

Survey of Trends in Adult Education 1985–1995, and Perspectives for the Twenty-First Century

by Jennifer Stephen and Gaetan Beaudet

Cet article examine les nouvelles tendances de l'éducation continue qui répondent aux changements technologiques et à la restructuration économique et suggère de nouvelles politiques directives pour l'avenir.

The increasing rate of technological change is exerting growing pressure on adult education. Work reorganization and job cuts in companies have triggered a race to upgrade skills and acquire educational credits just to try and keep one's job.

Since the 1980s, Canada, like other industrialized countries, has felt the combined impact of globalization of trade, the crisis and restructuring of the economy, and the scientific and technological revolution. These changes have also affected orientations and policies in education systems. The focus in adult education has gradually shifted from educational concerns to the economy and employment. Essentially, adult education has evolved around two axes: the “development of employability” and the “new economy of information and knowledge.” The idea of enhancing human capital and competitiveness by skill acquisition has gained ground with political decision-makers, business leaders, and the heads of educational institutions. For their part, union and community groups, taking note of societal and technological changes, have expressed their need for education and training mainly through literacy and basic training programs, union and community education, and professional development that qualifies, is transferable, and is recognized.

The restructuring of the economy and the job market

The sequence of recessions since the 1980s and the restructuring of the Canadian economy forced by the globalization of trade and the creation of continental blocs have contributed to a massive increase in structural unemployment and poverty, mainly among young people making the transition between school and the job market, immigrants and people in ethnic communities, women, native peoples, and older workers. These groups are more affected by the “discouraged worker” syndrome and have, at various points, been the target of training and education programs, with varying degrees of success. The concentration of long-term unemployment in specific regions has

led to a significant restructuring of training and education infrastructures, such as in some parts of Quebec, where over 20 per cent of the population is unemployed (including discouraged workers and social assistance recipients), or in Maritime provinces with the crash of the fisheries.

Indeed, the increasing rate of technological change has helped transform the job market and is exerting growing pressure on adult education to conform to goals compatible with the concerns of economic sectors and individual employability. Work reorganization and job cuts in companies have triggered a race to upgrade skills and acquire educational credits just to try and keep one's job. The 1994 Adult Education and Training Survey shows that, in 1993, one out of every two participants (about three million people) in adult education and training had support from their employers. But, education and training initiatives have launched into the identification, quantification, and standardization of relatively arbitrary and fragmented qualifications that often reflect narrow job definitions. Companies and institutions involved in education have altered the form and content of their adult education programs to reflect a shift toward employability. New and closer ties between the educational and business spheres have developed. New forms of learning have been instituted and encouraged, such as “customized training,” work/study arrangements and the setting up or development of apprenticeships.

Changes in work and the nature of employment have created a simultaneous increase in demand for workers with post-secondary education and casual jobs for unskilled workers. With a sharp increase in these two types of employment, the job market and jobs have become sharply polarized. For a number of years, policies on occupational training and development have contributed to this polarization in that they divide into two major streams: one oriented to qualifying training (leading to formal recognition), and the other to the development of employability measures (to achieve quick integration in the job market, with or without training).

The changing nature of the state

The federal, provincial, and territorial components of the Canadian state, like other countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), is in a period of transition between a Keynesian-based policy regime and a state form that has become all-too familiar: cutbacks in government spending, ostensibly to reduce the debt and the deficit; reforming—endangering in the opinion of many people—existing social programs; reduction in public spending on education and health;

and the downsizing of both the size and scope of government intervention.

The diminishing role of the state and expanding role of the "market," and the fact that government leaders subordinate their policies to the imperatives of economic growth, are key to the imbalances seen in social and cultural change and have, in the opinion of some people, had a particularly weakening impact on the education system. Thus, in the area of training, governments directly support companies through measures to help them train their employees and promote the development of private training institutions. Educational public institutions must then adopt a com-

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Furthermore, government interventions are addressed to specific groups in the population and come with increasingly tighter controls on individuals. The "target-customer" approach linked to repeated cuts in government spending, underlies, if not a questioning of, at least a move away from the principles of accessibility and universality put forward by the welfare state. This new direction is supported by a profound reform of the Canadian "safety net," which has been largely redefined at the federal, provincial, and territorial levels around two axes: passive measures/active measures and local development. As elsewhere in the West, we are seeing the development of a "two-tiered" social system.

New information and communication technologies (NICT)

Since 1985, the process of upgrading knowledge and technologies has accelerated. This has led to a greater focus on continuous training. The "scientific and technological revolution" is helping create a broader forum for adult education, giving it a different scope within the education system. Distance education (universities, colleges, educational television, info-highways, etc.) is continuing to grow, offering new interactive multimedia services. In addition, the second-phase technological change which characterizes NICTs radically challenges our notions not only of intellectual production, but also of the work itself, whose raw material has become the information entered in databases or in the "brain" (the programs) of machines.

But it must also be acknowledged that the progress and greater well-being made possible by this revolution are far from being equitably distributed throughout the population. Thus, despite the efforts of the past ten years to

support literacy and develop basic skills, it has not been possible to close the gap between those who "hold knowledge" and those whose knowledge is not or who, in one way or another, in work and daily life, lack the tools of the "society of knowledge."

Social and cultural change

While science and the world of work have undergone major transformations, our social and cultural environments have been equally transformed. Yet these changes receive less attention or are simply underestimated, particularly when they concern the impact on social organization of the advances by women, of demographic change, and of community efforts to improve local development and revitalize the democratic conditions of social life. Although analysis of the impact of these changes on society has barely begun, the transformations of the past ten years have given rise to new educational practices and have created the need for continuous training for individuals and communities.

Women's efforts to achieve greater financial and occupational autonomy have given rise to specific needs for training and retraining. Women's demands have helped generate new educational approaches that recognize and validate general qualifications arising from experience, in order to promote women's access to education and work. Demographic change, aging, and the increasing cultural diversity of the Canadian population were all factors in the emergence of new training needs, as well as a new way of envisaging the production of teaching material and approaches. Lastly, the rise in unemployment and poverty throughout Canada, but particularly in urban centres and certain rural areas has led governments to designate specific zones of intervention, and groups to develop partnerships and cooperative methods to implement development strategies intended to be "sustainable," but which will require that adult education be considered an indispensable tool in the process of empowerment and general development.

Education on violence and personal safety, peace and conflict resolution have long-standing applicability through agencies and clinics for women, gays and lesbians, and increasingly, immigrant and refugee communities responding to crises locally and internationally. For many years, community agencies and clinics serving women and gays and lesbians have provided education as well as other services. They have developed training programs on violence, personal safety, peace and conflict resolution. Such agencies also respond to the specialized personal, cultural, and linguistic learning needs of immigrants and refugees. Often this requires sensitivity to crises in their country of origin, and awareness of the systemic economic and educational barriers they face within Canada.

Health promotion and disease prevention activities have grown up around significant events, the most notable of which remains the massive education campaigns re-

garding AIDS and HIV-related illness among the lesbian and gay communities, sex-trade workers, IV-drug users, and more recently among incarcerated women and men. The latter populations have also been the subject of health promotion and disease prevention educational campaigns regarding tuberculosis. Educational activities have been initiated for the growing population in large urban centres lacking access to secure and affordable housing, specifically homeless adults and young adults. Community economic development initiatives have given rise to significant educational activities designed to support and broaden local economic and community development.

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These activities have been led by cooperative associations across a variety of sectors, including housing, workers' education, women's education, and First Nations.

In addition to work-related training, many adults have started or undertaken personal development courses, seeking healthier ways to juggle work, family, community, and personal commitments. Also, many people work long hours for low pay, which creates a higher level of stress and carries an individual and social cost in terms of personal development, health, and general well-being. This situation has created a need and demand for training related to personal well-being, time management, personal development and growth, substance abuse, family relations, and leisure activities in general. Volunteer organizations established by workers and communities have responded by setting up a wide range of programs and courses.

Strong and emerging trends

In the next decade, it is clear that the combined impact of social, economic, and cultural change will continue to produce social and job exclusion, but will also make new social and educational practices accessible to a greater number of adults. Major government policy decisions since the 1980s will continue to strengthen the current trend toward an approach centred on the job market and the introduction of a development model based on the notion of the "knowledge and information economy," or the "value-added economy."

The goal of workforce adaptation is central to worker training and development policies will remain the dominant orientation. If nothing is done to counter these trends, they could become entrenched to the detriment of basic education and a more global educational vision. Similarly, it is also likely that a utilitarian conception of

training and a generalization of measures to restrict the objectives of adult education to those narrowly related to employment, will grow stronger and will reinforce the dominant trend. However, the establishment of partnerships between educational institutions and employers, and the development of alternative training, including apprenticeship programs adapted to general market needs for young people and adults receiving occupational training, will also strengthen. This is considered a positive development by educators and business leaders.

Furthermore, given Canada's intentions to make the provincial educational systems into systems for continuing training, we will doubtless see new forms of collaboration between the provinces and territories, notably through the Council of Ministers of Education, but also through cooperation between federal and provincial governments to develop literacy and basic skills, to recognize experience, and to develop the work force and adult education. The consequences the announced federal withdrawal from labour market training and the current reform of educational policies will have on adult education and access to training must be monitored closely, especially in a context where public and private training systems compete against each other.

Further, given the regional development policies that lie behind government decentralization, another trend will be greater involvement by educational and industry systems as well as popular and community organizations, especially those involved in education and labour force development, in local development of communities and regions. Whatever the intent, the restructuring of the economy and the job market, and, to a certain extent, the effects of social and labour force policies, may further entrench a "two-tiered" society. If nothing is done to counter exclusion from the workforce and the increasing polarization of work, and to better equip workers and communities, this trend will simply grow stronger.

Also, the new training demands linked to the growth of the media and NICTs will likely increase, particularly with regard to distance education, both in civil society and the job market. However, the electronic highway could very well aggravate the existing trend to make the education system an adjunct of the workplace, and, because of deregulation, funding may determine content and access. Lastly, we will see an expansion of the voluntary sector to support the plethora of educational activities in the community and grassroots organizations.

Policy trends: targets and priority groups

In November 1992, the Canadian Labour Force Development Board approved an action plan designed to improve access to training for members of the designated equity groups: women, youth, visible minority, Aboriginal, and disabled. The action plan called upon the federal government to respond to a series of measures proposed by the Board, to develop policy and program initiatives

designed to overcome barriers posed by systemic racism and sexism, and to enhance access to education and training opportunities. This step was taken in the recognition that all equity groups are overrepresented among those engaged in non-standard employment, those who are unemployed, and those who are unable to secure the means to maintain themselves and their dependents according to the standards of basic quality of life and participation.

For example, people with disabilities experience many of the same problems most working people face at some point during their working lives: poverty, unemployment,

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underemployment, and minimal access to training opportunities. Approximately 40 per cent of working age Canadians with an identified disability live on less than \$5,000 per year (Statistics Canada 1993). Until recently, sheltered workshops provided a major access point for adults with disabilities seeking education and training opportunities. There have until recently been very few public program initiatives, particularly for adults considered intellectually disabled.

The adult education needs of Aboriginal communities must continue to be addressed within the context of Aboriginal self-government, on and off reserve. Numbering about 811,000 (2.7 per cent of the population), Canada's Native peoples (Indians, Inuit, Metis), who have special status confirmed by the 1982 Constitution, now aspire to a form of self-government. They constitute one of the primary target groups for adult education.

In terms of education, Native peoples fall well behind the Canadian population as a whole. The education system established for Native people often contributed to partial assimilation into the dominant culture and the weakening of first language and culture. Education and training have now been identified as key elements in autonomous cultural survival and integrity and the transition to self-government. Adult education and training is therefore an essential strategy for upgrading knowledge, languages, cultures, and skills. Different strategies are being used in different communities: Native control of training, basic education and literacy programs, assistance for university or college studies, more and improved professional development.

High unemployment and underemployment among women prompted various policy responses from government, notably the Canadian Jobs Strategy (CJS), cited favourably by the ILO and other international agencies as a

positive employment equity measure. The CJS program, funded through general government revenues, was intended to provide targeted training to assist women in gaining access to secure employment in the paid labour force.

Since 1984, overall federal government expenditures have declined by 45.5 per cent, while eligibility criteria governing access to CJS programs has been tightened considerably. In the five years from 1987-1992, federal expenditures on training for women dropped by 30 per cent. In 1991-92, women made up 44 per cent of the total paid labour force and more than 60 per cent of new labour market entrants. However, women received only 34 per cent of all federal training dollars.

Federal and provincial educational initiatives have encouraged the development of training programs to move women into so-called non-traditional occupations, to counter the entrenchment of occupational and labour market segregation. A comparison of data between 1986 and 1991 indicates some change in the employment patterns of women in non-traditional occupations.

For example, the labour force participation rate of women increased overall from 55.4 per cent in 1986 to 60.7 per cent in 1991. This compares to a marginal rate of increase for men, from 77 per cent to 77.3 per cent over the same period. In 1991, 40 per cent of the total 6.4 million women in the paid labour force had some post-secondary education: 14 per cent at least some university or college. University courses were concentrated in commerce, law, biological science, agriculture, dentistry, medicine, and veterinary medicine. College courses included business, natural resource management, engineering, and transportation. Overall, women identified as working in non-traditional occupations tended to be younger, better educated, and working more hours than their fellow workers (Hughes).

Overall, women have seen the erosion of many of the gains made during the previous decade. The growth of non-standard work, accompanied by reduced access to public programs and services including health care, child care, income support and education has been a serious setback for women. Non-standard employment (part-time, short-term, temporary, and contract) has been growing over the past decade, accounting for most of the net increase in total employment since 1980. By 1993, 30 per cent of all jobs fit one of the non-standard categories of employment (Betcherman). Women account for three-quarters of the part-time work force. According to 1993 estimates provided by Statistics Canada (qtd. in Betcherman) 35.5 per cent of the total part-time workforce preferred full-time employment, marking a trend that closely paralleled the rate of unemployment.

Women make up the majority of the low-wage labour force, concentrated specifically in low-paying jobs in the service sector. Overall, women accounted for 72 per cent of the ten lowest paid jobs in Canada, and only 20 per cent of those employed in the highest paid occupational categories (Khosla). The wage gap between men's and wom-

en's earnings has narrowed during the past decade, rising to 70 per cent in 1991 from 66 per cent in 1987. However, as the Canadian Labour Market and Productivity Centre (CLMPC) concluded, "analysis shows that the apparent narrowing of the gap is explained more by a decline in men's earnings than by higher earnings for women" (CLMPC 7-8). Average wages have declined steadily, in conjunction with a rapid polarization of earnings that has devastated the middle- and lowest-percentile groups. In 1981, 46.8 per cent of the labour force was earning less than \$20,000 per annum. In 1991, that percentage had increased to 51 per cent. According to analysts, the current

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trend would mean that by 2011, 65 per cent of the labour force would be earning less than \$20,000 (Meyer).

New policy directions: enhancing citizenship and democracy

Education is in danger of being reduced to a branch of economics. Lifelong learning is increasingly taken up and understood in relation to employment-related and employability training, based on and responding to the principles and requirements of the so-called free market. The principles of adult education are challenged in very fundamental ways by the prevailing model of training: the development of human capital as a central strategy for international corporate competitiveness.

Adult learners are becoming more involved in seeking access to and relevant results from education and training institutions. In the midst of continuing high unemployment, women and men are pressured to assume greater self-sufficiency and responsibility to attend to and provide for the health, education, welfare, and security needs of their children, parents, and themselves. Governments are off-loading, privatizing and/or cancelling the provision of state services and programs. The purpose, intent, structure, and content of these services and programs is changed dramatically in the transition from state-based to private sector provision. The meaning, responsibilities, and entitlement of education—of citizenship itself—is undergoing a fundamental transformation. This transformation is directly linked to the massive restructuring of the post-Second World War welfare state.

Recognition of these challenges has given rise to a series of education initiatives among popular social groups and organizations. One example is the recent bi-national Women's March Against Poverty organized jointly be-

tween women's and labour organizations, drawing on community-based educational forums and campaigns. Anti-racism education, women's rights, workplace rights, social welfare organizing, unemployed worker education, movements for national self-determination, cross-cultural awareness, and First Nations self-determination: major initiatives have been developed in each of these areas as part of a concerted effort to provide popular and accessible education addressing the rights, responsibilities, challenges, and entitlements of citizenship.

The information superhighway has challenged governmental and non-governmental organizations to develop and protect full access to and democratic participation in the development of adult education. Private sector-led initiatives all too often lead to the marketization and commodification of culture, which can lead to differential access, further entrenching existing inequalities. Technologies associated with the information highway present the opportunity for enhanced democratization with respect to adult educational programming and delivery. The Canadian Network for Advancement of Research, Industry, and Education (CANARIE) was established in 1993, with a federal government contribution of \$80 million and \$396 million from the private sector and the provinces. By 1998, the Canadian School Network will link researchers and educators into a high-speed computer network encompassing all 16,500 schools across Canada, plus 1,000 rural and remote communities. These are major coordinated initiatives aimed at democratizing and countering the private market, bringing the technology and its applications into full use in the public domain (see Industry Canada).

In Canada, as in most countries, a very high percentage of people have difficulty reading and writing. Those who do not have adequate literacy skills continue to find their basic entitlements and citizenship rights compromised and their capacity to participate in social and economic life limited. To expand adult access to basic training and initial occupational training, and to respond more adequately to the diversified needs of adult continuing education, we must undertake a series of new initiatives and actions as we enter the twenty-first century.

To meet the demands of training and education related to personal development, the job market and life in society, provinces and territories must adopt a policy on continuous training, and all education and training systems must be re-oriented to lifelong training, as recommended by the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century in its report titled *Education: The Hidden Treasure Within* (1996). To open the doors of the twenty-first century to the entire Canadian population, governments must maintain their commitment to increase literacy skill levels of Canadians. They must continue the implementation of action plans that include adequate funding, objective and specific time frames, co-operation and inter-sector partnerships (with educational institutions, communities, NGOs, employers,

etc.) as well as an obligation to produce results.

The information highway and NICTs hold incredible and unprecedented potential for continuous training. For these tools and their contents to be truly available to all adults, it is urgent and essential that governments adopt the principles of equity and accessibility in any strategy to deploy and use them. As well, governments must insist that the benefits of this technological advance be shared.

Given social, economic, and cultural change, particularly the rapid pace of changes in knowledge and technologies and given the restructuring of economies and the job market, as well as the search for alternatives in the lives of adults and of communities, lifelong learning has become an inescapable necessity. Policies and programs must be developed to increase services in the areas of intercultural education, the culture of citizenship, and in health, peace, the environment, and the voluntary sector. In the absence of such initiatives, Canada's education systems, still too focused on early training and the institutional system, cannot yet adequately face these challenges.

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Élancées
fines branches
clair de lune
du vent tendre
blanches balancent

tactile
l'esprit dérive
primesautier
dans ce lustre feuillé
où les siècles
à même
immortels
revoient
les restes solitaires
des âmes nues
dans l'abîme
du même

prévu

puissant
l'invisible
accouche des yeux
à l'approche naissante
lente

suprême
des cumulus présents
portés lumière
par le couloir symphonique
de l'errance séduite

les pleurs abdiquants
les mains sourdes
souples
viennent touchent
l'une et l'autre
envoûter le temps

de tous nos printemps
pastorale humaine
dans l'écho des champs
court
la démesure
cette moisson des eaux
Elles
l'ultime aventure.

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