968). Portman (1978), in his analysis of adult education's perennial peripheral location in the university, places the field's long history as extension at the heart of its location problem. While higher adult education as extension took place in the same institutional setting, it was separated by time from the day program of the university and by name—extension—from the central work that was traditionally considered to constitute the university's real role and purpose.

Indeed, Portman (1978) relates that, as the urban university expanded and increasing numbers of adult learners came to its hallowed halls, extension grew within a decidedly distinct separation of day and evening programs. He recounts that, during the 1920s, "the evening session approached or surpassed the day session in total enrollment if not in hours elected" (p. 115). Higher adult education became a rapidly expanding part of higher education in the United States, and its programs resembled increasingly the regular university curriculum. However, many university administrators and faculty discerned higher adult education to be something separate from the real work of the university. Since extension functioned historically as a pragmatic way to meet the educational needs specified by social, cultural, political, and economic change forces, higher adult education as extension (and, consequently, academic adult education by association) had to counter an image as less formally developed, reactive education that responded to time and tides. Higher adult education's community-service education had to be paid for, so extension, even in the best of times, was expected to be self-supporting. When it was not, extension was usually perceived to be a cultural and economic millstone, especially in times of fiscal constraint. This devaluing of its service function relegated extension to a survivalist stance: "While on the one hand it is motivated by the loftiest of ideals, yet, upon sober reflection, . . . [higher adult education as extension] acknowledges, often without regret, the public relations and budgetary objectives which permeate its activities" (Portman, 1978, p. 170).

This lesser location of higher adult education is in keeping with the academy's historical predisposition to deny service-significant currency as an academic function (Kidd, 1956). In contrast to teaching, and certainly in contrast to research, many academics positioned service outside

the essential and basic purposes of the university (Kidd, 1956; MacKenzie, 1978). They characterized extension as an auxiliary, night operation designed to meet the vocational and professional needs of adults leading busy lives. They questioned the credibility of higher adult education programs. These academics considered evening faculty, invariably part-time workers who were underpaid relative to day faculty, to be lower-class educators. This undervalued status of extension faculty persisted in academe despite the fact that, as urban institutions grew in number and in size, higher adult education also enjoyed tremendous expansion.

A Conspectus of Academic Adult Education's Struggle For Space and Place in the University

While academic adult education experienced significant growth and development during the years from 1917 to 1970, this evolvment was most pronounced after World War II when there were more institutions, students, experimentation, and course offerings in higher adult education than ever before (Liveright, 1960; Selman, 1978). Academic adult education attempted to gain space and place in postwar academe, bolstered by both need and opportunity for adult educators in an emerging late capitalist change culture. Extensive efforts to professionalize and techno-scientize modern practice marked the postwar period in Canada and the United States (Selman, 1995; Wilson, 1995). Many academic adult educators contributed substantially to these efforts and advanced the idea of developing a more disciplined practice. They were driven by a desire to secure greater cultural space and place for adult education in a world marked by all-pervasive cultural and economic transformations. However, conflict suffused their initiatives. Academic adult education was caught up in the tensions of an emerging modern practice walking the line between competing identifications as a field of study and a field of practice. These tensions pitted academic adult education's postwar desire to belong to an increasingly techno-scientized university culture (reflecting the values of the dominant culture and its advancing military-industrial complex) against the field's historical tendency to belong to the culture of the surrounding community (reflecting the values of extension education and its service function).

Academic adult education's postwar struggle for space and place in academe occurred as the university itself experienced crises, which became quite pronounced in the midst of the social and cultural upheaval that marked indelibly the 1950s and 1960s (Kerr, 1995; Riesman, 1981).

The university was in metamorphosis. In the 1960s Kerr (1995) used the term “multiversity” to capture its pluralistic nature in a changing cultural and economic milieu. The university had become an institution with many purposes, many centers of power, and many clienteles: “It constituted no single, unified community” (p. 103). Techno-science was the primary change force altering academe during this period. As thoroughgoing cultural and economic ruptures transformed the lifeworld (Jameson, 1991), the research university emerged to provide the infrastructure to support the military-industrial complex and the knowledge economy that emerged in response to the Cold War and Soviet scientific achievements (Kerr, 1995).

The increasing emphasis on techno-scientific research changed academe deeply. It accelerated professionalization of academics and diminished the value of their educational role (Kerr, 1995; Touraine, 1974). Indeed, science transformed the culture of academe. Touraine (1974) remarked, “Science is . . . no longer only a model of knowledge, but a cultural model, a set of social directives for the use of accumulated resources. One society builds research centers and universities as another builds cathedrals or palaces” (p. 121). To have space and place in this milieu, academic adult education and the larger field had to intensify operations in the realm of the techno-scientific. In this realm training in techniques became training in the ideology, values, and interests of the dominant culture (Miliband, 1974). The hope was that this intensification would take adult education beyond a reactive survivalist mode to a space and place as culturally valued education for adults in times of sweeping change forces (Verner, 1963, 1978).

Key questions were asked about the role of the university in the post-World War II change culture of crisis and challenge: What was the university’s responsibility to society and, specifically, to the variously disadvantaged and powerless? What were the community’s rights with respect to the university? How should the university relate to the surrounding community? These debates usually ended in calls for increased university involvement to address everyday life, learning, and work issues affecting citizen workers and learners. Pervasive change forces challenged the university to find new and effective ways to negotiate the social in its surrounding community at a time when the social seemed in perpetual turmoil in the face of unfamiliar late capitalist reconfigurations of the economic and the cultural. At the end of the 1960s Davis (1970) concluded, “Today, there can be no second-hand approach to society’s ills; an epitaph can be ordered in advance for a discipline or an institution

that looks upon its community as incidental or irrelevant” (p. 47). Cohen (1970) captured the university’s dilemma as it faced the challenge of pervasive social change:

The university enters the challenge of the urban period unclear and divided as to its role and functions. It is no longer an integrated community with a single purpose and a common language. At its hub are the graduate schools with their emphasis on research and specialized graduate training. . . . The hub has been attempting to pull the undergraduate programs and the professional schools into its vortex. At the same time, the nature of the urban condition and the problems of society in general are such that they are tugging both of these groups in an opposite direction. (p. 20)

These dynamics indicate that adult education, with its history as a community-based field of practice, struggled to find space and place in academe at a time when the university itself was being challenged to find a proactive space and place in the community.

Perhaps academic adult education could have emerged as the university’s primary connection to the community. However, it remained on the margins of academe for the very reason that it should have been welcomed as the university’s liaison to the community: its history as extension. As mentioned previously, higher adult education as extension historically had provided a primary link between the university and the community it served. Drawing on this history, academic adult education could have mediated attempts to strengthen and develop the university-community connection in ways conducive to meet the challenges brought about by changing community needs in late capitalist society. Yet it was hardly in vogue in techno-scientific times to turn to the field’s history as extension education delivered by caring amateurs who provided social-education services. Thus academic adult educators were left struggling to find space and place in the university as the logical location not only to engage in research and professional development, but also to engage in community development, curriculum and materials development, and adult educational and career counseling (Haygood, 1970). Many of them responded by building an increasingly professionalized and instrumentalized practice to enhance this space and place in light of the growing trend in the university to give increasing prominence to science and technology (Selman, 1978; Verner, 1978).

Program Development in Postwar Academic Adult Education

Academic adult educators took up a key question in their quest to build university programs that enabled the advancement of modern practice: What knowledge and practices should guide the development of academic adult education? Despite the growing demands of the emerging techno-scientized culture that emphasized skills training, answers frequently transcended concerns with the instrumental. Bergevin (1967), underscoring common concerns in academic adult education during the 1950s and 1960s, accentuated the importance of building theory and focusing on the foundations of practice. He believed that programs "should emphasize both broad and specific training in the skills of relationship with others, in communication, and in social, philosophical, and historical concepts affecting human conduct" (p. 62).

Thomas (1963) located himself similarly when he described the development of the graduate adult education program at the University of British Columbia. He stated that this program gave precedence to "the political, economic, and social implications of adult education, [sic] and the problems of power and responsibility that arise" (p. 341). Thomas concluded that two needs had to be met to develop programs in graduate adult education. First, there was the need to address "the imposition of the habitual format of the University on material which in its very nature must challenge the . . . organization of knowledge" (p. 341). Second, there was the need to consider student clientele and the community as core elements in program development. His first point intimated that traditional university methods and techniques were not always conducive to the design of adult education. His second point suggested that the individual and the social were complementary emphases in the education of adults. Thomas recognized that adult education had a diverse clientele who required a worldly education. Adult learners needed programs where theory, research, and practice were engaged to meet individual and group needs in the local community and beyond.

Liveright (1964) concurred with Bergevin and Thomas with regard to the importance of these elements of program design in academic adult education. However, he cautioned that it was neither possible nor desirable to set out specifically the organization or content of graduate adult education in some fixed and encompassing sense. He believed that the diverse nature of adult education was a major factor inhibiting the setting

of common aims and objectives that would identify competencies for graduate programs and entrance into them:

The fact that practitioners of adult education . . . vary so in the organizations and institutions they represent, their tasks and responsibilities, background, prior education and training, [sic] and the fact that they hold such differing images of the field, [sic] has [sic] special implications for a graduate program. (p. 94)

Verner (1969) identified another key factor inhibiting the unambiguous delineation of the role of adult education in the university: the lack of understanding of adult education as a component of all education.

The growth in [graduate professional] programs [in adult education] has not been entirely logical or constructive as it has tended to occur slowly within Schools of Education where it has been viewed primarily as an extension of pedagogy rather than a distinct subject with its own unique body of knowledge and practice. (p. 133)

Despite these difficulties, Liveright (1964) felt it was possible to give at least a general depiction of what constituted graduate studies in the field. Verner (1964) provided such a depiction in his summary of core courses undergirding many established graduate programs in academic adult education in Canada and the United States in the 1960s. They included (a) a survey course serving as an introduction to the field; (b) a foundations course investigating the philosophical, social, historical, and psychological foundations of adult education; (c) a program-planning course looking at connections between adult learning and program design; (d) a process course studying connections between adult learning and method, device, and technique; (e) a community-study course connecting adult education to the social needs of the community and examining how adult education functions in community institutions; and (f) field work involving a practicum where theory and principles learned in graduate study are applied to community-based adult education programs.

Yet Liveright (1960) knew that such a depiction neither solidified nor entrenched academic adult education's status as a discipline designed to train professional adult educators. Houle (1964) agreed. He attested to adult education's identity as something less than a discipline when he listed diverse concerns intimating the under-structured and diffuse nature of graduate adult education in the 1960s. First, no clearly delineated

and universally accepted outlines of study existed. Second, an inadequate research base hampered professional enterprise development. Third, no foundation in undergraduate study was in place to prepare practitioners whose first orientation to formalized adult education was usually at the graduate level. Fourth, insufficient funds for fellowships limited access to graduate programs. Fifth, graduate adult education programs were often part of faculties of education where they were overly reliant on established courses geared to public education (schooling for children). Sixth, the formal organization of graduate adult education lacked a clear identity in universities where programs ranged from recognized specialties to programs that were subsets of larger concentrations like educational foundations to programs divided up among several fields.

Concluding Perspective

While universities tended to give little space and place to it, and while program development in graduate adult education was still in metamorphosis, academic adult education made significant inroads into the university during the years from 1917 to 1970. This expansion was linked inextricably to the growth of higher adult education, which Liveright (1960) claimed had become the field's most pervasive characteristic. He related that higher adult education in colleges and universities pursued two main goals as it worked to ensconce learning as a lifelong process: (a) to conduct vocational training and (b) to engage in continuing education for civic responsibility and individual growth and development. Academic adult education had the important task of educating the educators who would work to achieve these goals. Liveright (1960) offered four challenges to academic adult educators working to professionalize and techno-scientize modern practice: (a) to measure their success in training other adult educators, (b) to develop further methods and techniques, (c) to continue building a knowledge base for the field, and (d) to conduct research focused primarily on practice. He hoped that meeting these challenges would enable academic adult education to increase its space and place in the university.

Endnote

¹ The terms techno-scientization, individualization, professionalization, and institutionalization are used to name postwar trends associated with the emergence of systematized academic adult education in Canada and

the United States. Specifically, the term techno-scientization is used to represent the inextricable link between scientific progress and technological achievement. These dynamics have had a significant impact on adult educational and other cultural formations as a post-World War II culture of crisis and challenge developed in both countries.

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