

## **Emergence of University-Workplace Learning: Trends from University of Calgary Graduate Programs**

WILLMENT, Jo-Anne H.

Workplace and Adult Learning Program, University of Calgary  
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

**Abstract:** This session explores the emerging discipline of workplace learning through the eyes of an experienced Faculty of Education member responsible for teaching and researching midlife learners in Canada. The session examines four influences: (1) the impact of adult learner demographics in the Canadian population; (2) past and present trends identified from adult graduate learners employed while completing a Master's degree; (3) the present and future needs

of workplace learners (Pappas & Jerman, 2004); and, (4) a graduate Canadian university-workplace learning model from the Faculty of Education, University of Calgary.

### **The Impact of Demographics**

The demographics of Canada have undergone significant shifts since the close of WW 2. The period of 1949-1960 saw a rise in birth rates as Canadian society today lives with the graying of this extraordinarily large baby-boom generation. By 1960, this development was accentuated further with increased rates of Canadian immigration. These forces of change have impacted on Canadian society and continue to push Canada forward in the way it responds to its citizenry.

In surveying Statistics Canada records since the 1950s, Selman, Cooke, Selman and Dampier (1998) concluded that one in twenty-five adult Canadians took part in some form of adult education during the years of 1959-1960 (Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1963), with a rise to one in five Canadians pursuing adult teaching opportunities by 1984 (Devereau, 1984). By 1993, approximately one-third of Canadians had been involved in one or more adult education pursuits in Canada (Statistics Canada, 1993). While the sheer size of the population increases have influenced these demographics, additional factors have also been at work. For example, many parents living through the Depression encouraged their children to finish high school and to complete post-secondary education. As a result, many baby-boomers have been the first to graduate with undergraduate baccalaureate degrees. They have gone on to join employment markets securing higher-level jobs than was otherwise possible for their parents. In following this educational path, this generation gained greater economic stability within contemporary society than would have been otherwise possible.

The impact of this demographic shift also created the development of new learning opportunities in Canada over the sixties and seventies. The introduction of the Canadian community college system in the mid-1960's opened up new formalized learning opportunities for adults interested in the pursuit of formal educational routes; expansion of university offices began the marketing of educational opportunities to 'mature learners'; while new marketing strategies offered educational initiatives through continuing education offices within colleges and universities. As well, informal educational activities outlined by individuals such as Alan Tough (1979) were also on the rise. To respond, adult education departments had faculty (e.g., Cross, Freire, Knox, Knowles, Tough, Havighurst; Houle) who were interested in serving adult learner needs while adding to the scholarly research of the

rapidly expanding adult education field. Some thirty years later, full and part-time adult education certificate programs are available in every Province in Canada.

### **The Development of Adult Education at the University of Calgary**

While documents trace the history of adult education development in Canada (e.g.; Selman, Cooke, Selman & Dampier, 1998) less attention has been given to the founding of adult education at the University of Calgary. The Province of Alberta in 1966 established the University of Calgary with the Faculty of Education serving the educational needs and opportunities of Calgary and the surrounding area. In this year of the 40th Anniversary of the University of Calgary, we pause to examine where we have come from and where we are leading Canada in the adult education field.

The Archives of the University of Calgary Library were searched in August, 2006 to explore documents relevant to this issue. Two programs are of particular interest: The Adult, Community and Higher Education Program, Faculty of Education; and, the Master of Continuing Education Program, Faculty of Continuing Education. The earliest record of adult education from the University of Calgary is found in the early 1980's in the Graduate Calendars of the University of Calgary while the names of graduates are identified in Convocation Assembly documents. Un-restricted Reports written from 1981 to 1993 provide significant historical insights into the way in which adult education was conceived and progressed at the University of Calgary

### **Past & Present Adult Education Programming Trends**

#### **The Decade of the 1980's**

The *Report of the Interfaculty Committee on Community and Adult Education* was published in May, 1981. The Report summarized the work of this joint Committee that was comprised of members drawn from the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Continuing Education. At that time, both Faculties called for the development of a graduate program stream to provide adult learners with opportunities to pursue graduate education within the field of adult education and community education. This was referred to as lifelong learning activities by Tenant and Pogson (1995) and Knapper and Cropley (2000).

From this Report, three recommendations were forwarded to the Deans of both Faculties. These documents as summarized below were subsequently endorsed in principle by the governing councils of both Faculties.

1. The two faculties jointly sponsor a Community/Adult Education Centre which would integrate the resources of the two faculties in meeting the education and training needs of practitioners in the areas of community and adult education.
2. Master's degrees and Graduate Diploma programmes in community and adult education be offered.
3. Undergraduate courses and non-degree offering be made available.

(Report of the Interfaculty Committee, 1981, p.2)

The Committee identified eight foundational principles to be used in the development of adult education at this university. Each principle was well-researched and all were constructed from the prior work of the interfaculty committee; meetings with two Deans and other University personnel; and extensive interviews and consultations with people from outside the University of Calgary residing in communities and workplaces within Calgary. These are summarized below.

1. Interdisciplinary approach in which “programs would also have to meet the needs of students with a wide variety of backgrounds in training and work experience. Appropriate content and methods would have to involve expertise and other resources existing outside the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Continuing Education.
2. Joint faculty sponsorship which would require both Faculties to be involved in teaching and supervisory functions.
3. Use of existing resources and facilities. Programmes should begin on a relatively small scale, using resources and facilities available in the two faculties wherever possible. Proposals for funding at the University level or from external sources could be made at a later date.
4. Flexibility in design and scheduling of program offerings. Considerable flexibility should be provided in the design of programmes and in the scheduling of course offerings to allow for the unique and varied needs of anticipated clientele, and of the organizations which these people represent.
5. Emphasis on practical experiences. Programmes should provide opportunities for unique, practical field experiences, since it is expected that the majority of students will be preparing for leadership roles in practice settings.
6. Priorities in programme development. First consideration should be given to Planning program procedures and course offerings related to the M.Ed, M.A. and graduate diploma levels.
7. Community education/adult education specialization. Graduate level programmes should provide students with a choice of specializing in either community education or adult education. These two areas would have common components but students would still have the opportunity to select options or to develop projects related to one particular areas or the other.
8. Early availability of programmes. Every effort should be made to have programmes in place by the Fall term, 1981.

(Report of the Interfaculty Committee, 1981, p.2)

These principles formally recognized the importance of the educational values and needs held by adult learners within the community. Secondly, they clearly articulated the early adult program directions for the University of Calgary. Third, they identified flexible programming options using non-traditional delivery formats for adult learners including on-

campus Institutes for Summer months and the provision of open-ended programme directions to meet the needs of adult learners. Fourth, they formally recognized part-time graduate student status could enable adults to continue with work while completing their studies. Fifth, they emphasized a faculty committed to the provision of an adult learning approach within a graduate program. In summary, these statements founded the development of adult education in two mainstream Faculties at the University of Calgary.

The Report refers to many meetings that were held over a fifteen month period. A total of “35 individuals within and external to the University were involved in exploratory discussions” (Report, 1981, p. 3). Of these, 22 were held with field-based practitioners who met as a follow-up to the January, 1979 community consultation (Report, 1981, p.3). Two Faculties were of the same opinion that innovative ways could be found to marry the needs of adult learning needs within a solid community market base.

*The development of a graduate degree of community and adult education.* The Interfaculty Report led to the development of a proposal for a graduate degree in community education and adult education offered through the Faculty of Education. This program was to be consistent with the guiding principles outlined in the Report and with regulations governing graduate degrees and diplomas contained in the University of Calgary Graduate calendar (May, 1981). To enable faculty to pursue doctoral opportunities with students interested in scholarly academic careers, the Adult, Community and Higher Education Program for graduates was formed in the early 1980’s. Interestingly, a review of the University of Calgary Graduate Calendar at the time included faculty with research interests in “program development and evaluation; innovative programs; entrepreneurship” (University of Calgary Graduate Calendar, 1985, p.62 ).

### **The Decade of the 1990’s.**

By the 1990s, classrooms were becoming increasingly more difficult to schedule with increasing undergraduate enrolments, while Faculties were exploring new program approaches to maintain their survival. This was the decade of budget cuts, programming rationalizations, financial claw backs, and increased competition between Faculties. An outcome arising from this period was the loss of cross-Faculty initiatives and co-operation.

In 1991 a Report was published by the Faculty of Continuing Education entitled, *Masters of Continuing Education: Learning in the Workplace*. This documented the needs of adult learners and proposed a graduate program designed to address the workplace needs of the adult learner clientele through non-traditional programming. Using computer technology, the program was conceived as a graduate program directed toward adult learners combining face-to-face institutes/seminars/courses with computer-mediated conferencing technologies for non-educational workplace sectors. Adults would draw on the strengths of asynchronous and synchronous electronic text and voice communication to enable cohorts of students to access virtual communities of online learners on a 24 hour basis 7 days per week. With existing instructional space at the University increasingly limited, the delivery of courses could be accessed through electronic communication from the learner’s premises rather than through traditional university classes.

This Report provided further insight into adult education by addressing “communities” as “workplaces” and focusing on the needs, opportunities, strengths and flexible delivery opportunities to reach adult learners at their workplace. Online classes would be offered rather than extensive face-to-face instruction. This was a significant step forward for the field

of adult on-line learning education within Canada. Further, learner software was proposed that provided efficient and effective communication across administrative, faculty and student levels. This system would enable classes of 20 learners to progress through the first 16 months of this graduate program while offering collegial support between students. The use of electronic software capabilities that electronically link students together are now common, but these were infrequently seen within the early days of graduate online adult education in Canada.

Costs associated with telecommunication, computer and administrative services would be handled outside the regular tuition policy in a cost-recovery financial model. While fees were higher than standard tuition rates, the opportunity for sponsorship as a workplace graduate program could be presented to employers by adult learners interested in pursuing this graduate program. This would be a new development for employers interested in investing in those employees who might act as a 'bridge' linking academic theory of a university with the practitioner perspective within the workplace.

*The development of the graduate degree of continuing education.* While the Faculty of Continuing Education at the University of Calgary excelled at innovative adult education programming, it lacked a history of administrative procedures with traditional adult graduate programming. To respond to this, the Master of Continuing Education was placed under supervision of the Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Calgary. The program was approved by the University of Calgary Faculty Graduate Council in 1993 with the first class of adult learners admitted to the workplace learning specialization in the June and July of the following year. An evaluation in the mid-1990's, resulted in the development of a second specialization that was identified as Learning and Development.

### **The Decade of 2000**

With the new millennium came new opportunities. Over the 1990s, the Adult, Community and Higher Education had continued to provide increased technological and design innovations and both the MCE and ACHE graduate programs shared many similarities. Both programs had also experienced a loss of faculty due to retirements and leaves with smaller faculty numbers asked to assume greater administrative responsibilities. In spite of these challenges, the adaptation to new teaching, learning and program approaches was welcomed by faculty across both programs.

The solution was for both programs to join forces and by September, 2003, plans were in place to merge the two programs within the Faculty of Education. The Associate Dean, Graduate Division of Educational Research, and faculty from the MCE and the ACHE Programs began to align courses such that each could contribute courses towards a new combined specialization. One year later, the Workplace and Adult Learning (W.A.L.) Program was created, three new faculty positions were added, and additional courses were introduced to reflect the research interests and strengths of the faculty within this new specialization.

Since 2003, course-based and thesis-based master and doctoral programs provide a research focus for workplace and adult learning study. Faculty have formed national and international research agendas, there has been a growth in successful research applications and grants, new opportunities for research are provided between faculty and doctoral students, and opportunities to contribute to workplace and adult education scholarly work are increasingly provided through local, national and international scholarly initiatives. In

summary, the Workplace and Adult Learning Program is modeled on the foundations of adult education that were introduced in 1981 by the interfaculty report and the development of distance education technology and the cohort system development in the 1990s.

### **Present and Future Needs of Adult Learners within Workplaces**

Whereas previously adult learners were limited to pursuing course-based degrees, the Workplace and Adult Learning Program consists of either a course-based or thesis-based degree. These programming directions are designed to address the different needs of audiences.

*Course-based programs.* The Workplace and Adult Learning (WAL) course-based specialization is designed to address:

professionals interested in a leadership role in creating and shaping adult learning environments in their workplace. Work in this area will enhance the skills of professionals, managers and administrators in corporate and management consulting, college teaching, public service, industrial and education administration roles.

(GDER -WAL Website, University of Calgary)

Noted on the website, <http://www.educ.ucalgary.ca/gder/distance/dadult.html>, this course-based distance graduate M.Ed program evolved from the Adult, Community and Higher Education (ACHE) specialization offered through the Faculty of Education, and the Master of Continuing Education (MCE) degree offered by the Faculty of Continuing Education. This distance program requires courses in qualitative and quantitative research and a concentration of courses taken within and outside of the WAL specialization. The completion of an exit paper is examined by external faculty readers at the conclusion of the program. Learners within this program include adults from education, health science, corporate, the not-for-profit sectors and the international field. Including english-as-foreign language instructors from China, Japan and Thailand, adults working to rebuild their education within Kosovo, and Australia learners experiencing the Canadian approach to graduate online learning programs.

*Thesis-based programs.* Adult learners interested in pursuing a thesis-based degree ( MA; EdD, PhD) may focus on research within the emerging international discipline of workplace and adult learning, or they may choose to apply a workplace and adult learning perspective to an occupational area. For example, a doctoral learner is pursuing adult self-assessment strategies for physicians, while a second is addressing the personal and professional outcomes for instructors after they have completed a university faculty development program. These specializations are “commonly interdisciplinary in focus e.g., adult learning theory, marketing higher education, learning in the workplace.” (Retrieved on September 17 from < <http://www.educ.ucalgary.ca/gder/cadult.html>>). Typically, the doctoral requirements include completion of courses, successful passage of research proposal, completion of a candidacy exam, completion and the defense of an oral examination based on the doctoral thesis.

### **Towards a Canadian University-Workplace Model**

A Canadian model for university-workplace opportunities is emerging at the University of Calgary. Four critical and essential elements have been established since 2003.

- 1) A review of Statistics Canada indicates the population of midlife adults will continue to offer an ongoing market for learners interested in pursuing advanced degrees in this academic field.
- 2) The W.A.L. program offers a full-range complete range of graduate degrees with diverse faculty having a strong allegiance towards adult education and learners for which it serves.
- 3) The research base is established with publications and research grants acquired at the faculty, university and national research levels with proven success...
- 4) The W.A.L. Program offers non-traditional delivery methods to learners and workplaces outside the realm of traditional university environment formats.

These four cornerstones form the framework of to support the growth of an emerging university-workplace model within Canada. Each is rooted in the foundations of community learning and adult education developed, tested and proven across three decades. This rubric offers a flexible framework customized to serve across times, locations, and needs. Principles of adult learning are central with workplace environments frequently serving as the common locations for this model. This framework can be offered directly or in collaboration with the Faculty of Education through an interdisciplinary focus and the flexibility and breadth of the framework offers diverse opportunities to shape, guide and direct the threads of this research as the need arises.

Future directions for workplace and adult perspectives include the development of a research agenda focusing on non-traditional education directions (Pappas & Jerman, 2004), marketing and midlife graduate program issues (Willment, 2006). This might be extended to include future faculty-learner research studies (e.g., Willment, Graham, Mahoney, Martinuzzi & Rogers, 2004; Willment & Mahoney, 2004), site-based workplace research studies, employer-sponsored research undertakings and/or external partnerships that would align with this emerging Canadian university-workplace model .

**References**

- Devereau, M. (1984). *One in Every Five: A Survey of Adult Education in Canada*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada & Dept. of Secretary of State.
- Dominion Bureau of Statistics (1963). *Participants in Further Education in Canada*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada. (1993). *Adult Education and Training Survey*. Ottawa.
- Knapper, C & Cropley, A. (2000). *Lifelong Learning in Higher Education*. London: Kogan Page.
- Pappas, J. & Jerman, J. (2004, Fall). Future considerations. In James Pappas and Jerry Jerman, *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, no.103. NY: Wiley Periodicals, Inc.
- Selman, G.; Cooke, M., Selman, M. & Dampier, P. (1998). *Adult Education in Canada*. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc.
- Tenant, M. & Pogson, P. (1995). *Learning and Change in the Adult Years*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Tough, A. (1979). *The Adult's Learning Projects. A Fresh Approach to Theory and Practice in Adult Learning*. Toronto: OISE Press.
- University of Calgary, Faculty of Education, Graduate Division of Educational Research. [www.educ.ucalgary.ca/gder/cadult.html](http://www.educ.ucalgary.ca/gder/cadult.html). Retrieved September 17, 2006
- University of Calgary, Faculty of Education, Graduate Division of Educational Research. [www.educ.ucalgary.ca/gder/distance/dadult.html](http://www.educ.ucalgary.ca/gder/distance/dadult.html). Retrieved September 17, 2006
- University of Calgary. (1993, December). *Masters of Continuing Education: Learning in the Workplace. A Proposed Graduate Program by the Faculty of Continuing Education at the University of Calgary*.
- University of Calgary (2003). *Master of Continuing Education*. Faculty of Continuing Education.
- University of Calgary (1981). Report of the Interfaculty Committee on Community and Adult Education. Faculty of Education/faculty of Continuing Education. Calgary: University of Calgary Archives. Item #1103
- Willment, J. (2006). Midcareer learners in graduate programs: a literature perspective. Paper presented to the *Conference of the Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education*. Toronto, York University, May 29.
- Willment, J. Graham, P., Mahoney, H., Martinuzzi, B, & Rogers, R. (2004). Knowledge-based strategies in Canadian workplaces: Is there a role for continuing education? *Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education*, 30(2), 59-71.
- Willment, J. & Mahoney, M. (2004). Employing a virtual workplace research team within a graduate program. *Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education*, 30(1), 55-70.