

Editorial

Talking Among Ourselves: Online Journals Can Quicken the Conversation

Walter Archer, Editor-in-Chief

Many adult educators believe that adult learning is, ideally, a group process through which we are informed and sometimes inspired by the thoughts expressed by others. Those of us in university continuing education units carry on this process of learning through discussion every day among our immediate colleagues, as well as at the CAUCE conference and other gatherings.

Academic and professional journals, such as this one, make slower and more carefully considered contributions to this educational conversation, as compared to the rapid fire exchanges that occur in the hallways of our workplaces and at our conferences. Since *CJUCE* publishes only two issues annually, often six months or a full year passes between the submission of an article for review and the time when the finished version is available to readers. In many cases that is not a great disadvantage, as authors are providing their carefully considered thoughts on broad issues that evolve only slowly. However, for the more topical issues typically addressed in the Forum section of this journal, and to some extent by items in the new Reports of Practice section, these long delays may be a substantial disadvantage. By the time a reader sees a discussion of a current issue in a Forum piece and writes a response to be published as another Forum piece in a later issue, the delay of a year may mean that the issue is no longer current.

Technology to the rescue! As the current issue is being published we have activated the “comment” feature of the Open Journal Systems software that now hosts this journal. To use this feature you must register as a reader (use the “Register” button at the top of the *CJUCE* main page) and then log in when you want to leave a comment on a Forum piece (or any other item) that you read in this journal. Since your name will appear beside your comment, this may well institute a much quicker exchange of views with the author and others than is possible through the slow process of writing a new Forum piece in response to one you have read here. We hope that this will “quicken” the discussions provoked by our Forum pieces in both senses: it should bring the discussion to life (admittedly a slightly archaic sense of “quicken”) as well as speed it up a great deal. You can also comment on items published as regular Articles, Reports of Practice, Book Reviews, and Editorials.

I encourage you to make use of this feature of our online journal. Those adult educators who review submissions to this journal and others have the privilege of carrying on an interesting (although anonymous) discussion with authors about the ideas expressed in their manuscripts submitted for publication. The use of the comment feature in the Open Journal Systems software will open up this privilege to everyone. Right now, I'll use an old fashioned means to exercise my

privilege of making some general comments about the items that appear in this issue, with the hope that you will read these items and perhaps make your own comments about them.

In “‘This Is Not Your Grandmother’s Plar’: British Columbia Boldly Creates a New Learning Culture,” the Forum piece in this issue, Dianne Conrad discusses what appears to be a major resurgence of the push for prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) in Canadian higher education. To many of us in the general field of adult education and the more specific sub-field of university continuing education, PLAR has always seemed like a really good idea, and a logical way of addressing some of the needs of adult learners. But over the past two or three decades it has become evident that the devil is in the details, and PLAR has never become a feature of Canadian higher education to the extent that many of us had hoped. However, in this Forum piece, Dr. Conrad describes a conference in the spring of 2010 that resulted in the creation of the British Columbia Prior Learning Action Network (BCPLAN). She suggests that this may catapult British Columbia back into a leading role in the implementation of PLAR in Canada—a role it occupied for a time in the 1990s. Could this really be the “tipping point” that may finally make PLAR a prominent feature of adult education in Canada? What do you think? We hope you will express your thoughts by commenting online. Of course, you can also write a longer response and submit it for publication as another Forum piece in a subsequent issue of *CJUCE*.

Jennifer Kelly discusses an unusual and innovative method of promoting adult learning in her article “Engaging Community: Exploring the African-Canadian Experience through Dialogue and Scriptwriting.” This article describes an instance of arts-based community-university engagement that is both an interesting history lesson and an account of community and individual development among a particular component of the ethnic mix that is our country.

Howard Davidson’s article “Palestinian Continuing Education Under Occupation: Images of Distress and Possibilities for Hope” describes yet another unusual setting for university continuing education—this one unusual by duress rather than choice by educators or learners. This article is a thought-provoking discussion of the distortions produced by circumstances of military occupation and concomitant political and economic forces.

Diane Dutton, Susan Burgess, and Tom Nesbit bring us back to the mainstream of university continuing education with their article “Looking Forward by Looking Back: Determining the Value of External Program Reviews.” Our units all do program reviews; this article is a thoughtful and valuable discussion of how we might get the most value from such reviews. While it was originally submitted for publication as a Report of Practice with a strong focus on a case study of a particular program review at Simon Fraser University, exchanges among reviewers, the authors, and myself resulted in its being turned into an Article with a broader focus on program reviews in general.

Many of our units are in charge of summer sessions at our respective institutions. Bill Kops’ article “Summer Session Organizational Models at Canadian Universities,” based on a recent Canada-wide survey, will be of interest to the many *CJUCE* readers who are involved with this aspect of university continuing education. It should be required reading for those involved in the recurring discussions of how summer session should be fitted into the overall structure and operations of their institutions.

Finally, Edward Jackson’s article “University Capital, Community Engagement, and Continuing Education: Blending Professional Development and Social Change” makes a bold suggestion as to how our units can combine promotion of social change with professional development through the investment of university capital. I expect that some of us will want to discuss this innovative idea with the author, both online and through other means.

Readers who are aware of the new category called Reports of Practice will have noticed that there are none in this issue. However, there are several currently in the review process, and I confidently expect that some of them will appear in the next issue of this journal.