

Forum / Tribune

The Life and Death of the Canadian Adult Education Movement

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AUTHORS' NOTE

Part I of this article was written by Gordon Selman; Part II is by Mark Selman. The two parts are each written in the first-person singular to reflect the personal, experiential nature of the observations and inferences being expressed.

The original idea for an article on the life and death of the adult education movement came out of conversations between Gordon Selman and Alan Thomas. Although illness prevented Alan from taking part in the project, Alan and his many contributions to the adult education movement were very present in the authors' minds and no doubt will be in the minds of many readers as well. In recognition of his passing in August 2009, we would like to use the occasion of the publishing of this article to note Alan's contributions, as well as his love of learning, his generous spirit, and his keen intelligence.

ABSTRACT

Adult education in the Western tradition goes back at least to the craft guilds of the Middle Ages; however, the adult education movement, that

RÉSUMÉ

L'éducation aux adultes dans la tradition occidentale remonte au moins à l'époque des guildes d'artisans du Moyen-Âge; cependant,

is, organized attempts to promote and gain support for the practice, had its origins in Canada, at least, in the late 1920s and petered out in the 1990s. Part I of this article traces the development of that movement and includes brief references to the pre-movement years and comments on the periods identified as the Idealistic Period (the late 1920s to 1950) and the Professionalized Period (the early 1950s to the end of the 1980s). Part Two explores the causes of the movement's demise and speculates about its revival.

le mouvement de l'éducation aux adultes, c'est-à-dire des efforts organisés de promouvoir et obtenir du support pour la pratique, a vu naître ses origines au Canada, du moins vers la fin des années 1920 jusqu'à la diminution d'intérêt dans les années 1990. La première partie de cet article trace le développement de ce mouvement et comprend des références brèves aux années pré-mouvement et discute de la période idéaliste (de la fin des années 1920 aux années 1950) et de la période de professionnalisation (du début des années 1950 à la fin des années 1990). La deuxième partie explore les causes de la dévolution et suppose la renaissance du mouvement.

PART I

(Gordon Selman)

My working life in adult education began in 1954 and continued until my retirement in 1992. Having done my graduate work in the field of history, I naturally gave thought over those years to the history and current condition of the field of which I was a part. And, having continued to follow developments in the field during recent decades, I came to realize that major changes had occurred in that period.

When I was looking for a job in the early 1950s, I was directed to the Extension Department of the University of British Columbia by someone I consulted. He thought I would enjoy the work, and I was subsequently hired and joined the staff in September 1954; however, like so many adult education workers, I got into the field with precious little knowledge of what it was all about. It appeared to involve a great deal of work with other people, in both the university and the broader community, as well as generally being among the forces for good in our society. I think I also glimpsed from the outset that it involved "working with people when they are at their best," as a friend has since put it.

Among the things I did not know when I reported for work at the Extension Department was that I would be part of a movement with a considerable history, a movement that was in a state of rapid transition at the time I joined it. I soon gained some knowledge of this under the influence of my director, Dr. John Friesen, and also because the historian within me led me to seek out information about the new business I was in. It was soon clear to me that I had become part of an important field of human endeavour, one to which Canada had made and was still making an outstanding contribution.

I also discovered what could accurately be described as an adult education movement, by which I mean a body of people in this country who were seeking to promote an understanding of and support for such activity within Canadian society. I subsequently became part of that movement, as a practitioner and teacher and as a member of organizations involved in advocacy on behalf of the field. These things were part of my life in adult education for as long as I worked at it, at the local, provincial, and national levels. But what I have come to realize in recent years is that the adult education movement as I knew it is no longer with us.

When I refer to the death of the adult education movement, I do not of course mean the death of adult education or continuing education. Indeed, those activities have never been stronger as a field of practice or as a priority in social and economic planning. The field has grown enormously so far as volume, variety, methodology, and breadth of sponsorship are concerned and has gained acceptance in public policy to a degree none of us even imagined back in the 1950s. It is against that background that I offer the present thesis: that in the span of the period between the late 1920s and the mid-1990s, the Canadian adult education movement grew and flourished for a time but is now no more.

ADULT EDUCATION BEFORE THE MOVEMENT

Programs designed to help adults learn the things they needed or wanted to know go back over many centuries. The history of such activity in Great Britain and in the United States has been documented by the work of Kelly (1962), Knowles (1977), and others. Our knowledge of these earlier forms of activity makes clear that, by and large, they were conducted as separate entities designed to meet specific needs but were not seen by their leaders as being part of an enterprise or movement that went beyond the boundaries of their own organizations. There was little, if any, sense of common cause among those who were providing adult education in the various settings.

One of the earliest examples is that of the craft guilds in Great Britain, which standardized and provided training for men and boys who wished to

enter particular skilled trades. Records of this work go back to the Middle Ages. The regulation of both apprenticeships and progressive levels of qualification in the trades was a widespread practice and indeed still exists in some forms. Early in the 1800s, one of many responses to the impulse for social improvement was the Mechanics' Institute movement. The organization was committed to the vocational and general educational advancement of skilled workmen and flourished in Britain and throughout the Empire and the Commonwealth. Its early focus on the scientific facts underlying the practices of the various trades subsequently was broadened, and many other organizations of the same general type but concerned with a broader type of education came into being. In many cases, the provision of public library services in our communities was inaugurated by these organizations.

The churches were important providers of educational opportunities in the pioneer years, as indeed they still are. And it was largely in the churches that the Young Men's Christian Association and its female counterpart, the YWCA, had their origins. These organizations are significant in the history of adult education not only as providers of programs but also as the settings in which many of the leaders of a more-professionalized field of adult education got their early experience.

To this list of important contributors to adult education, I will add just one more, the Workers' Educational Association, initially founded in Great Britain. The WEA was devoted to providing opportunities for leaders of the labour movement to acquire a liberal education and, to that end, developed a co-operative relationship between interested members of the movement and the universities. Its influence spread throughout the English-speaking world, including Canada, where it made its main contributions in Ontario, though it functioned in other parts of the country as well.

The distinction between these organizations and the broader movement that followed is their preoccupation with the provision of their own particular services. By and large, they did not concern themselves with either the growth of a broader movement or support for the concept of adult education in the broader community.

THE IDEALISTIC PERIOD IN THE PROMOTION OF ADULT EDUCATION

From the early 1930s to the end of the 1950s, adult education in Canada expanded greatly in terms of both variety and extent of participation. It was of course a tumultuous period in the life of the country and many of its citizens. One need only be reminded of the Great Depression of the 1930s and World War II to recall the major challenges that faced Canadians and the requirements for change and learning that were thrust upon so many of them.

During this period, a number of Canada's adult education programs gained an international reputation for their creative contributions to the methodology of the field. A major reason for such contributions was the able people drawn to the field, many of whom believed that adult education could make a significant contribution not only to the lives of individuals but also to our society as a whole. Clearly, the idea of a broadly based liberal education was seen to be a worthy goal, but the fact that Canada was to a great extent an immigrant society added strength and even urgency to education's responsibilities. There was also the belief in many quarters of the "saving power" of education; as a slogan of the day noted, "Learning is more important than what is being learned."

As early as the late 1920s, a number of public-spirited men and women in several provinces who shared such beliefs got together with like-minded community leaders and formed adult education associations. Research into this remarkable development has indicated that such organizations existed in at least six areas of the country—Newfoundland (not yet part of Canada at that time), Prince Edward Island, Quebec's Eastern Townships, Ontario, Manitoba, and Alberta—between that time and the outbreak of the war. These organizations differed widely in character, from those that mainly held public meetings where the idea of adult education was promoted, to others that provided adult education services; they also varied in sponsorship, from that of a traditional voluntary association to direct government sponsorship. Their circumstances, like their sponsorship, varied, but none of them lasted terribly long, soon fading away when funding ran out or the distractions of the wartime emergency got in the way. All of them were defunct by 1950 (Selman, 1995).

During those pre-war and depression years, some of Canada's most worthwhile contributions to the practice of adult education were achieved, and a number of them were adapted, either then or during the decolonization years following the war, for use in other countries. Some of the most noteworthy of these projects were: Frontier College, which took basic second-language and citizenship education to frontier camps across the country; the Antigonish Movement, which applied the methods of the cooperative movement to improve the lives of impoverished people in the Maritime regions; Farm and Citizen's Forum, which combined the use of study materials, radio, and local discussion groups and applied them to the study of issues affecting the lives of people across the country; the National Film Board of Canada, which made films relevant to the lives of Canadians and organized film circuits where these films could be seen and discussed at the small-town and neighbourhood level; and several innovative forms of correspondence or distance education, which helped to offset the problems of the vast distances involved in life in this country. Canadian educators

had not set out to capture the attention of the international community with these programs; they simply devised ways to be relevant and supportive within their own society. In many cases, they did it so well that in due course at least 50 other countries borrowed and adapted those programs for their own use. It was no accident, of course, that a number of these projects involved citizenship education in the widest sense, as well as the means to span large distances in the distribution of program materials. Both were responses to life in Canada, a land with a high rate of immigration and vast territories needing to be served.

Another noteworthy product of this early period was the creation in 1935 of the Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE). The provision in Canada's constitution that assigns responsibility for education to the provinces had been formulated long before national organizations such as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the National Film Board and other information and educational instruments with a national mandate and function came into being. Some of the leaders in Canadian adult education activities, with the support of the Carnegie Foundation of New York, decided a national organization that would foster the growth of adult education activity and relate appropriately to the new national means of communication was needed. The result was the creation of the CAAE and the appointment of an outstanding adult educator from Alberta, Ned Corbett, as its director. Corbett was in a sense the very embodiment of an adult education movement and of the vision of how that field could be used to strengthen Canadian democracy. Under Corbett's leadership, the CAAE was devoted mainly to the task he described as "the imaginative training for citizenship."

The vital contributions of women to the development of the field must also be acknowledged. In addition to contributing to many of the programs and institutions already mentioned, they made some specific distinctive contributions. Their role in all aspects of church activity, much of it educational, is well known, but their contributions to rural life and welfare through many organizations are also impressive. Research on the development of the field during the years of the Great Depression has revealed some remarkable stories, of which three will be mentioned briefly. The first is the magnificent work done by the YWCA during the 1930s to identify employment opportunities and train unemployed women for them. A quite different approach was taken by the Council of Women; it invented a program known as the Self-Help Movement, which trained women in various, mostly home-related skills and provided opportunities for cultural development. The Council also lobbied effectively for measures that affected the interests and welfare of women and their families. Another contribution by women during this period was of value to all sectors of the community: their contribution to the expansion of public library services. In British Columbia, at least, it was mainly women who led the way and pioneered new forms of library service.

What I have termed the “idealistic” phase of the adult education movement did not of course end in the 1950s, when a more professional approach began to emerge. Many of the leaders in the field continued to share the conviction that adult education had a vital role to play in both the personal and social lives of adults. However, as an increasingly professionalized point of view became more prominent, a new sense of the dominant goal of the enterprise emerged. In the earlier stages of the idealistic period, the leadership was inspired to a large extent by the social goals of the movement, but as the more-professionalized spirit became dominant, the focus was less on social goals and more on individual learners. Now, the predominant goal was to enable individuals to expand their powers and abilities and define their own learning goals. In other words, adult educators would enable people to expand their knowledge and skills but individual learners would decide what to do with their new-found knowledge and skills. The dominant goal of the movement thus became the empowerment of the individual, not necessarily to improve the functioning of democratic society.

This shift in the aspirations or motivations of many adult educators was brought home to me very vividly by a particular incident. At the time of this incident, about 1970, British Columbia had three provincial organizations devoted to the support of adult education, and some of the members of these organizations had decided it was time to bring all three together into a single organization. As part of this process, I spoke to a colleague who was mainly involved in vocational education and suggested to him we should think about merging the groups because, for one thing, it might strengthen the impact of our advocacy activity. His initial response, which I remember vividly to this day, was, “Why would we want to unite with a bunch of social reformers like you guys?”

THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF ADULT EDUCATION

An almost explosive growth and a trend toward professionalization were the two most notable features of the adult education field in the decades following World War II. The growth in the rate of technological, social, and cultural change during these years (phenomena that have continued ever since) made the need to provide adults with the means of coping with its impact increasingly obvious. The educational systems responded in various ways, as did governments, businesses, and many other organizations. Beginning mainly in the 1950s, a new series of provincial organizations concerned with the promotion of adult education came into being. In most cases, these bodies were led by professionals working in the field, rather than by public-spirited citizens, and their membership was made up largely of persons who were leaders and staff of agencies providing adult education services.

The earliest of the new style of provincial organization was created in British Columbia in the fall of 1954; by the end of the decade, there were similar bodies in all of the provinces. Although the activities of these groups were varied, in keeping with local needs and wishes, they tended to be of two main types: those aimed at expanding the capacity of their members in the performance of their professional duties and those aimed at lobbying activities within institutional systems and in connection with provincial authorities.

Another aspect of the field that demonstrated a more professional approach was the creation of organizations, mainly at the national level, to promote the professional interests of those working in the field, for example, in universities and in the colleges and institutes that emerged in the provinces in the post-1965 period. A second type of national body was devoted either to research activity in adult education or to particular instructional specialties, such as distance education.

Graduate-degree programs in the field of adult education were also created at a number of universities in Canada during this period. Previously, the handful of Canadians who had earned doctorates in adult education had found it necessary to go to the United States to do so. One of those, Dr. John Friesen, the director of Extension at UBC, encouraged his institution to launch a master's degree in adult education, which was inaugurated in 1957, the first in Canada. It was soon followed by programs in Saskatchewan and Ontario, while others followed in subsequent years.

One other relevant phenomenon came to the fore in this period. Not only did the field of adult education become both more extensive and more professionalized but the education of adults also became more widely recognized in public policy. After some years of relatively unsuccessful efforts to gain greater recognition of the importance of adult or continuing education in public policy, government-sponsored study groups, Royal Commissions, and other major policy studies began to include strong statements of support for it in their reports, describing its contributions to our economic, social, and cultural progress. Indeed, it seemed that almost every set of recommendations concerning the future of Canadian society gave a prominent place to what increasingly was referred to as lifelong learning.

PART II

(*Mark Selman*)

THE WANING OF THE ADULT EDUCATION MOVEMENT

To many in the field, it seemed that the struggle to gain acceptance for adult education in Canadian society had been won. However, this may well have been a factor in the decline of the adult education movement and the advocacy-oriented organizations that were part of it. These organizations consisted mainly of various provincial adult education associations and the national body, the Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE). Established in the mid-1930s, the CAAE had been the leading voice of the field, especially with respect to matters of public policy, for many decades.

The provincial organizations were largely gone by the early 1990s. The CAAE, considered by some as the flagship of the movement at the national level, was in decline by the end of the 1980s.¹ Some speculation about the causes of this decline, as well as an assessment of its effects, may be helpful. There are, in my view, some quite general causes and others more specific to the institutions and practices of adult education.

CAUSES OF THE DECLINE OF THE MOVEMENT

At the societal level, it is worth noticing that the decline in the adult education movement occurred at roughly the same time as the decline in other more-celebrated movements for social change, including most obviously the women's movement and the civil rights movement. Significantly, neither of these movements can be considered to have fully accomplished its objectives. People of colour are still overrepresented in prison populations, and women still earn less than men and are underrepresented in many leadership positions, to mention only a few unmet objectives. But the sense of urgency that seemed to demand collective action to make policy changes has largely dissipated.

This retreat from collective action may have its roots in even broader social phenomena that pervade our societies. It is not only in the area of advocacy for social change that collective action has given way to individualized activities. Robert Putnam's (2000) recognition that, while more Americans than ever engage in the activity of bowling, far fewer are involved in organized bowling leagues than was the case 30 years ago, has become a symbol for this set of changes. Individuals are "bowling alone," as he famously put it. In my experience, this change permeates our society, from the urban centres and their surrounding suburbs to the smallest and most-remote First Nations communities.

In the urban centre of Vancouver, this change can be symbolized by the fact that, whereas in the 1960s and 1970s, the largest outdoor spring event was the Peace March, where people gathered, often collectively under banners representing unions and other organizations, to signify their solidarity with a loose collection of causes, in the last 25 years, the largest public spring event has been the Sun Run, a corporately sponsored 10-kilometre run/walk in which people participate individually or in corporate teams with the primary goal of individual fitness. In small coastal First Nations communities, I am told, it was once commonplace for the women to gather for coffee or tea most afternoons and to exchange recipes and techniques for practicing traditional crafts. Whole communities gathered regularly for collective work parties or to conduct activities such as collecting oolichan (a type of fish) when they were running. Now, in many communities, only funerals seem to be occasions for gathering.

Thus, the decline of the adult education movement is part of a much broader societal change from active involvement in collaborative activities to more individualized activities. In fact, it would be surprising if the adult education movement had remained exempt from the drift from public-spirited co-operative activities and organizations. But this general change tells only part of the story of the decline of adult education as a social movement. I believe there are other causes, and I focus here on four specific causes: 1) a concern about so-called "missionary activities"; 2) specific facts about the structure, values, and rewards within universities and, by extension, other educational institutions; 3) the shift from a focus on adult education to life-long learning; and 4) the movement being too Canadian.

As noted in Part I, the idealistic period of adult education was characterized by an ethos of "sharing the light," whether that took the form of Father Coady reaching the souls of exploited workers by appealing to their desire for economic well-being or the much more general belief in the "saving power" of education. The adult education movement, like any movement, carried within itself a set of assumptions and values, in its case, beliefs about the nature of citizenship and democracy and the value of a liberal education. Although these assumptions and values were more open ended than those of many other movements, they reflected, on the whole, the convictions of an educated middle-class that believed in social progress through citizen participation and did not fully recognize the political content of the movement's message. It was not until Paulo Freire burst on the English-language adult education scene in the 1970s that the political dimensions of the movement began to receive explicit critical attention.

Once one recognizes, in Freire's (1970) words, that any educational act has a political dimension, the role of the adult educator becomes more morally complex. If one begins to question the existence of self-evident truths

and universal values and, more especially, begins to look at society as a struggle between groups with different interests, the very notion that one group of adults can go out and educate another group of adults, across differences of culture and interests, becomes a matter of concern. Thus, I would argue, the idealism that characterized the early phase of the adult education movement ran up against a new set of fears—that educators were promulgating a world view that might not be in the best interests of all those on the receiving end of that education, especially when those on the receiving end were disadvantaged by the existing arrangement of social reality. Such a suspicion tends not only to undermine confidence in any organization that claims to represent the broad-based learning interests of Canadians but also to bolster the view that, to be effective, organizations must be more specifically aligned with the particular interests of segments of society.

A second more-specific challenge was posed by the increasing role of universities and other post-secondary institutions in the movement. As adult education became more professionalized, with its own dedicated graduate programs, academic faculty, and large continuing education units, universities began to play a much-larger role in shaping the beliefs and values of the field. However, within the pecking order of large, complex institutions with established hierarchies, adult and continuing educators have a very limited role in shaping institutional policy and attitudes. And, the attitudes of universities are largely antithetical to the goals of the adult education movement. Universities are not focused on developing active, engaged citizens (even if they sometimes have that effect); instead, they are essentially interested in serving students who have the highest “scholarly potential,” as opposed to ensuring the equitable distribution of educational benefits. For the most part, universities tend to ignore both their role as gatekeepers for the professions and other highly paid roles in society and the fact that their choices exclude some people from the same opportunities for reasons other than merit.

In this kind of environment, it is possible to theorize about education for social equality and to teach the importance of social justice to aspiring adult educators, but the actual practice of adult education as a means to address the interests of people facing disadvantages, or aimed at the public good, is not well supported and is sometimes actively discouraged. Although the lack of fit between the movement of adult education and the ethos of the modern university could be noted in more depth, these few comments may be sufficient to show that educators who are able to maintain a commitment to the goals of the movement are likely to do so in spite of rather than because of institutional incentives and rewards. Under these conditions, university-based adult educators have typically tended to attach themselves

to organizations that serve their interests, such as the need to publish, rather than the broader public interest.

The third cause of the decline of the adult education movement was the shift from adult education to lifelong learning. There were of course very specific, very Canadian reasons for adopting the phrase “lifelong learning.” Lifelong learning could be promoted through federal government policy without fear of transgressing into the provinces’ jurisdiction over education. Beyond that, focusing on “learning” avoids certain problems associated with “education” but at some cost.

Some of the advantages of using learning as a defining concept are obvious. Most obviously, the term “education” often first brings to mind formal systems to prepare young people for roles in society, while “learning” has the virtue of including all the informal ways in which people grow and develop beliefs, values, and capacities throughout their lives. As a matter of public policy, it is important to recognize the difference and to realize that whereas formal educational programs are expensive, largely institutionalized, and deliberate attempts to develop people in particular worthwhile ways, learning is ubiquitous. If, to borrow Alan Thomas’s (1991) phrase, one could get beyond education to the business of managing learning, society might respond more efficiently, quickly, and effectively to its changing circumstances.

However, learning is so ubiquitous and varied, so commonplace and often easily overlooked, there is little to get a grip on.² Every aspect of human beings, the good, the bad, and the in-between, can be a result of learning. People learn racist attitudes and to overlook inequality when it suits them fully as much as they learn to treat others with respect or to develop an appreciation of good literature or good government.

With this in mind, it seems difficult to structure a meaningful movement around the goal of promoting learning full stop. Furthermore, it seems unrealistic to think that any particular set of societal practices or practitioners can have a significant impact on the vast sea of human learning. In this sense, the shift from a focus on adult education to lifelong learning set the agenda so broadly that no group could realistically claim to manage or be responsible for it. In some ways, this new focus opened the door so wide that adult educators became bit players in what had been their own field. People such as Peter Senge (1990), who focus on the shared, potentially transformative nature of learning in organizations, applied many of the ideas and principles of adult educators in the corporate workplace. But, for the most part, learning organizations are corporate organizations, or modelled on corporate organizations, and the focus on equality and citizenship that characterized the adult education movement was left behind.

The fourth cause is related to the waning of confidence in doing things in a distinctively Canadian way, so usefully described by John Ralston Saul in *A Fair Country* (2008). The zenith of the adult education movement occurred roughly at the time when Canada exhibited its greatest sense of confidence in being able to steer an independent path. Based on the “Metis culture” that had evolved in Canada during the fur trade, it was the basis for the country’s unique contributions during the world wars and afterward to defining a “middle way” in international affairs, most notably during the Suez crisis. During this time, Canada’s policies reflected its incorporation of aboriginal norms and practices, including an approach to consensus-based ongoing accommodation of differing interests leading to balance within an ever-enlarging circle. However, for the past 25 years, Canada as a nation and many of its institutions and other organizations have shied away from steering an independent course and have instead tended to act in a colonial fashion, allowing European or American standards to shape how we think and act. Thus, the decline of the uniquely Canadian approach to adult education, shaped by our geography, history, and culture, can be seen as part of our broader failure to steer our own course.

So, I have argued that the decline of the adult education movement was consonant with other societal changes, including the waning of other much-larger movements that accomplished significant social changes but fell well short of fully addressing their original concerns. Further, I’ve claimed that these changes are part of an even broader decline in participation in collective activities in favour of more individualized activities. But in addition to these general social changes that have worked against movements aimed at the public welfare, there are a number of much more specific issues that have challenged the ongoing support for a social movement aimed at promoting “imaginative training for citizenship” and liberal education for those adults who are least likely to have access to it.

I will now consider the effects of the decline of the adult education movement.

POST-MORTEM AND WHAT COMES NEXT?

If one accepts the thesis advanced by my father that there was an adult education movement and that it is now dead or dying, what of it? Movements by their very nature come and go. What of value has been lost?

The primary goals of the adult education movement were to make education accessible to adults who needed it and to improve the quality of citizenship by helping people develop the skills and knowledge required of active, engaged decision-makers. I think it is fair to say that, despite the massive growth of the education system, there remain critical unmet educational

needs among many groups, including immigrants (especially those whose credentials are not properly recognized and who require language training), First Nations, women entering non-traditional trades and professions, and workers displaced by technological and economic shifts. And, there are many who would say that the status of citizenship in this country is at a low point, judging by levels of voter turnout, the quality of participation in public debate, and the apparent paralysis of all levels of government in the face of economic, social, and environmental challenges. It might also be noted that, contrary to the example of several of the adult education movement's strongest initiatives, in most cases, a separation now exists between career-oriented adult education (whether offered by unions, corporations, or public institutions) and education aimed at developing active, engaged citizens who participate effectively in the public sphere.

So, in my view, some kind of organization that focuses on crafting intelligent public policy, channelling and coordinating resources, and stimulating more active, better-informed involvement in public debate is called for. While I am not at all certain this suggestion is possible, I believe there are some signs of a swinging of the pendulum, both in terms of initiatives aimed at helping disadvantaged groups overcome obstacles that have been put in their way and those intended to foster a renewed level of participatory citizenship.

With this in mind, it might be worth speculating on what kind of organization could effectively promote the goals of the late adult education movement. The more specific causes of its decline might offer some suggestions. First, I think that concerns about the missionary nature of the enterprise could be mitigated by a commitment to very broad participation in its governance. By this I mean that governance by people from diverse political and cultural perspectives would tend to allay concerns that any particular agenda or world view was being advanced under the cover of a broad interest in adult education and learning.

Second, it would be important for the organization to be independent, in the sense that it might draw on people, perspectives, and resources from government, universities, other educational institutions, corporations, unions, and civil society but would not be dominated by any particular orientation, particularly not by professional adult educators with academic affiliations.

Third, the organization would need to be clear about its objectives. As I have argued, this would mean avoiding a mandate to speak for all aspects of lifelong learning and instead focusing on more specific goals, such as addressing inequities and inefficiencies caused by public-policy decisions; seeking opportunities for imaginative approaches to citizenship education or for infusing more career-oriented training with content related to active

participation in community and civic life; and recognizing and disseminating information about successful initiatives in the field.

Fourth, it would be strongest if it were built on distinctively Canadian practices and goals, that is, by continuing to develop ways of working creatively with differences while seeking constructive ways forward together.

I do not know whether this is a vision that is widely shared by practitioners in our field. If it is, we should do something about it.

ENDNOTES

1. Professor Arpi Hamalian suggested to me that within French-speaking Quebec, there are a few flickers of life in the adult education movement—"just enough to remind us what we have lost in English-speaking Canada."
2. There are other complications with the shift from education to learning. Learning refers to what linguistic philosophers have called an "upshot" or a result. Learning is not typically used to refer to an activity but rather to what has happened as a result of an activity or event, such as practicing something, reading something, inquiring into something, or encountering something. Careful attention to correct usage makes a mockery of government reports that routinely separate "learners" from "non-learners" on the basis of participation in programs, conveniently ignoring that all sentient beings are learners at some level and that participation doesn't necessarily lead to learning any more than searching necessarily leads to finding.

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BIOGRAPHIES

Gordon Selman is professor emeritus of the University of British Columbia, having worked at that institution as extension worker and professor for 38 years. He is also a past president of both CAUCE and CAAE and was chair of the committee that drafted the constitution for CASAE. He is a co-author of *The Foundations of Adult Education in Canada* and the author of several books, including *Adult Education in Canada: Historical Essays*.

Gordon Selman est professeur émérite à l'Université de la Colombie-Britannique, où il travaille comme employé et professeur depuis 38 ans. Il a œuvré comme président de l'AÉPUC et de l'Association canadienne d'éducation aux adultes, et comme président du comité ayant rédigé la constitution pour l'ACÉEÀ. Co-auteur du livre *The Foundations of Adult Education in Canada*, il est aussi auteur de plusieurs livres, y compris *Adult Education in Canada: Historical Essays*.

Mark Selman develops and manages educational programs in the Faculty of Business Administration at Simon Fraser University, where he has worked for the past 21 years. Most of his work is with large corporations and First Nations communities. He is a former board member of CAAE and a past president of CASAE. He is a co-author of *The Foundations of Adult Education in Canada* and has written a number of articles on philosophical and educational topics.

Mark Selman développe et gère des programmes d'éducation à la Faculté de gestion des affaires de l'Université Simon Fraser, où il travaille depuis 21 ans. La majeure partie de son travail concerne de grandes corporations et des communautés de Premières nations. Il est un ancien membre de l'ACÉEÀ et ancien président de l'ACÉEÀ. Il est co-auteur du livre *The Foundations of Adult Education in Canada* et a écrit un certain nombre d'articles sur des sujets de philosophie et d'éducation.