III. Reflection on comparative education method

Comparative analysis is the tool to explain various social phenomena between two different countries (Green, 2002). One of the most significant contributions of comparative analysis was to make clear of the political aspects toward elder education in two different countries (Broadfoot, 2002). Since there are identical language, history, and similar cultural backgrounds between the two nations, it is considerably easier to comprehend the formulation of older adult education policies. Nevertheless, comparative research in this study is limited because of different political systems. Particularly, the government of Mainland China guides from the policy formulation to the implementation of older adult education activities, so that the relative data, such as curricula and number of participants, are unaccessible. This is the difficulty in proceeding the study. We suggest that further research can compare specific older adult education organizations in the micro perspective so as to better understand the context, the development, and the barriers of older adult education between two nations.

References

& Thomas, 2003), its comparative development, approaches, organisation and practices have not been explored for some time. In this paper we examine and contrast recent developments in the national and institutional approaches to, provision of, and support for UCE in Canada and the UK. We compare the current state and context of UCE within and across each country, explore what internal and external factors are influencing its development, and discuss the institutional and organisational responses to those influences.

Canada

Reporting on Canadian UCE is complex and confounded by geographic and cultural factors. The country is vast, the second largest in the world. Most of its 33 million population is concentrated in metropolitan areas along the southern border with the USA although a sizeable proportion still live in northern areas. The provision of education and other social services in the more remote areas is sporadic and it is often difficult to discern just what services are available where. Also, the country possesses enormous cultural diversity: 20% of the population being foreign-born. Different ethnic and historical backgrounds—Aboriginal, European, Asian, Afro-Caribbean, Middle-Eastern and other immigrant populations—add significantly to the variety of social and cultural values and perspectives (Fenwick, Nesbit & Spencer, 2006).

This geographic and demographic diversity is further complicated by Canada’s political system. Canada is a country with a federal structure, with 10 provinces and 3 territories sharing responsibilities with a national government. As almost all Canadian universities are publicly-funded and a provincial government responsibility, there are effectively 13 distinct systems of, and approaches to, higher education. Each province houses a constellation of universities, university-colleges, community colleges, technical institutes, and other public and private degree-granting institutions and have differing governmental approaches to supporting adult, higher and continuing education. Indeed, with no nationally agreed-upon definition of adult or continuing education, provincial policies, structures, financing and organisation differ widely and so favour school and higher educational systems that continuing education either disappears from the policy screen or is subsumed under the rubric of post-secondary education. Despite this, the federal and most provincial governments continue to adopt laissez-faire attitudes toward UCE and other forms of adult education and show no sense of urgency to create any mechanisms to create more coherence.

Although initially modeled on their British counterparts, Canada’s 80+ universities have now developed to reflect the particular historical, socio-cultural, and economic characteristics of the regions in which they are located. Most attract significant number of adult learners: about 25% of the approximately 1 million undergraduates, and 75% of the 200,000 graduate students are over 25 years old (AUCC, 2011). However, as it is unclear just how many universities offer any form of continuing education and record-keeping in this area is less meticulous, accurate figures for adult learners in continuing education are harder to come by. Nesbit (2012) estimated a figure of about 400,000.

Many Canadian universities profess continuing education or lifelong learning as an institutional goal and they are keen to identify and promote their approach to it (McLean, 2007). University mission statements usually include some statement as, for example:

The University of Toronto wishes to encourage learning as a lifelong activity and is committed to providing to persons in professional practice and to members of the community at large opportunities to study and use its facilities [and] helping other institutions, professional associations and learned societies through the provision of facilities and expertise.

(www.utoronto.ca/about-uoft/mission-and-purpose.htm)

What’s noticeable about such statements is their expression of concern for enhancing professional practice and providing service to the community: a commitment that most public universities share, at least rhetorically. Half (48) of Canada’s universities are members of the relevant national professional association: the Canadian Association for University Continuing Education (CAUCE). Most have developed one central unit or division specifically dedicated to organising and administering the overall provision of continuing education. These units tend to be referred to as Continuing Education or Continuing Studies although their title may also include such terms as university extension, extended or lifelong learning, continuing professional education, l’education permanente, distance education, distributed or open learning, community outreach and engagement or continuing higher education.

Such units have a long history (Conrad, 2005; McLean & Carter, in press) and encompass a broad range of activities that encourage and provide for adult and lifelong learners to study for professional or personal advancement. They include both credit and non-credit options and can take the form of conventional courses and seminars, workshops, public lectures, conferences and moderated discussions, home-study, distance or online courses, hands-on projects, or customised training. In some universities, professional schools—like business, medicine or education—have preferred to develop their own continuing education programs which offer short-term professional development and customized training courses. The most common courses involve English (or French) as a Second Language, business and management, courses in fine arts, humanities, computers and information technology and courses for seniors (55+).

Although UCE is subtly different at each university, what essentially differentiates it from more conventional university-level provision is that it is usually part-time, broadly available to most sectors of society, highly-flexible
and responsive to learner demand, requires few if any prior credentials, is
generally multi- and trans-disciplinary, operates on an entrepreneurial and cost-
recovery basis and is specifically organised upon an understanding of and
respect for adult learners’ unique needs and challenges. There is no specific
format or length for a continuing education program: some may just take a day
or weekend, while others can span weeks or even months. In addition, UCE
programs and courses need not be located on a university campus but can be
organised in a variety of alternative venues and communities. In fact, several
major universities in Canada have developed “downtown” operations and/or
satellite campuses (Booth et al., 2008). Here, universities with their main
campuses located in suburban or greenfield sites have recognised that not
everyone is easily able, or wishes, to take advantage of on-campus services.
They then develop other facilities and programs better suited and closer to the
population of working and adult learners. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this movement
has prompted some universities to re-examine their core activities and has
encouraged further discussion about the role of higher education in civic
engagement and community outreach, challenging social exclusion, and
advancing citizenship, participation and social justice. This has caught the
attention of such international organisations as UNESCO which has recently
established a chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility of
Higher Education and named noted Canadian adult educator Budd Hall as one of
its two co-chairs.

As might be expected, the form and extent of UCE provision varies
considerably among the range of Canadian universities. A recent CAUCE
institutional study (Percival & Potter, 2007) reported that most institutions
offered both degree and non-credit courses with at least some being offered in
off-campus or distance education formats. If one assumes that approximately
400,000 adult learners each year engage in some form of UCE activity and the
total number of students at Canadian universities is about 1,000,000, it is clear
that UCE is, overall, an important part of university activity. Despite these
impressive figures however, most universities still appear to regard UCE rather
passively as an essentially remedial activity, peripheral to the main goal of edu-
cating younger students and the already advantaged. Moreover most UCE pro-
grams appear to focus more on enhancing employment and career opportunities
than on civic concerns; an issue that causes periodic concern to more socially-
oriented and continuing education exists and accurate figures on programs, participation
and financial issues remain hard to come by.

Given their proximity to the issues, one might expect UCE units to have
systematically explored such concerns. However, it’s unclear to what extent, if
at all, this is happening. The most recent analytic studies on Canadian UCE
(Brooke & Waldron, 1994; Morris & Potter, 1996), are now quite out of date
and, although there have been a number of smaller studies since then, they have
tended to focus on individual programs and be “applied, small-scale, short in
duration, isolated, non-systematic and noncumulative” (Percival & Kops, 1999,
p. 46). Of course, there is a general dearth of research into continuing education
(Coffield, 1999; Duke, 1996) but this seems especially true in Canada. Most
Canadian units have a more practical and programmatic focus rather than an
academic orientation and few members of staff enjoy faculty status. Conse-
quently, it has proved difficult to allot time and other resources to research and,
despite the pressing need, it is not considered a major activity. In addition, other
concerns have predominated: UCE units are under increasing pressure to expand
and broaden their intakes, transform their curricula and pedagogies and not only
cover their operational costs but also provide a source of revenue to their parent
university (Nesbit, Dunlop & Gibson, 2007; Slowey & Schuetze, 2012).

England

For most of the 20th century, reporting on university continuing education in
England was relatively straightforward. The Workers’ Educational Association
(WEA), founded in 1903, was based around a critique of the University
Extension movement (“the average University Extension lecturer is decidedly
middle-class in his outlook” (J.M. Mactavish, quoted in Mansbridge 1913, p.
14)). The WEA’s academic apostles had youth, energy, intelligence and
connections on their side (the WEA’s key supporters at Oxford included William
Temple, the son of an archbishop of Canterbury, elevated to the same position in
1942, Richard Livingstone, vice-chancellor of Oxford from 1944, and Alfred
Zimmern, pipped at the post as first secretary general of UNESCO by Julian
Huxley in 1946). Lending weight to their cause was the rise of organized labour
(of which the WEA was in some respects part), and in due course the Great War –
toward the end of the which the Ministry of Reconstruction’s Adult Education
Committee recommended that universities should establish ‘extra-mural’ departments. It was largely the WEA connection which led central government to fund adult education in England and Wales (from 1909).

The first university to set up an extra-mural department was Nottingham in 1920 (by 1930, Exeter, Oxford, Cambridge, Hull, Southampton and Leicester had followed suit (Raybould 1951 pp. 126-127)). Their initial focus was the ‘tutorial class’, meeting for two hours weekly over three years, undertaking (uncertificated) work of ‘university standard’. Curriculum planning involved close collaboration with the WEA, through ‘joint committees’. Grant-aid supported ‘liberal’ (i.e., non-vocational) education and the employment of full-time and part-time tutors. The volume and character of extra-mural provision changed somewhat after 1945, but its defining features remained: the ‘liberal’ curriculum; association with the WEA (and a growing range of other community stakeholders); and grant-aid, allowing departments relative autonomy in their universities. Typically, full-time ‘staff tutors’ would both teach ‘tutorial’ classes weekly through the autumn and winter for two terms, and organise – in association with the WEA and others – a programme of classes in their subject taught by a larger band of part-time tutors.

For half a century, this pattern was firmly entrenched. However, as a senior adult education scholar lamented, extra-mural (literally, ‘outside the walls’) could also mean ‘out of mind’:

Fifty years ago dons and senates gave time and energy to adult education because they saw it as a means of correcting or mitigating an injustice: the denial of educational opportunity to intelligent “working men and women”. Such feelings do not survive in a meritocracy; they are replaced by a conviction (which though unwarranted is extremely comfortable) that justice has now been done and that secondary and higher education is now freely available to all who can profit by it. Those left behind are therefore seen not as the dispossessed but as the incompetent, and the sense of obligation which impelled the Universities into extension and extra-mural activities between 1870 and 1945 is weakened or destroyed. (Wiltshire 1976, pp. 103-4.)

This observation was to prove prescient. The 1970s began promisingly, with the Russell Committee advocating that universities should establish ‘extra-mural’ (or, as it was not commonly termed, ‘continuing’) education in universities was subject to a series of ill-considered, short-term and deeply damaging initiatives. Its funding was ‘mainstreamed’ under the higher education funding councils (rather than being provided separately by the Ministry of Education, as it had been since 1909). Quite quickly the curriculum followed: courses had to lead not just to qualifications, but to form part of standard undergraduate degrees. The final straw, was the need to meet the needs of successive ‘Research Assessment Exercises’: extra-mural (or CE) departments, whose academic staff generally spanned a breadth of disciplines thinly, found themselves unable to meet criteria of research ‘critical mass’; efforts to overcome this by focusing on continuing education as a field of study proved generally vain.

In the circumstances, UCE departments withered on the vine. Most closed over – roughly – the decade around the millennium. A few survived, by dint of tireless and gifted departmental leadership (e.g., Sheffield, Leicester), positional advantages (e.g., Cambridge), or a combination of these (e.g., Oxford). But most did not: the great names of the English ‘great tradition’ (Nottingham, Leeds, Newcastle, Birmingham, Bristol, Southampton, Hull, Manchester, Keele, Exeter, London) have all closed, or massively ‘downsized’, as have nearly all the departments created in post-Robbins universities (e.g., Kent, Lancaster, Surrey, Aston). Those few which have survived have been forced to adapt: some are in effect their university centres for management of part-time undergraduate degree teaching (e.g. Liverpool); a few, especially in major cities, have a strong record of development and project work (e.g., Sheffield); some have developed their ‘access’ and ‘outreach’ aspects to become ‘widening participation’ ‘hubs’ of their institution. Nearly all are now designated ‘centres’ or ‘units’, rather than ‘departments’ or ‘schools’. Few employ staff on standard academic contracts, and none now can now be considered principally as providers of a broad curriculum of liberal adult education. Programmes of day and weekend schools have all but disappeared, except at Oxford and Cambridge. Collaboration with the WEA also fell victim to government funding arrangements, which since the 1990s have made a sharp (and deeply ignorant) distinction between ‘further’ and ‘higher’ education.

Reflecting on the experience of these university continuing education over the period 1981-2006, Moseley (2010) comments that ‘to survive, let alone prosper, requires a CE/Lifelong Learning operation to be wholly in step with its university with all that involves’ (p. 52). The difficulty with this prescription is that the price of close alignment between UCE and a university’s mission may be high. Thus, for example, for ‘Russell Group’ and ‘1994 Group’ universities – broadly the universities established before and during the 1960s – international profile is now at a premium. For ‘global’ universities, continuing education has sometimes been over-strongly associated with the ‘local’: for example, thirty years ago Nottingham University had adult education centres in Boston, Derby,
Lincoln, Loughborough, Matlock and Stamford, as well as one in Nottingham city centre (Lawson 1977, p. 10) – all towns and cities within 60 miles of the university’s campus. None remains. However, the university does now boast substantial campuses in China and Malaysia opened over the past decade and offering a range of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, as well as engaging in research. (There are also now three in Nottingham and one (largely devoted to agriculture-related programmes) in the countryside nearby – though the student body is overwhelmingly full-time and engaged on accredited courses leading to degrees.

The above account has focused on ‘pre-1992’ universities. There is a case to be made (it has certainly become the commonsense within the ‘policy community’) that universities which were polytechnics before 1992 had a stronger ‘local’ mission, and were more attuned to providing part-time courses relevant to their local communities. This was the burden of a critique of university extra-mural education developed by Duke over many years (cf Duke 2008). According to this view, extra-mural departments, protected by ‘ring-fenced’ funding, became intellectually conservative and inward-looking, ceasing to engage both with internal departments and the extension of higher education opportunities which characterized the last decades of the twentieth century; at the same time, they short-changed their students by denying them the kind of recognized qualifications which had value in the labour market. Whilst it remains broadly true that these universities enroll more part-time (and ‘mature’) students than do their ‘pre-1992’ counterparts, the extent to which this should be regarded as ‘continuing education’ is unclear.

Analysis

While most Canadian universities appear to be responding—at least rhetorically—to increased demand for lifelong learning, personal experience indicates that the implementation of appropriate policies and programs face several conceptual and organizational barriers. First, as other studies have shown, capacity building for UCE and lifelong learning means dealing with encompassing, elusive, and contested concepts (Marks, 2002). Universities’ senior administrations do not appear to agree on, or be quite sure of, what UCE actually means let alone how to best organise it. Recent searches for references to “continuing education” on the website of Canada’s national association of universities and colleges yielded few results. Nor does the association detail any institutional approaches to meeting the challenges laid down by the government reports referred to earlier. Second, universities are increasingly competing with one another for both local and international students and to maintain their position they need to find additional sources of revenue to fund the core activities of research and teaching. This strikes at one of the key challenges for UCE. On the one hand it is considered an area of innovation and experimentation enabling the development of new programs and technologies; on the other it is considered to be profit-generating, its income to be returned to the university at large. A third aspect affecting the development of UCE involves university policies and practices that can hinder or discourage adult learning. For example, an earlier study (Nesbit, Dunlop & Gibson, 2007) identified several such barriers: cumbersome enrolment procedures, restrictions on entrance qualifications, inadequate guidance and support systems, a requirement that programs must offer a diploma or certificate, rigid scheduling, the rise of online registration systems, the slow acceptance of alternative prior learning assessment policies, lack of access to a welcoming space appropriate to adult learners’ lives and learning styles, narrow and unimaginative approaches to teaching, course content that ignores learners’ experiences, unsympathetic faculty and staff, and fiscal requirements that limit the freedom to experiment.

UCE in the UK faces many similar problems. Few university senior managers have been clear about the purpose of UCE: though by and large, post-1992 institutions’ leaders – with a more ‘local’ mission – have been somewhat less ‘know-nothing’. CE has ceased to form a strong part of government policy documents about higher education – despite the recent espousal of lifelong learning – while universities have largely disappeared from policy prescriptions as vehicles for lifelong learning more broadly. Many UCE units do extremely valuable work; those with strong and vocal leadership may be seen as a useful complement to the ‘core mission’ of the institution. Nevertheless, mainstreaming – particularly of finance, curriculum and ‘systems’ – has reduced the scope for CE units to exercise autonomy and be innovative.

A comprehensive analysis of the factors that variously enable or limit the development of UCE at Canadian and UK universities suggests that attention be paid not only to conceptual definitions but also to the environments in which such institutions are situated, their organizational and structural contexts, and the cognitive and affective learning interactions they foster. The first factor is the question of the balance between fulfilling provincial expectations for the delivery of higher education (often with limited budgets) and responding to national imperatives. Most universities have to regularly face the questions of who are their students and clients and to whom are they most accountable. Responding to the differing demands of learners, employers, local communities, and the state is a complicated matter, and their responses are compounded by the diverse, complex and changing nature of the Canadian and UK higher education sectors.

Yet, the opportunities to respond proactively to such challenges are often circumscribed by a second factor: financial exigencies and the expectation to constantly do more with less. Clearly, additional resources are required to develop UCE, but there is some uncertainty about who will provide these. In such circumstances, it is not surprising that the pressures to provide for “new”
groups of learners—such as adult and lifelong learners—are not given as much weight as the institutions’ core clientele. Thus, economic imperatives of continuing education tend to be promoted over its citizenship aspects. As Fisher and Rubenson (1998) noted a decade ago, such programs are now evincing a trend toward greater vocationalism or labour-market relevance. The trend continues unabated today.

Since such issues clearly affect institutional capacity to develop lifelong learning by also limiting responsive flexibility, a third factor in the development of lifelong learning involves universities’ distinct administrative, governance, funding, and accountability structures. These affect their overall operations, the educational opportunities they provide, and their capacity to change. Even though institutions of higher education are remarkably stable and resilient organizations, their internal systems and structures change only slowly (Clark, 1998). They are also less comfortable dealing with informal modes of education and tend to marginalize educational activities that fall outside their conventional and traditional systems of delivery (Jones, 2001). This situation is compounded by the often parlous financial state of many universities, brought about by the ambivalence of successive governments toward adequate funding. So, as universities receive no government support for continuing studies activities, the expenses of development in UCE usually have to be met on a cost-recovery basis by increasing student fees.

In other words, lifelong learning has yet to change much of universities’ organizational architecture. However, as with other institutions of higher education, universities are more than ever permeated by the forces that surround them and may need to modify their structures if they wish to ensure lifelong learning means more than providing a range of adult education courses or marketing existing courses to older learners. The institutional implications of lifelong learning highlight the need to widen access to, and improve services for, disadvantaged groups, both through a more cohesive organizational structure and through partnering and collaborating with other like-minded organizations. As Duke (2001) claimed, it is indispensable for a lifelong learning university to play an active part in various communities of learning.

A fourth factor concerns the traditional concept of a university. Although attitudes toward higher education are changing, universities are still too commonly regarded as overly formal and traditional and largely designed to provide courses for young people pursuing undergraduate and graduate degrees full-time. Here, university approaches to UCE have implications beyond the merely semantic. How an institution defines continuing education influences its overall approach to, and provision for, adult learners. Also, universities in both countries are relatively autonomous. Although operating in broadly similar economic and social contexts, they can develop their own programmatic and administrative structures as they think fit. Further, both Canada and the UK have little public coordination or nationally agreed-upon approaches to UCE. These elements tend to enhance (at least implicitly) a sense of competition between institutions and discourage cooperative research or joint attempts to deal with shared problems.

References


Tom Nesbit, John Holford: University Continuing Education in Canada and the UK


Introduction

According to EU policy documents, lifelong learning serves the following four purposes: enhancing or maintaining employability, promoting personal development, fostering social cohesion and developing active citizenship (European Commission, 2010). It is generally believed that – nowadays and in contrast to the humanistic approach of the Faure report in the 1970s – labour market requirements such as employability account for more than 80% of all learning activities and lifelong learning is therefore often discussed in terms of ‘human resource development in drag’ (Bosher, 1998; Holford et al., this volume). Whereas this may apply to learning as a whole, we find that the reasons for participation in formal adult learning are far more diverse and going beyond vocational aspects, while national systems differ widely with regard to the scope of courses on offer.

This chapter reports on a survey of adult learners participating in formal adult education. A precise definition and full account of the data collection procedure are found in the annex to this chapter. The survey aimed to collect data from 13,000 adult learners in the 13 European countries/regions involved in the LLL2010 project; due to problems with data collection in one country only 12 countries/regions were included in the comparative analysis. In this chapter we sketch a comparative picture of the profile of these participants in formal adult education. We explore questions such as: Who are these learners? What do national adult education systems offer them? Why do they learn? How responsive are national systems to adults’ learning needs? The main reason for exploring these questions is the fact that adult learning is seen as key to the achievement of a ‘competitive and dynamic knowledge based society’ as stated in the Lisbon goals (Holford et al., this volume). Increasing overall participation rates is clearly an important concern for

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36 Unfortunately, Norway had to be deleted from the analyses because the data collection method in that country deviated from the common guidelines.