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ABSTRACT

The paper reviews the growth of Canadian Adult Basic Education (ABE) with emphasis on the role played by the Federal government. It considers major events leading to an awareness of the disadvantaged and their inability to function adequately, without necessary opportunities and skills, in the mainstream of an industrialized society. The author describes the various Federally sponsored projects--the Technical and Vocational Training Assistance (TVTA) Act, the Basic Training for Skill Development (BTSD) Program, The Adult Occupational Training (AOT) Act, and the New Start Program. Innovations in ABE established life skills and basic literacy training and an ABE course based on individualized learning and a behavioral objectives "systems" approach. For continued effectiveness and expansion, the author emphasizes the need for active student involvement in the learning process. A bibliography is provided. (Author/JB)

CANADIAN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION:

AN OVERVIEW

by

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FOREWORD

This paper reviews the growth of Canadian Adult Basic Education (ABE) with emphasis on the role played by the federal government. It considers major events leading to an awareness of the disadvantaged and their inability to function adequately, without necessary opportunities and skills, in the mainstream of an industrialized society. Major legislation and programs introduced to combat some of these inadequacies are outlined and innovations considered.

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Derek Franklin
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CAUSES FOR CONCERN

Until quite recently Canadians assumed that because education had been compulsory since 1912, almost everyone of educable age was literate. Indeed, UNESCO questionnaires on Canadian illiteracy were reputed to have been returned with the satisfying response of "not-applicable." Although this assumption was doubtless false, illiteracy was not a problem or an embarrassment for the country at large before the 1960s, and had never received much attention.[1] Before then, illiteracy was generally no bar to employment, and those who did feel its sting were neither conspicuous nor vocal.

However, certain events occurred after 1960 which left no doubt that extensive adult illiteracy was not just a problem to be faced by the "developing" nations, but that Canada was one of many industrialized countries for whom illiteracy was indeed becoming a major concern.

Because many of these events were international and have been well

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[1] Exceptions to this were Frontier College, founded in 1899, which provided teacher-labourers for railroad workers and for miners and fishermen in isolated areas. Canadian Army basic education training in the Second World War, and certain school boards, church groups, provincial institutions and agencies (such as the YMCA) also provided basic educational opportunities for adults.

publicised, they will only be briefly mentioned here. First, the great technological explosion which we are experiencing today was having an impact in the early 1960s. Many simple manipulative occupations were replaced by occupations requiring considerably higher literacy skills. The technological revolution also introduced other complications for the individual - in no area was this more true than his psychological development. New demands were placed on him, and adjustment to these demands required education (and functionality) in the widest sense. This was especially true for the individual whose background had limited his participation in the regular activities of the society in which he lived.

Secondly, the growth of developing countries and their emergence into world affairs helped to expose the situation of their disadvantaged and illiterate and, in time, the situation of the deprived in industrialized countries. This was the case in countries such as Canada, which had established substantial international development programs and which *ipso facto* were expected to have resolved similar situations at home.

A third phenomenon of the 1960s, especially prominent in North America and integrally tied to the first two, was the growing public concern for the rights of individuals and minority groups. The causes for this concern were highly complex, and probably motivated as much by self-interest as altruism. In the U.S., riots on the campus and in the ghetto were common. In Canada, native Indian activists and other minority group leaders were conspicuous. Such books as The Other America (Harrington: 1962) and, in Canada, The Vertical Mosaic (Porter: 1965) helped publicise the misery of millions, previously unheard, and became immediate best sellers. "War on Poverty" was the slogan of the day; legislation and programs aimed at combatting illiteracy, unemployment, underdevelopment and other aspects of poverty, emerged in response to this call.

LEGISLATION AND GROWTH IN CANADIAN ABE

Besides the general factors outlined above, there were specific factors peculiar to Canada which intensified awareness of her illiterates.

Prior to 1960, Canada experienced a few years of unusually high unemployment. This situation helped emphasize the need for a federally

sponsored vocational training legislation espoused by the government of the day. In December, 1960 The Technical and Vocational Training Assistance (TVTA) Act was promulgated. Among its provisions, the Act permitted agreements between the federal government and individual provincial governments for the establishment of vocational training programs to "fit" an adult "for any gainful employment." It was agreed that the federal government would finance the programs and specify their objectives; the provinces, with their training facilities and resources, would implement them.

Shortly after TVTA training programs were instituted, it became apparent that many of their potential recipients were simply unable to benefit because they did not possess the prerequisite communication and computational skills. This situation came as a surprise to those who had assumed that the provinces were meeting the obligation of educating their citizenry to at least a functional literacy level. However, had they had the benefit of the 1961 Dominion Bureau of Statistics (now Statistics Canada) Census, they would have known that of the 11 million Canadians 15 years of age and over, approximately five million, or 46 per cent, had not gone beyond the equivalent of a Grade 8 level (Canada, 1961), and they would have been more prepared for what was to follow.[2]

The federal government agreed to the introduction of what it hoped would be a short term and restricted ABE component -- the Basic Training for Skill Development (BTSD) Program -- into its vocational training program. BTSD was restricted in content and duration, as the federal government, logically enough, did not wish to provide a substitute for the regular school system -- a provincial responsibility. Instead, instruction was limited to a maximum of 52 weeks and only basic communications, computational and science skills were approved. Moreover, BTSD was to be provided only as a means of preparation for learning a new occupation. Nevertheless, it soon became by far the largest ABE program with, for example, 64,000 participating during the 1968-69 fiscal year. Provincial institutions and private agencies continued to have independent ABE programs, but their student enrolment probably never exceeded 15 per cent of the total at any one time.

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[2] The effect of the results of the 1951 Census on the legislators appears to have been minimal.

The TVTA Act's successor, the Adult Occupational Training (AOT) Act (1967), recognized the indispensable nature of the BTSD program: social and political pressure had forced the federal government into a firm commitment to BTSD, although the restricted objectives of the program remained unaltered. After 1967 however, a variety of events occurred which sparked interesting and important changes within both the BTSD and other ABE programs.

One important event was the creation in 1967 of the federal government's NewStart Program. This program was designed for the purpose of establishing action research centres in participating provinces, aimed at providing solutions to the problems of educational and socio-economical development for Canada's disadvantaged. The NewStart Corporations represented one aspect of the country's anti-poverty drive.

Because of various administrative and political problems, the long term impact of several of the NewStart Corporations was less than had been hoped. However, in 1971 the Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan NewStart Corporations were able to have certain of their developments in ABE methodology displayed through demonstration projects in several provinces. Although of limited research value, these demonstrations had some notable effects. First, they exhibited the willingness of the federal Department of Manpower and Immigration, which was responsible for the administration of training under the AOT Act and which sponsored the projects, to support certain developments in ABE, not directly occupationally-oriented, which formerly had not been encouraged in the restricted BTSD program.

One reason for the federal government's apparent change of attitude was their recognition of socio-economic and political pressure for modification to the existing BTSD program. The second reason was the realization that the problem of unemployment could not be solved by only training towards the acquisition of an occupational skill. Unemployment was an aspect of a far more complex problem which had no single, simple solution. Niemi and Anderson (1969), among others, had emphasized this fact, although in a wider context:

> Any plan for a remedy for disadvantaged must be concerned with cultural change which involves an alteration in the over-all way of life. Piecemeal approaches directed towards the alleviation of individual distress will not solve the problem because they will not alter the basic cultural environment.

The second important effect of the demonstrations was the publicity given certain trends in educational development which were not widely known or utilized among Canadian adult basic educators. Most notable was the trend away from the teacher-centered, directive, to the student-centered, non-directive model of instruction. This model was manifest in what became generally known as Individually Prescribed Instruction (IPI). Its advantages were quickly appreciated. IPI meant that students could work individually and at their own pace. This meant, in turn, that a continuous intake and exit of students throughout the duration of the course could be implemented. In theory, therefore, the classroom remained full, even though some students still dropped out prematurely. IPI was expected to reduce the cost of training and also result in greater learning achievement. Both were attractive features which appealed to the sponsors and implementors of the program.

The third salient effect of the demonstration was to increase rapidly the latent interest in ABE research and development and to encourage a healthy interchange of ideas and approaches between programs. With some notable exceptions, up to this time Canadian ABE had not been known for its originality or creativity.

SOME INNOVATIONS IN CANADIAN ABE

Three significant innovations introduced by the demonstration projects will now be described. Other new approaches which emerged around this time will also be considered.

Life-Skills. The life-skills training course was a first attempt in Canada to provide for the disadvantaged a structured framework for the acquisition of skills in human relations and personal development.[3] Research had suggested that these skills were equally as important to successful occupational performance and continuing employability as the acquisition of the occupational skill itself. It was therefore argued that life-skills training could legitimately form a part of the BTSD program.

Originally the course was designed to be given independently, but later it was combined with other courses in a number of ways. The long term

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[3] This course was a modification of a model developed by Winthrop Adkins, Columbia University, New York.

effect of life-skills training on the personal and occupational life of the participant is still being studied, but there is *prima facie* evidence that it should have significantly beneficial results. Short term benefits are much in evidence.

Basic Literacy Training (Grades 1 - 4). A course known as BLADE (Basic Literacy for Adult Development), with an original, linguistic approach to teaching reading was introduced to Canadian adult basic educators in the demonstration projects.

Under the BTSD program as it was operated up to 1971, literacy courses were rare. The 52-week limit on course duration provided insufficient time to bring an individual fr m the lowest grade levels to a point at which he could obtain a job or enter occupational skill training. Although the limit remained, the Department of Manpower and Immigration's new interest in this program suggested a willingness to entertain student re-entry into training for further 52-week (or less) sessions, thus providing illiterates with the opportunities to develop their various skills over an extended period.

ABE Course (Grades 5 - 10). A course termed Learning Individualized for Canadians (LINC)[4] and based on behavioral objectives "systems" approach was the third and possibly the most important innovation introduced.

As indicated, the concept of IPI had been received with interest, among other reasons for its possibilities of permitting continuous intake and exit of students, an approach which soon was adopted in many programs. In order to implement continuous intake and exit, a model was required that would make individual prescription possible and practical in the classroom situation. The behavioral objectives "systems" approach was one such possibility. There was nothing new about the basic model: it had been used in modified forms in educational and other activities for years. Some ABE institutions had in fact already begun to develop curricula for the systems approach at the time the demonstration projects were launched.

Of these three innovations, the last mentioned has become the most prominent and widespread because it appeared at the time to be the only

[4] The Life Skills, BLADE and LINC courses were developed by the Saskatchewan New Start, now the Training Research and Development Station, Department of Manpower and Immigration, Prince Albert, from whom further information may be obtained.

viable solution for the continuous intake and exit requirement then being introduced in various parts of the country.

During the months following, these three approaches were presented in various combinations in different provinces, many independent of federal government sponsorship. The main result was an interesting and very useful exchange of ideas and practices hitherto unknown.

It is not being suggested that the innovations mentioned were a panacea for the wider problems confronting the disadvantaged. Nor is it suggested that these were the only innovations which were developed during this time. They were, at the time, the most publicised and readily available. Certainly they were not without their critics. For example many people were well aware of some severe limitations of the "behavioral objectives" model, which unless expertly implemented, had the distinct possibility of stifling creativity and the more subtle nuances of motivation and learning. Furthermore, many students did not thrive on non-directive learning. A second example: the argument was made that a life-skills course was little more then structured lessons in conformity to the dominant society.

Following the demonstration projects, the Department of Manpower and Immigration launched the Basic Job Readiness Training (BJRT) component of BTSD. This program combines a number of interesting features. It is aimed at the severely disadvantaged, or those with low level education (approximately Grades 0 - 4), and includes basic education, life-skills training, job orientation, job search techniques and specific work experience. These elements can be selected to suit the needs of individuals or groups in a training program that could be both flexible and recurrent.

The concept of recurrency in training and education is one that is already receiving considerable attention in Canada. The term "recurrent education", seen frequently in UNESCO and the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) publications, refers to a periodic returning to different phases of personal and occupational development, according to the individual's needs and goals. It is similar in meaning to "life-long learning" or "éducation permanente", although at present it appears to have more restricted occupational overtones.

Recurrent education, if it can be extensively implemented in Canada, will be a great step forward. It should decrease the artificial separation of

components such as ABE, life-skills, occupational skill training, and certain extraneous requirements such as an arbitrary time schedule, integrating them into one continuous learning pattern, based on the needs of the individual.

Innovative approaches in Canadian ABE using sophisticated educational technology are also being developed. Good examples of these are to be found in Canadore College, North Bay, Ontario. Two of these are Cognitive Style Mapping and Comprehensive Achievement Monitoring. The first is a computerized process whereby a "map" is designed of the ways a student derives cognitive meaning from his environment and personal experience. Once it has been determined how he learns, it is easier, in theory at least, to design an efficient individualized program for him.

Comprehensive Achievement Monitoring (CAM) is a computer based criterion-referenced, longitudinal testing program using sampling techniques. The CAM Program being developed will provide pre-test, post-test, trend and retention data as well as an automatic system for validating objectives and other components of the system. It is clearly far more thorough than most evaluation systems which are generally limited to pre- and post-tests.

Over the past few years, the Province of Quebec, which has large numbers of rural disadvantaged, has been developing interesting multi-media adult education programs through the use of T.V., radio and community groups. The objective is to reach those who through isolation, ignorance or poverty have been unable to share in the regular activities of the society.

One Quebec project, TEVEC, aimed at bringing the part of the adult population which had not completed nine years of schooling up to that level. The program combined two subject-areas: academic (e.g., French, English, Mathematics) and socio-economic-cultural (e.g., health, justice, participation, social welfare, government). Methods used have included 90-minute T.V. programs five days a week, correspondence courses, participant-teacher meetings, weekly tele-club meetings, with the central discussion topic arising from the T.V. program viewed.

Multi-media programs such as these are likely to expand and become more sophisticated with the development of technology and a growing concern for those who cannot be reached by conventional educational methods.

EFFECTIVENESS OF CANADIAN ABE

Canadian ABE expanded considerably during the 1960's. Its nature was determined largely by the responsibilities allocated the federal government. A task of the federal Department of Manpower and Immigration was to provide workers with marketable skills and avoid unemployment; to train towards employability rather than to educate in the wide sense. Its BTSD program, logically enough, therefore had a specifically occupational orientation. Over the years, however, it was found to be too narrow. The problems of human nature had been compounded by the severe demands of the day, and seemingly straigthforward problems required solutions of a most intricate nature. This was especially true of attempts to alleviate specific ills of the disadvantaged, such as unemployment, where the solution was far more complex than simply providing vocational training. Other factors associated with unemployment such as family and personal instability, poor housing, and bad work habits also required attention, along with the individual's need for a saleable skill. It made little sense to treat part of man and leave the rest. To do so was uneconomical and showed a lack of understanding of human behavior. The problems of the disadvantaged had to be treated within an ecological framework rather than a simple cause and effect model.

These facts have since been recognized by the majority of adult educators and trainers. In Canada, the introduction of innovations such as life-skills training, literacy program, Basic Job Readiness Training, and recurrent education into ABE programs is indicative of a greater appreciation of the complexities of the relearning process. In this sense Canadian ABE is <u>becoming</u> more effective. Some modifications to alleviate obvious program weaknesses and to accommodate changes within society are clearly being made and are likely to continue.

For Canadian ABE to continue having valuable impact, it is essential that greater attention be paid to a very basic pedagogical principle: the need to involve the student <u>actively</u> in <u>all</u> aspects of the learning process. The basis for this premise is not so much moral or philosophical, but one of simple expediency and common sense: adult education and training programs are as successful as the extent of student participation.

The Faure Report (UNESCO: 1972), among many recent statements, reiterates this necessity:

> "Any system according educational services to a passive population, and any reform which fails to arouse active personal participation among the mass of learners can achieve at best only marginal success."

For a program to be successful, the nature of participation is clear. It must be based on the principle, attributed to Freire, of "a dialogue of equals," and not a token participation *ex post facto*, i.e., after the course has been planned. It is insufficent to limit student participation to his choosing among a number of predetermined behavioral objectives. In this way he runs the risk of having to choose among a number of items which curriculum developers considered good for him and which, in all likelihood, fail to expresses his interests.

It is only through participation that the adult learner is likely to become fully motivated and reach his full potential. For this to occur, it may mean that we adult basic educators are in as much need of education as our students.

Canadian ABE, therefore, does at present have its own identity, with its own aims and goals. However, if these are to be reached by building on innovations such as those discussed, this identity as it presently exists is likely to fade and will probably disappear completely. The trend towards the integration of education (or training) components is evident. The presently existing artificial barriers between ABE, vocational training, life-skills, etc., will inevitably disappear, and in their place, continuous learning patterns will be developed in which the needs of the student, rather than those of the program, will be expressed. At that time Canadian ABE will have served its purpose.

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