Imagine/Learning: Thoughts from Two adult educators

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Introduction

Budd: I am a settler Canadian or settler colonizer of English heritage who lives and works on Coast and Straits Salish Traditional Territory on what is currently known as Vancouver Island. My Great Grandparents settled on Vancouver Island in the later 19th Century on what was once the traditional territory of the Halalt First Nations People.

I have been associated with the field of adult education since 1970 having worked at the University of Dar es Salam in Tanzania, at the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), the University of Toronto and the University of Victoria. I have been both a Chair of an adult education department (University of Toronto) and a Dean of a Faculty of Education (University of Victoria). I currently teach in a community development programme located in a School of Public Administration in a Faculty of Human and Social Development. My approach to teaching and learning, while evolving over the years has always been seen from a lens of social change, transformation or resistance. The poem we use to conclude this article captures the spirit of what we both mean by adult education.

I remember a discussion with the late Paul Bertelsen, the Danish former Head of Adult Education in UNESCO. His question was similar to ours, but referring to adult education within a government. "Which is the best Ministry for adult education to be located in", he wondered. In most countries adult education was found in Ministries of Education, but in a number of countries adult education was located in Ministries of Social Development, Community Development or Rural Development. Paul maintained that the adult education programmes located in Ministries other than education had the advantage. They represented a more substantial proportion of the non-educational ministries, they received more visibility and were seen to be more action-oriented or even more politically active than adult education programmes in Ministries of Education. When a Ministry of Education hosts adult education it is always the small cousin, the strange boat in a sea of schooling. The sheer scale of the institutions of schooling is such that programmes dealing with the education of adults remain largely invisible. It does not fit with 95 per cent of the work being done to support the schooling enterprise.

Darlene: I am a woman settler of English colonizer stock who has had the privilege of working and learning on the Coast Salish lands of Vancouver Island, British Columbia for the past 12 years. Although the province of Ontario is my 'home' this province and the University of Victoria have given me a chance to learn things from Indigenous Peoples I would not have at the University of Toronto.

Although I continually enquire I have yet to find anyone who actually chose to become an adult educator. This is not true of the majority of teachers I have met who frequently felt a vocation, a drive to teach children from an early age. Like many of my colleagues, I fell, headlong into the field. In 1986 I returned to Toronto after living

abroad - Latin America, Europe and the Caribbean – for almost six years and was invited by a friend, D'Arcy Martin, a labour educator, to assist him with the Workers Education Programme of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE). For a number of reasons, I ended up staying with the ICAE for many years in various roles but I remember with clarity many moments of the early days where I sat listening to adult educators from Uganda, India, Argentina, Chile, Chile, Jamaica, China and the Sudan totally perplexed by a complex understanding of teaching and learning that seemed both unstructured and ungovernable; discussions of literacy that had little to do with 'proper' reading and writing; a clear belief in people's knowledge that seemed to imply they 'knew' things that were important; a discussion of learning sites that defied physicality; a participatory form of research that went against all the university rules of 'objective' inquiry; a practice of 'popular' theatre that lacked any semblance of a script; and the inclusion of other practices that had nothing to do with 'real' education, which everyone 'knew' was schools! I confess it took me a few years to sort adult education out, and I will forever be indebted to Selman, Selman, Cooke and Dampier for their book entitled *The Foundations of Adult Education in Canada* (First Edition) which I actually spent time reading up in my hotel room at the CASAE Montreal meeting in the 1990s whilst some 80 members of CASAE held forth on the topic on the ground floor. In the opening chapter Selman et al drew attention to the confusion around terminology as well as a number of definitions and means of adult education. Ah so it is not just me!

My own bewilderment around adult education gave me an ability to empathize with students in my classes, particularly the schoolteachers, who look so utterly disoriented as I pull them deeper into the labyrinth of adult education theory and practice. After all, school-based education is a coherent discourse of teachers, children, lessons, curriculum, a physical building and a set number of hours. After school activities may be somewhat more nebulous and unstructured, but they are some distance from the impenetrable and amorphous practice of adult education. And yet as an adult educator, I believe that despite the complexity of the field, all students can come to understand it in its density, as I did, and also, that the adult education I believe in is as relevant to schoolteachers as it is to community activists, ESL teachers, labour educators, anti-racist facilitators, government ministry employees and trainers. My point of departure as an adult educator and a feminist is a commitment to the social and critical purpose of adult education with its baseline values of social and ecological justice, greater gender, economic, social, workplace, and political equity, cultural diversity, the promotion of an active, engaged and subversively imaginative citizenry able to envision a better, fairer and more healthy and sustainable world where all forms of education have a role to play.

Budd: I am no longer as up-to-date on the institutional arrangements for all of adult education graduate programs across Canada as I once was. It do recall that for some time adult education at St Francis Xavier was independent, flying free of the Faculty of Education. It seemed to me to be doing wonderfully in that administrative arrangement. That has changed of course. And I recall the fierce philosophical positions held by Prof Claude Touchette of the University of Montreal who insisted that *Andragogie* was a totally independent discipline, having more to do with sociology or social psychology than the pedagogy of schooling. Sadly, the Department of Andragogy has also disappeared from there as well.

I spent the longest portion of my academic life at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), itself an independent research and graduate teaching centre associated for degree granting purposes to the University of Toronto. OISE from its birth in the 1960s to its merger with the U of T in the mid-1990s was a splendid base for the pursuit of progressive practice-based adult education. For most of that period, we had a stand-alone department of adult education closest philosophically to the Department of Sociology and Equity Studies at OISE or the Environmental Studies unit at York University than the other departments such as curriculum, history, psychology et cetera. And even after the merger with the University of Toronto that brought the Faculty of Education at University of Toronto into our world at OISE, Adult Education remained high profile, attracted diverse and clever students and scholars and continued the social change traditions that had been part of its birthright. Others who know the situation better would be able to speculate on the situation now in 2014 or 2015. Adult education at OISE is of course now sharing the bunkhouse with both administration and higher education. The heavy hand of schooling after nearly 40 years may be limiting the horizons for the adult educators there now, but perhaps, and I hope, I am wrong.

Darlene: Among many other things working at the ICAE encouraged me to return to university and I chose the University of Toronto. Naturally, in seeking a programme that would suit my growing interest in adult education, I made an appointment to see the Undergraduate Advisor in the then Faculty of Education. As I lowered myself in to the seat across from him his first question to me was why I wanted to study in that faculty. A fair question and I began to explain the work of the ICAE, its commitment to an educational practice for social change, for people's empowerment; its critique of dominant ideologies that marginalize and oppress; and its struggle against the wilful ignorance of governments vis-à-vis social and environmental problems. I plunged along in this vein, breathless with excitement and astonished at my grasp of the field, until he sighed deeply and raised his hand for me to stop. He explained carefully, as if to a fool or small child - I have come to realize they are often one and the same in these faculties – that what I was articulating was simply not 'education'. If I were to study in the Faculty of Education, and his raised eyebrow suggested there would be no hope of that given my scurrilous lack of comprehension, I would need to become more 'disciplined', to learn quietly and rationally to design lesson plans, apply classroom management strategies, follow clear rules, and depend upon the guiding visions of the Ministry for inspiration. I would also need to volunteer many hours with a school and understand its culture. "Dull", I said sotto voce; "Thank you for your time", I said alto voce. Clearly a faculty of education was not for me.

Budd: In 2001, after 10 years working full-time at OISE, I was offered a position as Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria. For a number of adult educators, the dream of being a Dean of a Faculty of Education that might be coaxed into becoming a Faculty of Lifelong Learning has been a powerful fantasy. It had been for my friend and mentor, the late Alan Thomas who was disappointed that he was never offered the position of Director of OISE. And so it was for me. The job description indicated they were looking for someone with an interest in Indigenous Education, in diversity, in lifelong learning and who brought an international perspective. It seemed to

fit me to a 'T' and following an interview, I was offered the job and took it. I of course soon discovered there was no adult education programme in the Faculty, despite the courses outlined in the calendar, never really had been nor was there much understanding or interest in what an idea such as lifelong learning might mean to the Faculty. My own academic appointment was made to Curriculum and Instruction, the unit that did all the heavy lifting in the teacher preparation programme. Darlene Clover, my adult education companion was appointed to Leadership Studies and Educational Psychology. Her face went pale, I will always remember, when she was told this.

The focus of my work over my five year term as Dean shifted from an overall dream of a Faculty of Lifelong Learning to the support of groups of progressive scholars who were determined to create space for Indigenous Education, for Environmental Education, for links between physical activity and transformative learning, global linkages and community leadership. As it happened, while we made some very satisfying progress in these areas of learning, there was a narrow majority of faculty members who found this focus entirely unsuitable to the world of the preparation of teachers. A stealth campaign was launched and my bid to return as Dean for a couple more years was defeated by the margin of one vote. Although this was crushing in the beginning it turned out to be the best thing that could have happened. Released from the shackles of teacher preparation and the ministry, I was able to create a centre for community-based research based on adult education principles of participatory research.

The person who has done the most to bring visibility to the principles of adult education and learning in the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria has been you, Darlene Clover. You and your colleagues have promoted alternative practica for student teachers in adult education settings and have opened up the most room for adult education in the Faculty's history. You and they have successfully created a suite of progressive and interesting courses based on principles of adult education in the Leadership Studies programme. Leadership Studies at the University of Victoria has gone from being concerned solely with training school principals, to having a strong community leadership and activist as well as arts-based component that attracts students from across Canada, around the world and every other faculty at the university itself.

Darlene: Lovely sentiments but let me disabuse you of any notion I have had much of an impact on the Faculty of Education. A few months after my arrival at the University of Victoria I was told flatly by a colleague with straight face: "Only children learn and they only learn in school. Teachers cannot learn, they can only be trained." Oh dear, wrong turn. As a poor 'sessional' appointment I cried myself to sleep that night (and quite a few others by the way). Fast forward a few years later. I am participating in yet another faculty retreat aimed at building community by 'tolerating difference'. We are shuffled in to pairs – ah, an adult education practice - and asked to share our visions of the new directions in which the faculty should head. When I finished sharing my ideas to have an adult education undergraduate degree or graduate programme my partner stated: "hiring you was a big mistake." I had the tough skin of tenure by then so no crying that evening but I did stomp all the way home. Even more recently I was accused of 'fragmenting' the Leadership Studies programme. When I came to UVic in 2002 the graduate student ratio was 85% schoolteachers, and15% everyone else. Today, the ratio is nearer 70% non-teachers in our regular programme. We have adapted courses and tried to identify

instructors to reflect and respond to that change, although they are few on the groun on this island. The question, therefore, is why are the 30% of teachers and school-focused courses not now seen as the fragmentation? Why is this new majority viewed as the splintering ram rather than the norm? The answer is simple. This is not a faculty of education but rather, a faculty of schooling. Our new President just made the clear to us on his last visit. Sigh…

Budd: If the measure of success of our graduate adult education programmes was to be the degree to which we have been able to bring our values and approaches to the world of teacher preparation then an administrative home in a Faculty of Education is ideal. If there are other units in our faculties that deal with adult populations that might be allies or supportive homes for adult education within a Faculty of Education, then nestling down into the Faculties of Education is also viable. If on the other hand there are other progressive and practice oriented academic programmes such as community development, social work, social economy, environmental and women's studies, rural development, urban studies or even arguably community psychology, then adult education might well find itself better suited in a space where it did not feel to overwhelmed by the weight of schooling discourse.

Darlene: But Leonard Cohen reminds there are always cracks that let the light in, even into the Faculty of Education. There have been discussions about weaving adult education in to the Faculty. Some colleagues have openly stated they are more interested in adult education – and believe it is what they do - than they are in schools. I have been involved with two different working groups to expand our ideas of 'education' as well as discussions with Continuing Studies to better integrate their adult education courses in to our Masters Programme so I am not the only 'adult educator'. This latter is because, as alluded to above, copious numbers of students are entering our Leadership Studies programme with an interest and/or background in adult education (e.g. ESL, community development/learning, arts-based adult education, environmental adult education, et cetera). I can actually take most of the credit for this and see it as something to celebrate. Further, my courses draw students from across campus, as you said Budd, including environmental studies, fine arts, women's studies, social work, geography, and sociology, who want to strengthen the educational component of their community/social work. There are also those priceless moments when a student who is a schoolteacher comes to me to reflect on how relevant she feels adult education is to her own practice, and decides adult education will be the focus of her thesis. Finally, we have wonderful colleagues who not only understand adult education but also believe its theory and practice can strengthen the teacher preparation programme. They are so passionate they wanted to create a stronger partnership between CASAE and CSSE at the University of Victoria Congress, not to subsume it, but to showcase its importance and value. Was it perfect? Of course it was not. Often times at organising meetings for the Congress our relationship was simply referred to as 'CSSE'. Further, the App developed for the conference was at first simply labelled 'CSSE'. But when I drew attention to this oversight, heaven and earth was moved to repair it as best they could. Having said this our Dean continues to refer to the Congress as CSSE. He remains truly and totally oblivious to the fact that CASAE even exists. We are now looking for a new Dean. I do not dare to hope he or she

will have worked outside the school system and have some idea of 'education' that is not just 'school'.

But returning to the Congress and what we attempted to do, I question whether without the commitment of my colleagues CSSE and CASAE will continue to move closer together. I do hope it continues as I have noted over the past few years that submitting a paper for presentation at CSSE guarantees a very large audience. Only a very few of the students and faculty who attend these sessions would normatively identify as adult educators. But they come to our sessions because they are deeply interested in what we have to say and see some kind of connection to their own teaching and research. This ability by these scholars to see beyond the school walls is not only a compliment to our field, but something we need to give credit to more often. So while the systemic problems remain, we should never under estimate our colleagues or all teacher educators and the relevance of our field to them.

Budd: I often need to remind myself that the academic field of adult education does not represent the entire world of adult education or adult learning even within the world of academic disciplines. I teach Community Development in a School of Public Administration! I continue to explore learning within social movements. My work in community-university research partnerships or community-based research is often found in higher education. The formal study of adult education as a discursive area seldom surfaces in these settings. But I remain an adult educator and my work is informed profoundly by principles of what have come to be known in academia as adult education. I believe that we need now and will continue to need spaces where 'adult educators' come together within their disciplinary guises, but I believe even more profoundly that what drives our work is much deeper. I became an adult educator because it seemed to be a field that was open to the kind of political and transformative changes that I believed in. Making a difference in the world came/comes first. To the degree that adult education is able to support this kind of a vision, it will continue to be both an essential practice and challenging yet creative theoretical platform.

Darlene and Budd: We close in poetic form

Imagine

Learning is about our relationships,
our communities,
our places of work,
our bio-regions,
our political structures,
our planet and our universe.

It is about us.
It is about the kind of work we do.
But above all it is about our right to imagine.

To imagine a context where we are each respected for who we are;

To imagine a life of sufficiency and health;
To imagine that everyone would have support to learn throughout their lives
To imagine that all children could live without abuse;
To imagine that violence or the fear of violence in the lives of all women could disappear;
To imagine that race and ethnicity would be a code for creativity and contribution rather than a filter to exclude;
To imagine relationships of harmony and rhythm with the Earth;
To imagine that differences in ability could be cherished for what they make possible;
To imagine that learning mathematics science, the arts, language and our own bodies are aspects of the same;
To imagine that we have the courage and right to speak;
To imagine we have the capacity and knowledge to transform our lives.

Just imagine….