

# Reviews / Comptes rendus

## Unearthing Canada's Hidden Past: A Short History of Adult Education

By Michael Welton

(Toronto, ON: Thompson Publishing, 2013, 232 pages)

Michael Welton's *Unearthing Canada's Hidden Past* offers a brief history of adult education that can be taken in comfortably within a few sittings. This is perhaps one of the book's most appealing features if readers are looking for a short, yet reasonably comprehensive account of adult education in Canada from the time of the first contact of European settlers with Canada's Indigenous peoples up to present day. Welton is well known for his histories of Canadian adult education, including the award-winning *Little Mosie from the Margaree: A Biography of Michael Coady* (2001). True to the social justice roots of adult education in Canada, *Unearthing Canada's Hidden Past* includes perspectives on Canadian history that outline the exclusion of women, First Nations, and Black Canadians—in effect, “unearthing” the stories that have not yet been told.

Welton begins his story of adult education in Canada with the “pedagogical encounters” of Canada's First Nations with European settlers, particularly the French Jesuits of the fifteenth century. His description of these encounters sets the stage in further chapters for a history of adult education, characterized as a tension that manifests itself, for example, through the education of “the working man” witnessed during the great industrial transformation at the turn of the twentieth century. In contrast, however, a different story is told of the “stirring of the grass-roots” of adult education. Canadians, through social agencies such as the Women's Institute, were enlightened about the causes of their suffering, empowering larger-than-life individuals such as Violet McNaughton and Nellie McClung, who offered a moral critique of the industrialized society that had taken shape at that time.

Later chapters are devoted to the telling of the story of adult education in Canada in the early twentieth century and the birth of the Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE) in the 1930s. This is followed by an account of the creation of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE) almost a half-century later, which serves presently as the principal association for adult educators in Canada. Welton characterizes contemporary adult education in Canada by “two masters”: instrumentalized learning, typically directed by the performance-driven ethos of the workplace, and learning with a broader perspective on the needs of the marginalized and disenfranchised in society. Through this latter point of view, he brings forward the concept of the “just learning society” as a socially just alternative to the well-known notion of

the learning society, described in 1961 by Canadian adult educator Alan Thomas as “continuous learning” (or lifelong learning) as a central component of educational policy beyond the common school. However, the interests of business have taken an increasingly leading role in defining lifelong learning as the acquisition of competencies and skills to meet the vocational needs of industry (Rubenson & Walker, 2006). Through the notion of the just learning society, adult educators, particularly university educators, are reminded of their connections with communities and their role within society at large, thus keeping faith “with the emancipatory traditions, fought [for] so hard by hundred and hundreds of McNaughtons and Coadys” (p. 229).

While a more in-depth account of the just learning society, and its implications for adult education, might be found in some of Welton's other works, such as *Designing the Just Learning Society* (2005), this history brings the concept to light within the diverse historical contexts of adult education in Canada. Readers may find themselves wanting a more comprehensive and detailed historical account with more attention to the histories of Indigenous peoples, new immigrants, literacy education, as well as aesthetics in adult education. However, this is not the intention of this particular book. The concise and accessible nature of *Unearthing Canada's Hidden Past* gives it the potential for a wider readership well beyond academia. In addition, a generous bibliography has been provided following each of the six chapters. This compact volume offers both new and consummate readers the opportunity to revisit their learned perspectives on adult education, particularly within the contexts of Canadian history.

Reviewed by Paul Kolenick, University of Regina

## REFERENCES

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