

New Agendas for Research and Program Development

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Over the past two decades there has been a growing and continuous desire on the part of members of society to have increased access to learning opportunities. Research done by Allan Tough (1979) and others has demonstrated that most adults are frequently involved in new learning:

“Almost everyone undertakes at least one or two major learning efforts a year and some individuals undertake as many as 15 or 20. The median is eight learning projects a year, involving eight distinct areas of knowledge and skill” (Tough, p. 1).

Tough's work indicates that all members of our society have developed mechanisms by which they can learn new skills, knowledge and attitudes. Clearly the choice of mechanisms is often left to the individual adult, and the vehicle often chosen is that of a formal organization. In this context, it is important to note that a study by CAAE (1982) showed that 95% of all Canadians who were engaged in course activities chose to participate in an organizational setting (college, university, HRD department, school system, voluntary organization, etc.).

Given the importance of formal organizations as a vehicle for adult learning, it is incumbent on the field to understand the training systems in place for those who manage adult learning in these settings. What is the nature of the training that is shaping the attitudes, knowledge and skills for these educational administrators?

The purpose of this study is to explore the type of administrative training being offered in Canada to current and potential administrators of Adult Education. To do this, the paper will first describe the types of organizations that provide Adult Education; secondly, describe programs in Canada that prepare managers of Adult Education; and thirdly, offer some thought on an agenda for research and development program in the field of Adult Education administration.

Organizing Adult Education

The field of Adult Education is based upon a fundamental belief that education is a life-long preoccupation of all people in our society. At the individual level, we know that people learn how to adapt to a wide variety of life situations: the acquisition of life-supporting necessities, marriage, having children, choosing a new job, learning new technologies, improving relationships, participating politically, etc. People in our society have been able to learn about these situations in the past, and there is no question about their ability to learn in the future.

While these general situations have not changed over time, what has changed has been the nature of how people receive support for learning and adapting. Over the past 100 or so years, our society has changed into an organizational society. From the time we are born (usually in a hospital), to the time we are buried (often through the services of a funeral home), our lives constantly intersect with organizations. This is also true regarding

organizations which support adult learning projects. Welton (1988) provided Canadians with a wonderful historical review of a few of the organizations which have helped Canadians learn and adapt to the world around them. His text provides short case studies on a wide selection of organizations which have empowered adults by providing opportunities to learn new skills, knowledge and insights.

Welton's text only touches the surface of the types of organizations which are providing opportunities for adult learning. Exhibit I provides an attempt to capture the complexity of the Adult Education field and the institutions that serve it. It illustrates that almost all forms of human organizations are providing, or have the potential to provide, opportunities for adult learning. They vary along many dimensions. Some (e.g. universities) have Adult Education as their primary purpose, while other institutions (e.g. private sector or firms) are those organizations which have not always captured how supporting adult learning furthers their own organizational goals. The aims of these institutions vary from providing learning for employment to organizations (e.g. trade schools) which help New Canadians learn a new culture. Similarly, they vary from learning for recreation and pleasure (e.g. YMCA's) to learning for entry into one of the certificated professions. In short, today's individuals are being provided with more and more organizational opportunities to pursue their learning needs. Our experience tells us that a growing number of organizations are taking up the challenge of adult learning and providing adult learning opportunities. At issue is that most of these institutions employ people who are responsible for managing a significant amount of resources to support adult education. A survey of Canadian universities indicated that about 20% of the students enrolled in Adult Education training programs across Canada identified themselves as managers of Adult Education in their

respective organizations. As the numbers and size of organizations offering Adult Education services grow, so does the complexity of tasks for those who are asked to manage and chart the organizational waters in this field. This leads us to ask, "How do managers in these organizations learn to manage the learning of adults?"

Training Managers of Adult Learning Organizations

Whether it is in a training department of a major Canadian private sector firm, or in a school's adult education department, there is a growing number of people who are being asked to take on administrative or managerial responsibilities for adult learning. We see this phenomenon on almost a daily basis: Frontier College was asked by CEIC to work on improving literacy in the workplace; Canadian universities and industries are asked to set up new programs to help transfer Canadian technology to the developing world; police departments are asked to help police officers learn how to work in an increasingly multicultural environment. The litany of situations go on and on. However, requests for Adult Education programming, though clear, are far from simple. In identifying and organizing the needs of adult learners, our society is asking adult educators to not only set up learning opportunities, but also to manage a wide array of resources in a turbulent environment. Frontier College will need to organize a complex array of resources and utilize these resources in planning, marketing, financing, staffing, programming and monitoring the goals of the project. This holds true for Canadian universities, police departments, and any other institutions involved in Adult Education. In other words, imbedded in our society's desire to identify and meet adult learning needs, there is an equally important requirement to manage the resources given to meet those learning needs. Thus, managers of adult learning must not

only develop strategies to generate resources, but, as well, manage these resources effectively and efficiently.

How do Canadian managers of adult education learn these administrative skills? In general, people who take a management position develop their skills either before they enter their administrative role (pre-service) or while they are carrying it out (in-service). For example, in most Canadian cities people must first participate in a teacher-training program before obtaining a teaching position. As well, it is evident that teachers have already learned a great deal about teaching through their participation as a student.

In educational terms, people tend to learn in three types of settings:

1) formal, 2) non-formal, and 3) informal. Formal training refers to institutionally-based degree programs. Non-formal training refers to planned educational activities that are usually carried on outside degree programs and informal training refers to life experience, by which everyone acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, and attitudes from daily exposure to their environment.

In Canada, there are no specific formal training programs for managers of Adult Education. People interested in pursuing the field of administration either follow an MBA program, an institutional management course, non-profit sector, educational administration of Adult Education programs, and attempt to adjust the content of the programs to their particular needs. In a study of the catalogues of the major 25 Canadian MBA programs, only four had courses related to managing the training functions in the private sector. With regard to institutional management and the management of the non-profit sector, a review of these programs indicates that few choices are directly associated with managing adult education. For example, in the field of educational administration, only four Canadian

universities of the more than 30 offering degrees have one or more courses in managing Adult Education. Finally, in programs related to Adult Education, 13 of the 21 programs in Canada had one or more course related to managing Adult Education.

Because it appeared that programs of Adult Education had the most opportunities for formal training for administrators, a survey was taken to better understand the types of courses being offered. Exhibit 1 (see page 6) provides a summary of this course data. In general, all 13 programs offered an introduction course to managing Adult Education. The next most frequent courses offered program planning or performance appraisals. As can be seen, three offer courses in policy development, two in finance, and one in marketing. This is hardly a set of programs which will train people to take on adult education management functions in the future.

As for non-formal training in Canada, one finds few universities offering specific training activities for Adult Education administrators, although there are a sizable number of training opportunities within associations, private sector training firms, and continuing education programs. In the areas of non-formal training for adult education administrators, a pot-pourri exists throughout the country, little of which is organized in a way that can be codified or described.

This leads to the informal system of training. In general, this system has been, and remains, how the private and public sectors develop their manager of learning. In school boards, Directors of Adult Education were individuals who had moved up through the ranks to a management position. The same has been true in the private sector and in institutions of higher education. The data implies that you learn how to manage adult learning settings by being in such settings, and providing your own learning agenda.

In general, the learning system most often used for managers of adult learning is work experience. This is typical of many managers but is a double-edged sword. On the positive side, people working in organizations where they manage, learn the culture and "administrative ropes" of the system. On the negative side, such a learning system often reinforces both good and bad practices and is resistant to change.

Are adult education organizations or units administratively different from other types of organizations or units? Do managers of adult education organizations need to have a different set of formal learning opportunities in comparison to school administrators, business administrators or public sector administrators?

This paper assumes that there are significant differences between managing learning settings and managing other activities. The assumption is based upon a number of observations that are crucial to the managing of the adult education enterprise. First, the goals of most adult education organizations or departments are associated with empowering or expanding people's repertoires. This is in juxtaposition with most organizations' need for control. A second difference is that most adult education organizations employ staff on a temporary basis. This differs dramatically from most private and public organizations. Thus, from this assumption the following research agenda is suggested.

Where do we go? A research agenda.

In reviewing administrative training in the management of adult education, one can only conclude that the field is at a very early stage of development. It is clear that an increasing number of adults are engaged in learning in a large number of organizations.

Need for Comparative Analysis of the Characteristics of Adult Learning Systems in Relation to other Organizational Systems

In order to offer opportunities for administrative training, we need to be able to describe both the similarities and differences between adult education organizations or units, and other organizational units. This analysis requires review of such variables as context, personnel, staffing, goals, mission, clientele characteristics, transformation and production systems, coordinating mechanisms and so forth. A more comprehensive set of adult education organizations could also result from such a review.

Need to Understand the Nature of Managerial Work in Adult Education

During the past two decades, management educators have realized how little they know about the type of activities their clientele engage in. This is probably true for the field of adult education. In general, there is little known about the day-to-day activities of those who manage adult education.

Need to Understand the Learning Needs of Adult Education Administrators

Clearly, if the field of adult education is to pay attention to those who administer the field, some concern should be given to understanding who they are and what their learning needs are. Presently, learning needs are assessed at the individual level. That is, each administrator reviews their own needs and develop ways and means to meet their learning needs. A more conceptual and collective analysis might help individuals with their struggle to understand their learning needs and, at the same time, allow the field of adult education to make a more comprehensive statement about administrative learning needs.

Need to better Understand the Existing Learning Systems used by Managers of Adult Learning

How do managers learn how to manage? What strategies do managers of adult learning use to incorporate skills, knowledge and insights into their role? Although there are no formal programs for managers of adult education, this has clearly not stopped them from learning their craft. It would certainly help those who train managers to better understand the modalities being presently utilized by managers of adult learning.

Concluding Comments

Our data indicate that managers of adult education are a forgotten group. Little is known about them, their organizations or learning needs. Most formal programs in Canada provide few structured learning opportunities which focus on typical administrative areas. As for non-formal learning opportunities, there are few central coordinating mechanisms which provide insights into these learning opportunities. As the field of adult education grows, develops and matures, it is clear that more attention needs to be paid to our "Managers of Learning".

Exhibit 1 - Results of a Study on Administrative Courses Offered in Adult Education Programs

COURSE TITLE	NUMBER OF UNIVERSITIES OFFERING COURSES
Introduction to the Administration of Adult Education	13
Program Planning and Appraisal	7
Performance Appraisal	3
Policy Development	3
Leadership Development	2
Development Administration	2
Financing Adult Education Programs	2
Marketing Adult Education Programs	1

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