

St. Francis Xavier University

Foundations Institute:
Learning Plan, Critical Annotations, Review of History of Adult Education

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Learning Plan

The following Learning Plan contains a learning narrative, personal and professional learning goals, initial research project plan, self-assessment and learning contract, and a reflection on journaling. This Learning Plan has been submitted as a partial requirement for *AE 500 – Foundations Institute* in the Master of Adult Education program at St. Francis Xavier University.

Learning Narrative

For as long as I can remember I have always struggled with a potential career or area of interest upon which I could focus my time and energy. Most of my energy to date has been spent examining my life through formal education and workplace roles. Seeking out challenges and a sense of belonging, I have consistently struggled to find meaning in the actions I take. Only in more recent years have I begun to understand how periods of vulnerability in life have shaped me as a learner and practitioner.

Over the coming pages, I will first consider myself as both a student and learner, two terms which I draw strong distinctions between. Then, looking at myself as an educator I will reflect on what elements of teaching most resonate with me. Next, I will identify the influence vulnerability has had on my learning and personal growth. Finally, I will draw the journey that has brought me to be a student in the Master of Adult Education program at St. Francis Xavier University.

Student and Learner. The relationships I have constructed with information and knowledge thus far in my life — as both a student and as a learner — have been formed through two completely different experiences. As a student, I have navigated the

structure and demands of formal learning environments which have, for the most part, been designed with behaviourist philosophies in mind. Academically a strong student, I have consistently struggled to find meaning in these educational experiences and as a result I have been unable to translate my learnings into an ongoing commitment in a specific career or field. Lacking a sense of purpose in the studies themselves, unable to find necessary challenge in the course work, and the inability to make connections to form a sense of belonging, I have always sought out more meaningful learning opportunities on my own.

As a learner, I find myself actively engaged in the consumption of information. Motivated by my curiosity to develop a deeper knowledge base, I seek to understand the context within which I exist and the role I have in the broader society of which I am a contributing member of. Taking the forms of self-directed or learning in non-formal settings, I most value when educational opportunities are developed through my own initiative to satisfy my prevailing thoughts at a given period in my life.

This divided approach, as a formal student and an informal learner, has been a source of challenge for myself. As I continue to examine my life, by focusing on various areas of interests and seeking knowledge through diverse education experience, I create confusion among my peers, with my family and ultimately with myself. As I take actions in my life I am shaping a continually changing identity as both an individual and practitioner. This changing identity presents a challenge when illustrating my value and worth to colleagues, helping family members of different generations understand who I am, and providing some reassurance to myself that I am on the best possible path.

Second, and ultimately tied to the idea of personal and professional identity, is how this examination of myself through various educational pursuits influences my ability to remain relative and competitive in work endeavours. Although past professional roles have not closely associated with me, with the aid of a social worker I have begun to understand that work is a highly personal and important thing to me. As an individual constantly forming his personal identify, as a professional seeing acceptance by my peers, and as a family member who feels like an outcast seeking to be understood, what and how I choose to learn, and the work associated with such learning is a central element of how I construct personal meaning.

Only in more recent years have I begun to understand why I do not typically feel connected to formal educational experiences. These understandings have been further expanded on while here at the Foundations Institute as I begin to learn more about the various philosophies and approaches to education and why some may resonate more than others. Having completed the *Zinn Philosophy of Adult Education Inventory* (Zinn, 1999) and associating myself most closely with the humanist and progressive philosophies, I now have a starting point from which to develop a better understanding of my approach to learning, as both an educator and learner. In the past, I have not had the knowledge to form an understanding about the environments and philosophies from which I was learning. Feeling that formal systems have never served me the way intended ultimately lead to following my curiosity and navigating towards settings which more aligned with my personal philosophies of education.

Adult Educator. Teaching adults has been the most rewarding thing I have done to date. Supporting learners as they work towards achieving goals they define for

themselves, there is no better feeling than seeing a student develop as an individual and practitioner as they begin to build a more comprehensive understand of what it is they are focusing their time and energy on.

Unfortunately, like many educators there are elements of my practice that do not resonate with me. Elements such as the subject matter itself and the overarching curriculum I often find to be irrelevant, uninteresting, or not designed in support of what learning is in the best interest of the student. Often wanting to alter or completely change how I am asked to teach and what courses I am to deliver, I often find myself at odds with administrators, other faculty and higher education as one large entity. Although I understand why content, curriculum, processes and standards exist in any system of education, and agree that many of those elements are essential, I am most often troubled by the fact that these elements are many times not designed with the student in mind and that there are sometimes better ways to serve learners.

In the past, I was not informed enough to *name my practice* but now feel I have a better understanding to consider where my philosophy is rooted. As I look back as past teaching experiences I can see how both humanist and progressive philosophies of adult education have influenced my work. I now have a starting point to better appreciate why I may often try to circumvent established practices that tend to be developed from more of a behaviorist perspective.

Periods of Vulnerability. The true concept of vulnerability was foreign to me until more recent years. It was not until I started to invest time in evaluating and understanding myself as an individual with the help of a social worker, and while here at the Foundations Institute with my peers, that I truly began to understand what it means

to be vulnerable and the ability it has to shape one's life. As I reflect on the most influential events that have shaped me as an individual, learner, and practitioner I find myself continually drawn to three emotional examples rooted in vulnerability.

Finding myself in Paris, France more than a decade ago without the knowledge of the French language or an agenda, I did not know what I would do with my time or what I could expect while I was there. As the days unfolded I began to fall in love with the nature of cities. The people, the places, and the interactions amongst and between these elements shaped Paris into a vibrant urban space in front of my eyes. Although it was impossible for me to know it at the time, a chance run-in with a stranger, the relationship I built over a few short hours, and the mark that experience left both in my mind and in my heart; this was the genesis for my love and appreciation of community. What I recognize now about this moment is that it was my ability to be vulnerable, even without knowing it, that presented the opportunity for me to experience something new and different, learning about culture and building an understanding of what authentic community interactions in a city can look like. When I think of my love and appreciation for cities, communities, the people which occupy them, and their ability to create positive change, I find myself always returning to my time in Paris.

My chance encounter in Paris did not start to take on meaning until I found myself unemployed in my home town and unable to find work for a lengthy period. By this time in my life I knew that I had been living with depression since a young age but avoided any authentic attempts to address my illness. However, I did know enough that I needed to keep my mind and body active as a source of ongoing distraction from spiraling into the depths of despair while unemployed. Because of this understanding I

found myself becoming heavily invested in my local communities. Volunteering, picking up odd work here-and-there, and supporting individuals and organizations who were creating better communities for themselves and those they served; I approached opportunities during this period with a yes mindset. Involving myself in anything which resonated with me, I often overcommitted myself to the point where I was at or beyond my capacity to contribute in truly valuable ways.

I found myself connected to neighbours, colleagues, friends and like-minded individuals who showed that they cared about me and were willing to invest in me as both an individual and active community member. What I learned during this time was the power of community; the ability that individuals have, when they come together to support one another, to build stronger communities. I started to invest my time into learning more of the foundational elements of community development and community engagement, and placed these practices into a context that resonated with me. I began to understand the varying levels of power that exist within a city dynamics, both explicit and implicit, and from this understanding I focused my attention and efforts where I believed the greatest gaps were in existing programming, where potential for success was, and what resonated most with me as a leader.

As I struggled in my life, my community rallied behind me to provide support when it was most needed however but this was not without its disadvantages. Because of my willingness to have a yes mindset I would find myself in the years to follow, up until most recently 2014, focusing my time and efforts on others rather than myself. I began to place community, colleagues, family and friends all before myself, which

resulted in neglecting my wellbeing more so than I already was, ultimately leading to major depressive period.

This time in my life was not unfamiliar as I had found myself in similar situations in the past. However, what did make this depressive period unique was the context and circumstances at the time and the influence these elements had on my willingness to authentically address my illness for the first time in my life.

A stable job with an employer whose values aligned with mine and who cared about me as an individual and not only as an employee. An understanding and compassionate partner I cared deeply for and was terrified of losing because of my depression. The self-realization that if I did not take responsibility and address my illness that no-one else would. These elements together provided the motivation and structure from which I could take the necessary steps to start to address my illness.

Support from key individuals whose input I respect, combined with forms of reflective practice and the consumption of relevant literature have helped me to direct more focus towards my physical and mental wellbeing. Over a two-year period, I reconstructed my life with the focus on myself by removing distractions and obligations that were not helping me to reach my identified goals. As I progressed through the rebuilding of this focused life I realized that it is only when I am healthy as an individual that I am of true value to my broader community.

What I have found to be most interesting is that while I understood what was happening during this period of my life, a period which I am still in, it was not until I attended the Foundations Institute that I started to recognize how much of an influence it has had on me as an individual and learner. Sharing my bridging exercise (see

Appendix A), regardless of how challenging of a process that was, and being receptive to feedback from my peers helped me to make connections between what I was interpreting as an ordinary period in my life to a transformation of myself as an individual and learner. Comments from Dr. Carole Roy regarding the nature of vulnerability and learning and an article by Stephen Brookfield (2011) on how to learn about one's mental illness and the power this realization can have, helped me to connect other events in my life with changes in myself to form a better overall understanding of where I am today and how I can get to where I want to be in the future.

While unknown in the moment, spending time in a foreign city with no agenda, becoming unemployed in a community of strangers, and living with a mental illness have all shaped who I am as an individual, learner and practitioner. Coming to this understanding was only possible when I found allies and safe spaces allowing me to have the conversations I needed to have, conversations I have avoided the majority of my life. While I believe that all learning experiences provide value of some type, addressing my mental illness and recognizing that I have the responsibility to affect positive change in my life and in the lives of others as a result, has been an influential development in understanding who I am.

Journey to Antigonish. The journey I have taken to be in the Master of Adult Education program at St. Francis Xavier University has been anything but linear. Coming to a master's program later in life, if at all, is something I never thought I would be doing. Yet when I take the time to reflect and consider who I am, where I have been, and what I am capable of, I realize I am now where I have needed to be all along.

On more than one occasion I have taken the necessary steps to start graduate studies but have always withdrawn from them. Knowing that a specific program would not have provided the needed purpose or meaning, or recognizing that the challenge would have been too much at a given time in addition to personal or professional struggles, I could have only come to this program now in my life as things have unfolded. Thinking back once again to my bridging exercise (see Appendix A), the meaning we derive from experiences often only makes sense when we take a step back and look at the larger picture.

As someone who has always struggled to find meaningful challenges in life I cannot think of a more appropriate challenge to put in front of myself. Seeking to understand why I have valued certain learning experiences over others in my educational pursuits, wanting to know how I can better support the community that has given me so much, and coming to a self-directed program motivated by my own curiosity. These are the conditions upon which I know I can achieve meaningful, challenging, and purposeful success.

As I continue along this journey, I think to the validation I have experienced while interacting with my peers throughout the Foundations Institute. Past concerns about not associating with being a graduate student, not having the mental aptitude to complete graduate studies — which I recognize has always been a form of *imposter's syndrome* — or being concerned that an adult education program may not be the right field for me all have dissipated as I continue through the assigned work. As someone who is passionate about learning more about the society in which I live but lacks the necessary focus to fully examine the depths of a given topic, I am looking forward to the focus and

intentionality that graduate studies can offer along with the flexibility to connect a subset of my interests into a single work.

As discussions unfold in our classroom, the hallways, in residence social rooms and online, I am encouraged by the connections I am beginning to make between theory and practice. I am recognizing that value I bring to my cohort of peers and I am appreciative of what I can learn from them at the same time. Identifying gaps in my own knowledge, experience, and understanding of my interpretation of society from a very privileged perspective, I am finding I need to make a conscious and intentional effort to fill these gaps towards developing myself as a more informed individual as one way to improve my practice and personal life.

Absolute and Unknown. Arriving to be where I am today has been a long, nonlinear journey with Antigonish representing an early stop, not a destination. Prior to coming to the Foundations Institute I did not fully understand the interconnectedness of the experiences I have had in life to date. Only through sharing and discussing with peers, reading and taking time to reflect could I begin to see the larger picture and who I am as an individual. Now I have a clearer understanding of who I am based on my past experiences. I recognize the learning that can be found in vulnerability and now that I am taking more responsibility for myself and my wellbeing I am interested in what the coming years will bring. Where I go from here is both absolute and unknown but I am excited to be on this journey regardless of where it may lead.

Personal and Professional Learning Goals

My purpose for participating in this program is to better understand why non-formal learning experiences have resonated so deeply with me and how they have contributed to my development as a community leader. Building upon this personal goal, I am interested in how similar learning experiences can be designed to effectively engage, educate and empower citizens in urban settings so that they may take greater ownership over shaping their communities. Of specific interest to me is how important elements of *placemaking* are — if at all — in creating community learning experiences which encourage and foster citizen empowerment.

Preliminary Research Plan

My research project intent is to investigate to what extent elements of *placemaking* help to foster citizen empowerment in community education environments.

Focusing on the London Public Library (London, Ontario) or Idea Exchange (Cambridge, Ontario) I would take a case study approach to better understand how the incorporation of *placemaking* elements have influenced community learning experiences offered, with an emphasis on investigating those which promote citizen empowerment. In Spring/Summer 2019 I would interview active and engaged community members, observe community learning experiences, and review available documents. Deriving meaning from the findings of this research and placing it in context with the available literature and theories, my aim is to understand if the design of community education environments has an impact on how empowered citizens feel to play active roles in the development of their communities.

Self-Assessment

Through an eclectic history of learning, volunteering, and professional work I have developed a set of strengths and abilities that will help me to achieve my overall learning goals and research project.

Skills, Knowledge and Attitudes. An active listener and an attentive observer, I have found these skills invaluable as I seek to understand the situations I experience. My colleagues regularly acknowledge their appreciation of these skills as I can identify, understand, and leverage opportunities that are often missed at first glance. Unafraid to experiment and try new things, I possess the natural ability to learn new concepts with ease and can quickly assess if they provide value to myself or those I serve. Driven by a natural curiosity, this ability has served me well when seeking to understand new concepts and their relation and relevance to existing projects, problems or questions.

As a recognized community leader, over time I have developed in-depth knowledge of principles of community engagement and grassroots community action. Approaching all work with the belief that as a collective we can achieve more than as individuals, I can bring together divisive parties, generating consensus and building strength across diverse communities. The result of this knowledge has been the building of valuable relationships and connections with local individuals, organizations and resources that I can leverage to complete any aspect of my work.

Believing that any adversity can be overcome with patience and persistence, I try to regularly push myself beyond my boundaries. Fueled by my curiosity and interest in seeking out new knowledge, my willingness to be open to new experiences has

provided me a wealth of opportunities from which I can draw connections and derive meaning.

Challenges and Supports. The greatest challenges I face when returning home relate to both professional and academic endeavours. Given the sporadic nature of my professional work, my attention is often needed to be redirected at the most inconvenient moments creating challenges in scheduling regular and consistent times to focus on a given task. Academically, I feel that because I have been away from the academic setting for some time that I will find writing in a critical, analytical, and scholarly way to present an *initial* challenge.

Although there are many challenges ahead of me I am optimistic about the outcomes given the supports upon which I can draw. In London, Ontario located at both King's University College and Western University are staff, libraries, researchers and other resources I can access to develop my research project and body of knowledge. I am fortunate that a local colleague is also a current student of this program. Acting as accountability partners, editors, peers, and critics we are currently discussing the ways we can help one another to succeed. To help me connect with the right individuals and access the information and services I may need to complete my research, I have several established relationships with organizations and individuals I can make use of. As a source of encouragement, criticism, and support my advisor Dr. Carole Roy is part of a support network to help me develop as a research, practitioner, and individual.

Learning Contract

Learning Intents (SKAs) (what to learn)	Learning Tasks, Materials, Strategies (how to learn it)	Criteria and Means for Documenting Evidence (how to <i>measure</i> it)
<p>To become a more critically reflective practitioner.</p>	<p>Continue to read <i>Reflective Practice: Writing and Professional Development</i> (Bolton, 2014) and work through the included activities.</p> <p>Join and contribute to a community of practice.</p> <p>Employ identified strategies (see Reflection on Journaling) and other strategies such as <i>Brookfield's Four Lenses: Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher</i> (Brookfield, 1995).</p>	<p>Compare journal entries over time.</p> <p>Evaluate my work/practice over time to identify if it has strengthened from a critical perspective.</p> <p>Discussions with, and feedback from, my advisor and peers.</p> <p>Successful completion of AE 510 (Professional Portfolio) and AE 530.</p>
<p>To become a more skillful writer.</p>	<p>Enroll in an academic writing course.</p> <p>Work with an editor to improve my work.</p> <p>Allow myself the necessary time to write and edit attentively.</p>	<p>Compare writing samples from assignments throughout the program.</p> <p>Solicit feedback from my advisors and editors.</p> <p>Acting as an editor for others on a more regular basis.</p>
<p>To understand if there is a relationship between placemaking, community education, and citizen empowerment.</p>	<p>Review the relevant literature.</p> <p>Speak to academics and professionals.</p>	<p>Successful completion of AE 510 (Literature Review).</p> <p>Self-assessment.</p>

Learning Intents (SKAs) (what to learn)	Learning Tasks, Materials, Strategies (how to learn it)	Criteria and Means for Documenting Evidence (how to <i>measure</i> it)
To increase my knowledge of what value community and non-formal education experiences provide.	Review the literature. Speak to educators and learners.	Personal reflection on my own learning experiences. Successful completion of AE 520.
Become more attentive to how my existing biases shape my work.	Consider diverse perspectives of my argument through literature and other sources. Take time to be the <i>devil's advocate</i> when reviewing my own work.	Review my writing for inclusion of critical analysis and any changes in views over time. Advisor feedback.
To develop greater empathy with those I serve.	Identify personal ignorance and take steps to understand. Expand the activities, communities and networks I participate in.	Feedback from both those I serve and my peers. Personal reflections over time. Evaluation and evolution of the focus of my practice over time.

Reflection on Journaling

Journaling is not a new practice for me. For more than a decade I have kept a journal and regularly review past entries to gain insights into themes and the journey I am on. Reflective practice however, is proving to be a struggle.

In the past, I have taken time to reflect on the more memorable and obvious events in my life. As I begin to better understand the purpose of reflective practice I am realizing that it “is looking at everyday taken-for-granted” and trying to derive meaning from what happened, how those involved felt, and most importantly *why* the event was significant (Bolton, 2014, p. 8). I am aware there is value in reflection but I am finding myself challenged when trying to place this practice into a new context.

Here at the Foundations Institute I have not yet been able to develop a process for reflection allowing me to focus and think more critically. As someone who identifies strongly as an introvert — an INJT personality type (Myers-Brigg, 1962, p. A-8) I am aware that finding time and space for me to absorb, process, and reflect is essential. It has become more apparent that I need to be intentional about the act of reflection and having a schedule with *margin* built in, allowing time and space for pause.

Understanding the need to link theory to practice, one connection I have made is regarding my depression and the process I can take to address it as a learning experience. Drawing from Brookfield (2011) and him using personal depression as a starting point for further development, I am interested in better understanding the *why* of the things I do and the strategies I can employ to further develop my thinking.

Drawing from one of my journal entries, I identified a set of strategies to encourage reflection and develop it as an essential element of my practice. These

strategies include: providing myself with the time and space to reflect, reflecting when it is natural and not forced, developing a process which is flexible and accessible, allowing myself to stop looking for *aha* moments, and continuing to read and connect theory to practice.

Drawing connection between my learnings and practice, I have identified three observations about myself as an educator. I need to be patient in my practice, reflecting on it, and in its development. Individual development takes time and intentionality and I need to recognize there is a process which unfolds as it is attended to. I need to identify a community of practice that I can draw upon to help in my process of reflection and development. My cohort here at the Foundations Institute is one community I am a part of but when I return home I need to seek out a similar community as well. Lastly, identifying with the INTJ personality type I know that I often live *inside* my head more often than I should. Approaching problems analytically and often avoiding feelings or emotion, I need to make a concerted effort to step out of my comfort zone to help me think more critically about my experiences and the meaning I derive from them.

I am certain that with time, the necessary attention, and the appropriate strategies, reflective practice will become a more natural and consistent part of my professional and academic endeavors. I am encouraged by the potential reflective practice offers for me to better understand myself and to strengthen my role as an adult educator and community leader.

References

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Critical Annotations

Brookfield, S. (2011). When the black dog barks: An autoethnography of adult learning in and on clinical depression. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2011(132), 35–42. doi:10.1002/ace.429

Drawing from personal experiences of living with depression, Brookfield explores one of two essential tasks adults can undertake as they deal with their illness. While the author's relationship with depression may be perceived as a bias, he makes it clear to the reader that his depression is a "starting point for an analysis of what might comprise a research agenda for anyone interested in exploring the adult learning dimensions of depression" (p. 36). The four learning tasks of depression the author cites (overcoming shame, ideological detoxification, normalizing despair, and calibrating treatment) were highly relatable to me as someone who has more recently come to terms with his mental illness. As an introductory piece into a much larger topic, Brookfield provides direction for further study related to elaborating on the learning tasks he outlined, the methods associated with each task, and the application of theoretical paradigms towards understanding depression. Noting that a second task exists in helping adults learn to live with, and treat, their depression - adult educators to provide education about this condition - it would have been helpful to direct readers to authoritative sources on this or note that a gap exists in available literature.

Cranton, P. (2013). Adult learning theory. In T. Nesbit, S. M. Bringham, N. Taber & T. Gibb (Eds.), *Building on critical traditions: Adult education and learning in Canada* (pp. 95–106). Toronto, Canada: Thompson.

Cranton provides a broad overview of the foundations upon which adult learning takes place. Including a selection of traditional learning theories and ones related specifically to adult learning, the author takes the necessary time to provide a detailed example of how Hambermas' *kinds of adult learning* can be applied to a single learning experience. Of note, Cranton acknowledges the faults and gaps in existing literature which focuses primarily on cognitive and behavioural perspectives of adult learning and ignores the influence social movements from the early twentieth century have had on the field. When discussing the contributions of Canadians to the field it would have been helpful for Cranton to include some thoughts on the relative impact these contributions have had in comparison to scholars from other nations, in terms of shifts in thinking, overall understanding, and practice within the field. I am left asking questions such as: Where are Canadians the leaders? What areas of adult education are we falling behind in? What are other nations specially learning from Canadian scholars and adult educators?

Elias, J., & Merriam, S. B. (2005). Introduction: Philosophy of adult education. In *Philosophical foundations of adult education* (3rd ed., pp. 1–15). Malabar, FL: Krieger.

As an introduction to a more comprehensive work, Elias and Merriam establish a foundation for the study of philosophy of adult education in a straightforward, understandable, and digestible format. For those like myself who may have been reluctant in the past to consume and consider any thoughts from a philosophical standpoint, this chapter was much less intimidating than one may anticipate. It was helpful that the authors took space to discuss the more common objections towards philosophy, the faults of philosophy, and their validity, as doing so makes the topic more approachable for those new to academic reading. Providing a concise overview of the philosophies of adult education I could better understand the underpinnings upon which existing systems of education, individual educators' approaches, and my personal values are structured upon. Having even an initial understanding of these theoretical structures will be helpful in developing a deeper understand of adult education as an area of study and the continual development of my work as a practitioner.

Horton, M., & Freire, P. (1990). *We make the road by walking: Conversations on education and social change*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Discussing topics of education, social change, literacy and empowerment I found this work valuable for the perspectives it provides regarding participatory and experiential education, teaching that begins and ends with the learners' experiences, and the thought provoking way to look at formal and non-formal education. Positioning the teacher as a guide and an expert that knows when *not* to be an expert, Horton and Freire reinforce the notion that educators need to know *how* and *when* to intervene in a student's learning, helping them develop and grow through inquiry, understanding, failure and personal investment. Coming together to *talk a book* – the format Horton and Freire chose to present their thoughts – added to the effectiveness of the messages it contained. One fault in the informal nature the format demands is the lack of formal references and sources. While some elaborations and translations of terms can found throughout the book, the absence of additional academic references creates a gap in extending ones' learning, understanding, and research. *We Make the Road by Walking* offeres a new perspective from which I can approach both adult education and community development in my practice.

Merriam, S. B., & Bierema, L. (2014). *Adult learning: Linking theory and practice* (First ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam and Bierema offer an easy to consume overview of the field of adult education including major research completed to date. Starting from the theories foundational to adult learning, the authors touch on concepts such as body and spirit in learning, culture and context, and the increasingly important topic of adult learning in the digital age. Both scholars and practitioners with limited knowledge regarding concepts of adult learning will find value in the assortment of topics covered. As a first edition, Merriam and Bierema have been able to include references from important seminal works as well as more recent contributions to this broad field. As someone new to higher academia, I particularly appreciated the sections appropriately titled *Linking Theory and Practice: Activities and Resources* found at the end of most chapters. The included references, diagrams and extension exercises offer a practical way to apply the theories outlined in the preceding chapter. As a work that manages to present such a great deal of knowledge in such a relatively small volume I found few faults based both on its intended purposes and the overall value it provides.

Taylor, E. W. (2006). Making meaning of local nonformal education: Practitioner's perspective. *Adult Education Quarterly: A Journal of Research and Theory*, 56(4), 291–307. doi:10.1177/0741713606289122

Building upon the reconceptualization of non-formal education offered by Barrie Brennan, Taylor attempts to develop meaning from the experiences practitioners have while teaching in nonformal locations in the context of developed countries. Taylor draws similarities between two sites of learning – home improvement centres and environmental educational programs – in terms of challenges faced and the ways which the individual practitioners make meaning in their roles. Making note of the influence communities of practice most likely have on nonformal educators and their work, Taylor observes learner-centred approaches that were not consistent with existing literature. The author's explanation of varying epistemological perspectives – related to personal experience with knowledge rather than teaching setting or curriculum – is a point of contention with my personal perspective. I suspect that there is a direct and obvious connection between one's epistemological grounding and the subject matter they are concerned with. Meaning, that certain subject areas and curriculum require more text book knowledge compared to hands on experience, given the topic and the flexibility for interpretation of the knowledge and its application.

Review of History of Adult Education

Since their inception, public libraries have been more than buildings containing books to be borrowed and read. Often referred to as “the people’s university” (Adams, Krolak, Kupidura, & Pahernik, 2002, p. 32; Irving & Adams, 2012, para. 18; Knowles, 1976, p. 43; Martin, 1955, p. 10), public libraries “perform a more complex function in society by supporting literacy, social action, and lifelong learning” (Adams, 2005, p. 367) acting as essential locations where adult learning takes place. At the forefront of libraries has been the librarian, playing an influential role in adult education and one that is constantly evolving.

Focusing on the role of the librarian — as a professional and an often-contested adult educator — in the fostering of adult learning, I have identified common themes found among the literature reviewed. As a framework against which these themes can be loosely contextualized, recognizing that themes may flow from one period to the next, I draw from the work of Welton (2013) to consider the themes across a period of roughly one hundred years beginning with the year of Canada’s Confederation.

Concerned primarily with the North American setting, literature reviewed includes historic and academic texts published between 1928 and 2012 focusing on libraries, librarians, and adult education. Considering the literature more broadly, I will provide a brief synopsis of gaps which currently exist and where new contributions to the study of public libraries, librarians and adult education could be focused.

The Age of the Great Transformation (1800-1929). As Canada was gaining its independence and establishing the foundation of a new identity, libraries were already playing a central role in developing a more informed citizenry as their roles evolved in

communities across the country. Both historical and academic texts pay attention to the availability of learning sites and access to information for both the elite and the common man. By the end of the century with university extension programs and organizations like the Mechanics' Institute becoming more accessible, opportunities for adults to engage in learning through library programming slowly became more readily available (Adams, 2005; Welton, 2013). With this shift librarians found themselves supporting study clubs, book mobiles, portable 'book boxes', the mailing of books, traveling libraries, and small independent collections (Adams, 2005; Adams et al., 2002; American Library Association, 1934; Bateson, 1944; Horning, 2010; Irving & Adams, 2012; Kelly, 1970; Martin, 1955; McNally, 1986).

Literature concerned with libraries during this period tends to focus on the tools and methods used for early information delivery and portray librarians as purveyors of knowledge. As the availability of books and information shifted, with the opening of institutions for broader public access, libraries started to be more often recognized as sites for the development of the individual and support of social change and as a result, a new role for the librarian emerged (Adams et al., 2002; Irving & Adams, 2012).

With the arrival of the twentieth century "libraries were part of an awakening consciousness" (Adams et al., 2002, p. 31) across the broader Canadian society (Welton, 2013). Becoming beacons for community learning, libraries offered access to knowledge for everyone, especially the adult learner and those in more rural areas (American Library Association, 1934; Bateson, 1944; Kelly, 1970; Martin, 1955; Taylor, Parrish, & Banz, 2010; Tomkins & Bateson, 1936; Wilson, 2008) with librarians often playing the role of "chief liaison officer" (Kelly, 1970, p. 148). As the demand for access

to information and services increased so did the activity of librarians. With many focused on the ongoing development of their institutions to provide resources and services where they were most needed, local librarians started to use their voice to be heard, advocating for the more active role of libraries in the learning of the common person (Tompkins & Bateson, 1936; Bateson, 1944). Available literature in the Canadian context often focuses on the roles of Nora Bateson, Helen Gordon Stewart and Sr. Marie Michael MacKinnon — three strong female librarians — with the emphasis on both social change and adult education roles (Adams et al., 2002; Irving & Adams, 2012). Aside from the profiles of these women, information focusing specifically on the role of the librarian in relation to adult education is lacking and often needs to be derived from anecdotal accounts of writings focused primarily on libraries in general.

Adult Learning and the Crisis of Democracy (1929-1960). As Canada moved with the rest of the world from a period of prosperity to one characterised by depression, war and inflation, the public library system saw rapid growth across the country. Along with the changing demands to core library resources and services, the role of the librarian evolved with the needs of the learner (Martin, 1955; Wilson, 2008).

At the beginning of the depression there was significant investment by the Carnegie Corporation into the creation of “demonstration libraries” across Canada requiring librarians to evolve the role they filled in both their workplace and broader community (Adams et al., 2002; American Library Association, 1934; Bateson, 1944; Irving & Adams, 2012; Tompkins & Bateson, 1936). In addition to being agents of social change librarians became figures in the political spectrum as advocates for funding, facilitators of community partnerships, and were required to provide “recreation,

information, and a means towards real education” (Tompkins & Bateson, 1936, para. 10). This temporary influx of funds meant that librarians now had the resources upon which to develop special departments for adult education (Compton, 1928) and provide increased access to the populations most in need (Martin, 1955). Unfortunately, given the temporary nature of this funding librarians’ attention in the years to follow would be divided between serving those seeking out information and knowledge, and advocating for new and sustainable sources of funding.

As the depression continued, libraries became a place for individuals to find cheap sources of entertainment, access to education, the means to increase one’s employability (Martin, 1955), and to access government programming which put people “to work on socially useful projects” (American Library Association, 1934, p. 298). The shift in services and support individual librarians offered and their approach to engaging with the public began to develop into a point of contention for many. Historical and academic texts reveal a clear division between those who believe librarians should play a more social change role in society as an educator, and others who believed that the librarian should be a professionalized role focused on providing access to information and separate from the function of an educator (Adams et al., 2002; Kelly, 1970).

This division would remain as new funding for adult education would come-and-go into the 1950’s (Knowles, 1976) and as prominent global ideologies would help to inform, shape and question the role of libraries in a new world (Martin, 1955). Most of the effort and the modest gains made over the proceeding 25 years did not result in a system that appeared to have progressed much in comparison (Martin, 1955) and while still serving the adult learner, the role of the librarian remained unclear.

Adult Learning Under Siege in a Disordered World (1960+). The 1960's saw the move from a long period of global war recovery into one characterized by competing ideologies and intolerance for a wide selection ideas and views (Martin, 1955). During this time, libraries remained as a place where people could come together to freely access ideas and knowledge, with *The Adult Education Act* in the United States of America underscoring "libraries roles in adult education, fostering greater inclusiveness and dedicating resources toward basic adult literacy services and programs" (Taylor et al., 2010, p. 328).

Libraries continued to work with community groups, a common theme since their inception (American Library Association, 1934; Compton, 1928; Horning, 2010; Wilson, 2008), making efforts to extend their services to marginalized groups such as the poor and immigrant populations particularly through literacy programs (Horning, 2010). The role of the library gradually shifted to more of a resources centre or "community intelligence centre" (Martin, 1955, p. 9) focused on community and group structured learning (Adams et al., 2002; Martin, 1955), and with this shift the role of both student and teacher started to be redefined (Knowles, 1976).

Librarians began to play a more instructional centred role evolving from one focused on the function of providing reference services (Taylor et al., 2010). Acting as a facilitator for adult learning (Knowles, 1976) and becoming a resource person (Adams et al., 2002), the librarian served "as both a vital link to community information resources and as an active agent in structuring learning experience" (Adams, 2005, p. 367). Although the role of the librarian shifted during this period it remained unclear their formal place in adult education. Since 1960 adult education has been less central to the

purpose of the national library movement (Knowles, 1976) and in many ways the question of the librarian as an identified adult educator is unclear as ever.

As the century neared its end there were renewed connections between adult educators and librarians in their support of adult learning. With libraries “viewing themselves not only as venues for learning but as agents in the process” (Adams, 2005, p. 368) there was in many ways what appeared to be a cycle coming to completion around libraries, librarians, and their role in adult education.

Literature Gaps. As literature searches were conducted and works reviewed, gaps in the existing knowledge based were identified related to both the availability and focus on research pertaining to libraries and their influence on adult learning. First, there appears to be a lack of focus on aboriginals in context to libraries and adult education. Both historical and contemporary literature reviewed failed to refer to aboriginal, indigenous, or native connections to libraries or librarians in North American activities. While a common problem with much of the literature which looks at Canada’s past, more effort should be made to draw attention to this important element of history.

Next, there appears to be a lack of attention given to discussing the role of the librarian as an adult educator in contemporary literature. Scholars have noted that research concerned with educators in non-formal learning settings has not been plentiful (Taylor, 2006; Taylor et al., 2010) and that the role librarians have played in the historical development of adult education has been often overlooked (Adams, 2005). While scholars such as Irving and Adams (2012) are paying attention to specific individual contributions to the profession, by providing a historical perspective, the study of librarians in adult education could benefit from increased attention.

Last of all, given the nature of libraries — as institutions that contain a wealth of knowledge on every conceivable topic — it comes as a surprise that there is little to no research or in-depth accounts published regarding the history of libraries in Canada (McNally, 1986). While there certainly have been some more recent publications to date regarding libraries as an educational institution (Adams, 2005; Buschman & Leckie, 2007; Taylor, 2006; Taylor, Parrish, & Banz, 2010; Wilson, 2008), considering the important role libraries play in the stewarding of information, knowledge, and history, it seems that greater documentation and understanding of the development of libraries over time and their role in adult education should be present.

Conclusion. It is true that “the public library has no rigid definition of education” (Tompkins & Bateson, 1936, para. 4) and as such it needs to be flexible and responsive to the communities it serves. Tasked with meeting the needs of a constantly changing society, librarians and the institutions they operate have shifted their expertise, focus, and approach to serving their communities over the course of a century.

While some attention has been given to the role of the librarian as an adult educator there are still gaps in the available literature. Both historical and academic fields would be served well to direct attention to the aboriginal context as well as provide a more direct account of the role of the librarian as an adult educator.

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Appendix A

Bridging Exercise

