

REDEFINING ADULT EDUCATION AS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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“None of us is as smart as all of us.” – Ken Blanchard

We define adult education as community development. Likewise, we believe community development practices can often be defined as adult education.

It can be said that perhaps some of the best-known examples of this is the Antigonish Movement or the Fogo Process during the 20th century in rural Atlantic Canada. With a keen interest in both adult education and community development, we have co-authored a work that provides a broad, brief overview of other adult education by post-secondary institutions for community development within the region.

We begin by examining the role of Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador (MUN), a post-secondary institution that has demonstrated adult education as being community development. It is a public university and was upgraded from a college in 1949 by then Premier Joey Smallwood. The extension department was established in 1959. Premier Smallwood had wanted “...an Extension Department with a university tacked on to it, not the other way round” (Gwyn, 1972, p. 293). The MUN Extension Service began to evolve when Donald Snowden, with experience facilitating co-operatives among the Inuit, came to Newfoundland in 1964 and became director of Extension in 1966. Snowden and his colleague, Tony Williamson, from the beginning, seemed to perceive Extension field workers as practitioners of community development and education. “Community development is essentially an educational process. The basic tenet of community development is involvement of local people in identification and

solution of their own problems (Snowden & Williamson, 1984, p. 26). The staff of the extension service were critical to its success in communities, not only during the Fogo Process but in other communities through participatory learning practices and working closely with those who lived in the community.

“It can be seen that the University Extension worker is not task-oriented. He can work with greater flexibility because he is not under directives... He is primarily an adult educator and coordinator concerned with processes which enable the individuals of the community to develop, to choose their own priorities and tasks, to be self-determined” (Snowden & Williamson, 1984, p. 24).

Furthermore, MUN Extension was a principal supporter of the Newfoundland and Labrador Association for Adult Education. In 1991 (the same year the government and university closed the Extension Service) the association was active with members from the government, the university, and public colleges. Its 1991 conference was Adult Educators-Missing in Action. The conference featured recognition of neo-liberal governance and focus on the “streams” of community development and adult education.

In addition to the work of MUN Extension, the College of the North Atlantic (CNA) in Newfoundland and Labrador has a role in adult education and community development in the province. Foley’s (2007) work on examining the adult education role of the College of the North Atlantic on community development provides a detailed, step-by-step process from individual learning to community transformation. The process begins with personal transformation in learning with emphasis on the importance of knowing oneself and the private and public aspects of one’s being. The next step is the realization that one can see themselves as having the ability to control one’s destiny. This step is crucial as it is where the individual builds confidence, gains new knowledge, and can appreciate their strengths (Foley, 2007, p.87). The third step is the move toward a group which involves acceptance of how group development is

a conscious matter that can be learned and developed. Through this group development, it is essential to acknowledge group dynamics and the need for leaders who can guide the development of a healthy group. Steps 5 and 6 of Foley's proposed process involve community organizers working towards a community plan followed by having group members realize they too can be the masters of their destiny (Foley, 2007, p.88). This is reminiscent of Moses Coady and the Antigonish Movement and his work on people becoming masters of their destiny. In his work in a particular region of rural Nova Scotia, Coady (1939) noted that people could share the belief they had the power to determine their future. The final 3 steps in Foley's (2007) 9-step process involve the community taking ownership of itself by establishing the required environments needed to change the social and economic development, i.e. social action. With the desired changes to transform a community, the last step of the process is a permanent system owned and operated by the community. Foley (2007) emphasizes the permanence of the transformation and becoming "...an accepted part of the system," (Foley, 2007, p.89).

Foley (2007) also discusses the overall role of CNA in encouraging people to enter college programs via a "prior learning achievement and recognitions" and an "open entry" policy. Such policies allow for previous formal and informal learning to be respected within the college system. In addition to this, CNA developed specific programs to help improve the literacy level through involvement in adult education programs. Foley (2007) discusses that CNA contributes to a positive lifelong learning culture in Newfoundland and Labrador through the use of informal, capacity-building workshops, sector-specific programs, and three-year diploma programs. He describes how CNA utilizes 6 strategies for influencing development in various regions which include enhancing accessibility, fostering business and economic development, increasing research and development, developing transition programs, increasing literacy, and creating a culture of lifelong learning (Foley, 2007, p.66). Here we see an effort by a college to increase participation in adult education by acknowledging previous learning, reaching people

through workshops, and identifying strategies for development within their region. This demonstrates a conscious effort by a post-secondary institution to engage citizens from various learning backgrounds while also endeavoring to contribute to the community's development. Arguably, this is similar the previously described Memorial University Extension Service.

While our work has primarily discussed Newfoundland and Labrador and post-secondary institutions, it is also noteworthy to consider the use of adult education and community development in larger, urban settings. Large cities in the 21st century are diverse spaces; however, Gelpi (1985) points out that there is a role for lifelong learning in these spaces as they emphasize there are both creative human resources present as well as limited knowledge of the cultural practices and needs of those who live in the city. This reiterates the importance of learning from others and learning from those we wish to teach (Evans et al., 2022, p.55). Whether in an expansive metropolitan area or a rural community in Atlantic Canada, there is a role for lifelong, adult education that contributes to communities.

It is also critical to incorporate Freire's ideas on learning for and within a community. Over half a century ago, Freire noted the significance of dialogue among people. He notes that programs that have little or nothing to do with people should never be provided and that it is not the role of someone else to speak or impose on others our views of the world. One's view of the world reflects their situation and Freire emphasizes that when educational and political action is not aware of situational differences it runs the risk "banking education" or essentially preaching in the desert (Freire, 2018, p. 96). It is seemingly not helpful.

This brief composition provides a high-level overview of adult education as community development provided by post-secondary institutions in Atlantic Canada while also acknowledging that adult education for the community is not only beneficial in rural regions but also relevant in urban settings. Friere and Coady, and many others, are influential leaders in this

field as they believe in learning relevant knowledge for one's own life and that people can be the masters of their own destiny. The quote at the beginning "None of us is as smart as all of us" is applicable here as we believe it demonstrates the power of individual strengths and abilities of people coming together for a shared cause (i.e. community development).

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