

Michael Schemmann (Hg.)

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Trends and Issues in Canadian Adult Education Research



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Inhalt

Tom Sork, Michael Schemmann

Trends and Issues in Canadian Adult Education Research. An Introduction to the Topic 7

I Thematischer Schwerpunkt/Key Subject 17

Ralf St. Clair

All dressed up and nowhere to go: PIAAC in Canada 19

Maren Elfert, Judith Walker

Level 3, Bureaucrats, and Stigmatization: Why “Mainstreaming” Literacy Failed in Canada 33

Shauna Butterwick

Out of the Shadows: Women’s Adult Education Leadership in Canada 51

Francine Emmonds

Indigenous Approaches to Adult Basic Education Research: Lessons from the Elders 71

II Vermischtes/Miscellaneous 83

Dörthe Herbrechter, Eva Hahnraath, Xenia Kuhn

Professionelle Lerngemeinschaften als Konzept zur berufsbegleitenden Professionalitätsentwicklung der Lehrenden in der Erwachsenen- und Weiterbildung? Ein narratives Review 85

Dennis Klinkhammer, Michael Schemmann

User-generated Student Course Evaluations: (How) Can Key Competencies become Systematic Evaluation Parameters? 107

III Rezensionen/Reviews 123

Carolin Radtke

Rezension: Schriftsprache im Kontext von Habitus und Milieu 125

Martina Engels

Rezension: Mixed Methods als methodologische Perspektive in den Sozialwissenschaften 129

Trends and Issues in Canadian Adult Education Research. An Introduction to the Topic

TOM SORK, MICHAEL SCHEMMANN

The 41st volume of the *International Yearbook of Adult Education* is dedicated to Canadian Adult Education Research and is edited by Tom Sork as a guest editor and Michael Schemmann. The decision to focus on this topic goes back to the editor's last year's visit as a guest scientist at the University of British Columbia which allowed for several discussions about the current state of Adult Education Research in Canada and Germany. As a consequence, this volume is conceptualized to display the ongoing research of Canadian Adult Education in order to present a folio on which Adult Education Research in other countries can be reflected. As such this volume is meant to exhibit current topics and theoretical and methodological approaches as well as empirical findings which are highly relevant in Canadian Adult Education Research.

However, before presenting the concept of this year's volume, we want to give an overview of basic infrastructures and fora of Canadian Adult Education and in that way start off by mapping the field. We will begin with a brief historical overview of the development of Adult Education Research before taking a look at trends and issues over the time. To get an idea of the genesis of research topics over time, we will analyze both the themes of the annual conferences of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE) and the topics of the volumes of the Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education (CJSAE). Following that step, we will introduce the concept of this volume and give an overview of the contributions before concluding with some remarks by the editor on changes concerning the International Yearbook of Adult Education.

1 Development and Infrastructure of Adult Education Research in Canada

The practical side of adult education dates back to the nineteenth century and sees lines of development in learning opportunities for workers, extramural courses from Universities and social movements like the women's movement. Accordingly, Canadian Adult Education has a longstanding tradition and developed characteristics that can still be traced at present (Nesbit & Hall 2011). In 1998, Draper and Carere published a selected chronology of adult education in Canada which dates back the origin to even 1800 and which illustrates the rich tradition of adult education in Canada.

This is also underlined in recent publications. An introduction to the field indicates to three distinct and enduring historical lines of Canadian Adult Education:

“A set of unyielding social purposes, informed by passion and outrage, and rooted in a concern for the less-privileged.

A systematic and sustained philosophical and critical analysis that develops the abilities to connect immediate, individual experiences with underlying societal structures.

A keen attention to the specific sites, locations and practices where such purposes and analyses are made real in the lives of Canadians (Fenwick, Nesbit & Spencer 2006, p.17).”

As a field of study, the development began rather late. It was during the 1950s that first initiatives towards professionalization could be traced. As such, first organizations of adult educators appeared in some provinces and the Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE) as a practice-oriented organization began to organize some regional conferences (Grace & Kelland 2006, p. 12). What is more, universities started to offer credit courses at that time, which were mostly taught by Roby Kidd. The University of British Columbia was the first University to offer a Master’s program in adult education in 1957.

In the meantime, there is a Master’s program on adult education offered in each province. The databank “mastersportal.com” indicates to eight Master’s programs in Adult Education in Canada. Three of them are offered by the Universities of British Columbia in Victoria (Curriculum and Instruction) and Vancouver (Adult Learning and Education; Adult Learning and Global Change, online). Furthermore, adult education programs are offered at the Saint Francis Xavier University, Antigonish (Adult Education) and the University of Calgary (Adult Learning). Somewhat more general programs which include adult education modules are offered at the University of Alberta, Edmonton (Aging), at Athabasca University (Integrated Studies Adult Education) and at the Concordia University Montréal (Education Studies).¹ Certainly, the program offered by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) of the University of Toronto needs to be added to this list. As regards doctoral programs, the larger ones are to be found at the University of Toronto, the University of Calgary and the University of British Columbia.

Coming back to the beginnings of the development around the late 1950s, Canada’s caliber in the field of adult education and its worldwide standing at that time became evident in 1960, when the Second World Conference on Adult Education of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was held at Mac Gill University in Montreal and Roby Kidd was elected as its President (de Maeyer 1997, p. 27). Adult Education both in Canada as well as in the whole world had experienced extraordinary growth and consequently the conference articulated the confidence that adult education will develop as an integral part of the chain of

1 www.mastersportal.com (June 12th 2018).

education in a lifelong perspective. What is more, Roby Kidd also became the first chairperson of the UNESCO international committee for the expansion of adult education which was also responsible the follow-up of the conference (ibid.). The eminence of Canadian Adult Education in an international perspective also becomes evident when looking at other Canadian personalities and their engagement in international organizations. As further examples we would like to hint to Budd Hall, who served as President of the International Council of Adult Education (ICAE), and Paul Bélanger, who also served as President of ICAE and also as Director of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning in Hamburg, Germany. We would also like to indicate to the role of Statistics Canada in establishing and realizing the PIAAC study by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) (St. Clair 2016).

One further major milestone in the development of Canadian Adult Education Research can be seen in the foundation of the CASAE. CASAE was founded as an expert association for researchers in 1981. About two decades before, it was American organizations that had attracted Canadian professors and researchers. Roby Kidd and James Draper, OISE, however, took the initiative and started a process that led to the foundation of CASAE. In 1980 there was a meeting at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, which was attended by 75 people (Grace & Kelland 2006, p.10). The meeting discussed the general idea of an organization for the study of adult education in Canada as well as its nature, i. e. its purpose, function, goals, finances and steering committee (ibid.). The foundation of CASAE is certainly a landmark in establishing Canadian Adult Education Research.

Finally, as regards the infrastructural development of Canadian Adult Education Research, the launch of the CJSAE in 1987 by CASAE needs to be pointed out. Since the Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education is no longer published (authors are asked to contact the new Journal of Professional, Continuing and Online Education), it is the only well-established Canadian journal for Adult Education Research. CJSAE has the intention to disseminate knowledge gained in adult education research. It is a refereed journal that is published in May and November each year, since November 2012 online only. It also provides immediate open access to the content.

2 Trends and Issues in Canadian Adult Education Research

In order to get an overview of the trends and issues as well as the topics that were researched during time, we would like to undertake an analysis of both the themes of the annual conferences of CASAE and the topics of the volumes of the CJSAE.

As regards CASAE, there is documentation of the annual conferences to be found dating back to 1995. Thus, our analysis will start in that year and will end in 2018. Concerning the conferences from 2011 onwards, they did not have a clear topic

in the call for papers anymore but asked more generally for proposals. Therefore, they are not included systematically in our analysis. What is more, the 19th annual conference in 2000 at University of British Columbia, Vancouver, was an international conference held in cooperation with other national associations like the Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults (SCUTREA) or the Adult Learning Australia – Research Network (ALA-RN) and international associations like the European Society for Research in the Education of Adults (ESREA) and thus also did not have a specific topic. Consequently, fifteen topics could be taken into account within this analysis.

When considering the results, it does not come as a surprise that the topics have a tendency to initiate reflection. Thus, the terms “thinking” and “re-thinking” are found quite frequently. What is more, these initiations of reflection are also connected with temporal elements. As such, reflection of *The Past, The Present, The Future* (1995) can be found as well as *Shaping the Future* (1998) or *Challenges of Adult Education in the 21st Century* (2005). Furthermore, a focus on space and the dialogue of the local and the global can be observed. The global dimension was at the center in 2008 with the title *Thinking beyond borders. Global Ideas, Global Values*. But also, the local dimension came to the fore with titles like *Learning in Community* (2007), *Rethinking Community* (1997) or *The City. A Festival of Knowledge* (2006). As a last, findings it can also be pointed out, that the titles very often allude to the roots of the adult education movement. As examples we hint to *Adult Education for Democracy, Social Justice and a Culture of Peace* (2004) or *Re-thinking Community. Culture, Solidarity, Survival* (1997). Elements of vocational education and training can be found once in the title *Rethinking Education, Training and Employment* (1996). All in all, it seems that Canadian Adult Education Research is very much oriented towards the tradition of liberal adult education. However, we are aware that our conclusion must bare the limitations of such an analysis in mind. Therefore, we point out that this is only one glimpse at trends and issues in Canadian Adult Education Research.

Another glimpse can be gained by looking at the titles of the numbers within the volumes of CJSAE. Launched in 1987, the volumes only started to have a thematic focus as of the year 2007. Due to a few exceptions since then, seventeen issues can be analyzed in view of their thematic focus. In the volumes before 2007, however, all in all three articles and one special issue could be identified, which somehow analyze the at that time state of Canadian Adult Education. We will refer to these articles and the special issue before analyzing the thematic focus of the seventeen issues.

In 1989 Garrison and Baskett from the University of Calgary published an article titled *A Survey of Adult Education Research in Canada* (Garrison & Baskett 1989). They surveyed the 1986 membership of CASAE in order to analyze both nature and extent of Adult Education Research in Canada. All in all, 247 CASAE member questionnaires were sent out, 60.7% (150) replied after one reminder. The reported findings display demographics, academic background, affiliation and experience, job description, barriers to publishing, areas of research and numbers as well as types of

publication. However, the most striking findings were that only 10% of the university affiliates understood research as their major job. What is more, 4% of the respondents claimed to spend more than 40% of their time on research; also, the research areas and interests of respondents were quite diverse (ibid., p. 32).

The above-mentioned special issue titled *Adult Education Research in Canada* is to be seen in the context of UNESCO's Fifth World Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V) held in Hamburg in 1997. The UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning as the organizing unit came up with the idea of a world trend analysis on Adult Education Research. It gave the mandate to organize this to the Canadian UNESCO commission. The Canadian UNESCO Commission invited colleagues to work on this survey and the various contributions were brought together in a symposium held in 1993 in Ottawa, Canada. This special issue covers six reports that were written after the symposium as well as two articles from observers of the Canadian scene.

In 1999 Welton published an article on the eve of the millennium titled *Research Perspectives towards the 21st Century. Where are we and what do we do now?* In his article he refers to the special issue of CJSAE presented above and a publication titled *Learning for Life*. He takes changes in the debate on universities as a starting point. As such he refers to the predominance of natural sciences and the growing influence of the marketplace. Welton (1999, p. 20) states, that the

“texts make it pellucidly clear that no matter how hard we adult educators have tried, we have not succeeded in establishing a full-fledged discipline of adult learning in the academy, despite millions of dollars of research monies, lots of empirical work, and reports generated within Thomas Kuhn's normal service paradigm”.

By further reflecting on the historical development of Canadian Adult Education Research, Welton suggests four striking themes that he considers as a basis for future reflection. First, with Canadian Adult Education at a crossroad and not having established an own singular identity, he suggests to maintain the social frame for adult education. Secondly, Welton proposes to think optimistically about the chances and possibilities of an interconnected globalized world instead of focusing on the risks and dangers. Thirdly, he advises to think about the values that Canadian academic adult educators want to keep up in a work society that is in crisis. And fourthly, Welton suggests to focus on the renewal of democratic citizenship in the global era (Welton 1999, p. 24f.).

In 2003 Butterwick, Fenwick and Mojab published an article on Canadian Adult Education Research in the 1990s (Butterwick, Fenwick & Mojab, p. 2003). Their starting point was a debate in which on the one hand an erosion of the social movement legacy of adult education was to be observed. On the other hand, it was argued that the boom of feminist theory, poststructuralism, cultural studies and postmodern approaches led to the fragmentation of the core adult education. Consequently, they examined the liberatory potential of adult education and analyzed three different sets of data: articles of CJSAE, student graduate theses and the conference proceedings of

CASAE. Analyzing in an inductive approach, each study had its own themes, categories and ways of coding data. In the article the authors displayed the results of juxtaposing and comparing the independent studies. As a central finding the study reports, that “attending to social inequalities does not appear to be simply ‘fashionable’ as some have suggested; it has been a persistent, albeit marginal theme in the research reported in these data sets across this decade” (ibid., p. 15). However, the study also showed that hardly any attention is given to the study of race, class and sexuality in Canadian Adult Education Research.

When looking at the thematic foci of the issues as of 2007, it becomes obvious, that the journal has been quite focused with Canadian Adult Education in a self-reflective way for a longer period of time. As such, volume 20, 1 is titled *Adult Education in our Country*, volume 21, 1 *The Continued Dynamism of Canadian Adult Education*, volume 21, 2 *Adult Education in Troubling Times*. To continue, volume 22, 2 is titled *Staying the Course*, volume 23, 1 *Canadian Adult Education. Neither Dying nor Dead*. This tendency ends with volume 23, 2 titled *Keeping the Flame alive*. Next to that, a sociological focus can be identified, represented by titles like *The entwinement of Learning and Social Structures* (volume 25, 1) and *Exploring Society’s influence on Learning* (volume 25, 2) (The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education 2007ff.). What is more, it has to be noted that there is a strong representation of feminist research on adult education represented in the journal.

In conclusion, our brief and rough analysis showed that Canadian Adult Education Research has a tendency to be highly self-reflective, very much focused on social dynamics and social issues, shows a strong representation of feminist approaches and is highly obliged to the classical idea of adult education contributing to empowerment and enlightenment.

3 On the Concept and the Individual Contributions

The concept of this volume with the intention to display Canadian Adult Research capacity is based on the understanding of adult education as a multilevel system. As such, Adult Education is not only confined to the actual learning processes but rather has to take into account the level of the organization as well as the level of society. Thus, we followed the differentiation between the macro, meso and micro level when conceptualizing this volume.

To the macro level the articles of *Ralf St. Clair* as well as by *Maren Elfert* and *Judith Walker* can be assigned.

The article *All dressed up and nowhere to go: PIAAC in Canada* by *Ralf St. Clair* from the University of Victoria focuses on the relationship between adult education research and policy making. The author creates a case study of Canada drawing on an analysis of grey and academic literature, various interviews with experts and his personal knowledge as an academic within the field. The paper starts out by analyzing the involvement of Canada in the series of surveys carried out since the 1990s as

well as their theoretical foundations. It then takes a look at the governance and general development of literacy programs in Canada resulting in the conclusion that the impact of PIAAC data on policy and practice is rather limited. By applying the actor network theory *Ralf St. Clair* then tries to theoretically explain the reasons for the limitation.

Maren Elfert and *Judith Walker* focus on the history of literacy in Canada. In their article titled *Level 3, Bureaucrats and Stigmatisation: Why 'Mainstreaming' Literacy Failed in Canada* they differentiate three phases in the Canadian history of literacy. As such, the first phase is dated from 1970 to the publication of the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) and is to be understood as the phase when the interest in literacy in Canadian society grew and certainly reached its peak. It was also the phase in which a profound adult education infrastructure was developed. The second phase dates from the publication of the IALS till 2005 whereas the third phase since 2006 saw a clear policy shift towards literacy which is framed as a failure of mainstreaming literacy. Mainstreaming literacy refers to bringing literacy from the periphery to the center of political interest and institutionalizing adult education policy. The paper analyses the reasons for this failure empirically based on interviews with stakeholders.

The articles by *Shauna Butterwick* and *Francine Emmonds* can be assigned to the meso and micro level. Whereas *Shauna Butterwick* focuses on women's contributions to the development of Canadian adult education and its organizations, *Francine Emmonds* argues both at the meso and micro level when taking the contribution of Elders to indigenous adult learning next to organizations that offer adult basic education into focus.

Shauna Butterwick's article titled *Out of the Shadows: Women's Adult Education Leadership in Canada* takes its starting point in the development of Canadian adult education. However, women's contribution to this development remain rather invisible even though they are significant, substantive and manifold. Thus, the central goal of the article is to highlight some of these contributions and to explore their outreach and their consequences. On the one hand *Shauna Butterwick* focuses on Women's leadership in social movements and analyses the leadership in Atlantic Canada, African Canadian women's leadership and more contemporary initiatives of feminist activists as well as indigenous women's leadership. On the other hand, she focuses on women's leadership in the creation of feminist organizations and spaces within formal institutions. As such amongst others the Canadian Association for Adult Education as well as literacy campaigns and libraries come to the fore. The paper concludes with reflections on how important it is to highlight women's contributions in order to have a complete picture of Canadian adult education leadership.

The article *Indigenous Approaches to Adult Basic Education Research: Lessons learned from the Elders* by *Francine Emmonds* focuses on Adult Education Research which considers indigenous ways of knowing and learning. The article concentrates particularly on the role of indigenous elders in interpreting and communicating oral teaching dealing with life and lifelong learning. The paper offers a twofold perspec-