Reclaiming the radical: Using fiction to explore adult learning connected to citizenship

Writing and reading fiction are means by which many individuals continue to learn throughout their lifetime. Through fiction it is possible to explore alternative perspectives, envision different landscapes, and consider important social, cultural and political issues. This paper draws upon a Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) funded research study on Canadian fiction writers to explore how a more sophisticated understanding of citizenship can be fostered through lifelong learning experiences linked to reading and writing fiction. In doing so, it also considers how educators can strive to reclaim the radical perspective that is an integral component of adult education within a social purpose tradition (Armstrong and Miller, 2006). Challenging a neoliberal framework that fosters a limited mandate for lifelong learning, educators can use fiction to enable learners to explore their understandings of the world and others in it, taking into account how power shapes personal and social experiences. Learners may become more reflective of their role as citizens and consider how they can work towards social change.

This paper begins with an overview of the conceptual framework which discusses how critical theoretical approaches can inform a critique of neoliberal influences in adult education. It then provides an overview of the research study and builds its discussion by focusing on three thematic areas related to fiction writing and citizenship; a) disunity as unity, b) a sense of place, and c) reading, writing and citizenship. It considers the implications of the findings of this study to inform critical adult education practices and

then concludes by considering how educators are to reclaim the radical vantage point of learning within a social purpose tradition.

Conceptual framework

Grounded in adult education that has a focus on radical learning (Brookfield & Holst, 2011), this paper draws upon the broader framework of postmodern, critical, and feminist theories (Bannerji, Mojab & Whitehead, 2001; Clover, 2010; Giroux, 2005; Welton, 2005) to support its claims. Adult education policies and practices over the last couple of decades reflect how neoliberalism has increasingly shaped the emerging discourses around lifelong learning (Plumb, Leverman & McGray, 2007; Grace, 2004; Author A). Olssen (2006, p. 223) points to the underlying neoliberal assumptions around education whereby 'lifelong learning is a market discourse that orientates education to the enterprise society where the learner becomes an entrepreneur of him/herself'. The emphasis on personal responsibility implies that self-determination and intelligent choices determine decisions regarding individual learning trajectories so that social structural factors that delineate opportunities, responsibilities and barriers, such as race, gender, ability, age and social class are screened out. A neoliberal framework devolves responsibilities for education onto the learner and minimizes government accountability for redressing social inequities. As Jackson (2003, p. 367) points out, despite the attractive rhetoric a learning society, 'learning is clearly set in a discourse of individualism'. This focus on individualism frequently disadvantages women, particularly those who have minority status or who come from a working class background. As prior research shows (Author A), for example, women often make

educational decisions that prioritize caregiving needs for family members, although they recognize that these ‘choices’ may not be as personally beneficial.

In the *Learning Through Life* NIACE report, Schuller and Watson (2009) note that adult education policies and practices in the UK in recent years have been skewed towards addressing the perceived needs of the marketplace. Within a neoliberal context, the values of the global marketplace are so pervasive that justification for education becomes almost universally linked to possibilities for economic growth. As a result, Sumner (2008, p. 36) argues, that opportunities for ‘learning in adult education...can become narrow, instrumental, lacking any critical or transformative potential’ (p. 36). A discourse of individualism and competition suppresses concerns around learning connected to social purpose, working to silence the dissident voices of critical adult educators and to undermine the collective responsibility of a social purpose tradition historically connected to radical adult education. Students are not encouraged to develop empathy for other learners or to critically assess political and cultural structures that shape social contexts for learning. This approach undermines the rigour required for in-depth theoretical and philosophical inquiry and devalues education that focuses on artistic or cultural forms of understanding, such as learning connected to fiction reading and writing.

Within a neoliberal context, an overarching public pedagogy has evolved that Henry Giroux (2005, p. 4) describes as ‘an all-encompassing cultural horizon for producing market identities, values and practices’. These values shape our learning contexts in limiting opportunities for dialogue, debate, and social critique. Biesta (2012, p. 685) writes that “the neo-liberal shift from a public logic to a market logic is one where

citizens are no longer involved in democratic contestations about the public good but have turned into consumers of public services". Education becomes an item to be consumed, rather than a space for dialogical and critical learning opportunities.

The work of Jürgen Habermas provides useful insights into understanding how neoliberalism has become so influential in shaping adult learning contexts. Habermas (1987, p. 56) discusses the concepts of *worldviews* that 'offer a potential grounding that can be used to justify a political order or the institutional framework of a society in general'. Within a particular worldview, members of society share collective understandings around basic values, beliefs, and how social structures work. Kucukaydin & Cranton (2012, p 52) state that 'according to Habermas (1981), mythical, symbolic, and dogmatic knowledge and their worldviews are closed systems; they are incompatible with rational discourse, and they lack reflexivity. Reflexivity is involved with questioning, revising, and critiquing any knowledge claim.' This capacity for critical debate and the ability to reflect upon and to articulate differing viewpoints is necessary to engage in what Habermas (1981) calls 'communicative action' and Jack Mezirow (1991) discusses as 'communicative learning'.

The foundation for creating shared worldviews is based upon our human capacity for language. According to Kucukaydin & Cranton (2012, p. 52) 'for Habermas (1979), any explanation of social phenomena is accomplished through the use of language because words, concepts, and terms are intimately related to social life, in which both language and knowledge are formed.' The way that language is used in various educational contexts, therefore, is important because it circumscribes opportunities for learning and debates around the purposes of education.

Within neoliberalism, the dogmatic influence of marketplace in shaping everyday contexts has become broadly accepted so that in many ways the dominant worldview has become a ‘closed system’. In the language of the marketplace students become customers or clients and markets to be exploited or ‘tapped into’; courses becomes products to be marketed and distributed; teaching is assessed by outcomes and research by deliverables. Language represents how we actually come to view our reality as students and educators. Within a neoliberal climate, education is only perceived to have value if the investment of time and money is returned when the learner gets a better quality or higher paying job, thus leading to economic growth and productivity for the broader society. Any kind of learning – such as engaging with fiction – that is not recognized as having immediate practical [read profitable] value, is rendered less worthwhile.

In Habermasian (1987) terms, this is an example of how the *system* – the political-economic structures has invaded or ‘colonised’ the *lifeworld* – a place of everyday interaction within community and family. Learning is envisioned as a tangible product delivered within the system rather than as an intersubjective experience that occurs in the lifeworld. Newman (1999) explains that ‘the system is used to denote a combination of the processes of exchange that go to make up the economy and the processes of the political and legal control that go to make up the state’ (p. 158). Habermas (1987) argues that over time the system has grown in size and gained strength so that it increasingly intrudes upon the lifeworld where meaning used to be negotiated in more communicative and collaborative ways. Brookfield (2005, p. 237) explains that ‘the market – the web of economic exchanges, price control mechanisms, cartel agreements, and patterns of consumption – impinges on our lives in ways that seem uncontrollable, beyond our

influence'. Market values come to be perceived as an inevitable aspect of everyday considerations, regardless of context.

Challenging a dominant worldview creates monumental challenges for radical adult educators. Taber (2011, p. 379) notes the difficulties faced by proponents of social purpose education, whereby 'educating with an alternative view of the world is a complex goal not easily achieved in the wake of neoliberalism' (p. 379). Critical educators argue, however, that there is always the human capacity for analytical thought and social action. Welton (2005, p. 136) notes that Habermas's (1984) theory of communicative action 'has important implications for critical educational practice'. It is through our ability to use language that we can exchange ideas, debate different beliefs, and potentially envision alternative worldviews.

Habermas (1996) believes that through communicative forms of learning, individuals can become informed citizens who can work collectively to build a robust civil society. As Welton (2006) argues, critical educators have the capacity to help facilitate learning to lead to a more 'just society'. In this context, the role of radical adult educators includes using strategies that will help learners to use language – not only through oral communication, but also through the written word. Reinvigorating the lifeworld involves developing the capacity to use language in sophisticated, imaginative, and critical ways. As Dragonmirescu (2012, p. 37) explains, 'the lifeworld is a social construct that is an organization of culturally established patterns which are then transmitted by language'. One of the ways in which we shape our lifeworlds, and create alternative worldviews, is through the stories that we tell. In this way we can see that reading and writing fiction may provide opportunities for radical adult educators to

provide learning opportunities that may be used to explore issues pertaining to citizenship.

Using fiction in various learning context may develop the critical capacity of learners to question a dominant worldview imbued with neoliberal values. Sheridan-Rabideau (2010, p. 54) argue that incorporating the arts in education can ‘help us share complex ideas that transcend national, racial, or socio-economic boundaries’ (p. 54). Being able to challenge a pervasive worldview requires the capacity to imagine that there might be another way to understand how society should operate, to acknowledge that there are multiple viewpoints and perspectives, and to realize that power permeates most human interactions in often subtle and complex ways. In their examination of how historical fiction can be used to encourage learners to critically reflect upon history as a field of study, den Heyer and Fidyk (2007, p. 141) argue that people ‘create stories to come to terms with what is otherwise unbearable, unspeakable, or unimaginable’. Difficult moral choices, unfamiliar cultural values, alternative social mores, and different personalities and belief systems can all be explored through works of fiction, both as readers and as writers.

While O’Rourke (2007) has written about adult learning and creative writing and Jarvis (2005) has explored connections between fiction and transformative learning, Wright and Sandlin (2009) argue that one of the under-researched areas in adult education is an examination of popular culture. In recent years, however, greater attention has been paid to the ways in which the arts can be central to fostering opportunities for the development of public pedagogy. Sandlin, O’Malley & Burdick (2011, p. 353) note that increasingly there are a number of critical educators who explore the notion of

‘public pedagogy as a possible site of resistance to and critique of the onset of neoliberal policy’. Using fiction to enhance critical adult learning experiences may be a way to draw upon certain aspects of popular culture to develop a stronger critique of the narrowness of neoliberalism and to enhance learning connected to a social purpose tradition.

Overview of the Research Study

This Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) grant explores connections between citizenship, lifelong learning, and the craft of writing fiction. Thus far we have conducted life history interviews with over thirty authors from different geographical regions of Canada, including emerging and established writers from diverse backgrounds. These participants have been successfully published through traditional presses and have received some public recognition for their work. Our study includes not only CanLit writers – whose writing is considered to be literary fiction – but also crime fiction and children/young adult fiction authors. We include these other authors because genre fiction is often widely read, and as a genre, crime fiction or mysteries often delve into current and historical social issues, thus providing insights into the values, mores and beliefs of the country. Children and Young Adult (YA) writers are also included as it is often during these formative years that learners are first introduced to fiction reading and writing, and establish an interest or habits that may influence learning later in adulthood around fiction writing and reading. This study also includes about a half a dozen interviews with authors in the US and the UK conducted for cross-cultural comparative purposes, although due to space constraints, this paper only focuses on comments taken from Canadian transcripts. In addition, interviews with about a dozen

‘key informants’ – individuals in the policy, publishing, educational and writing sectors were included as part of the study to gain insights into the policies, educational programs, and supports that exist for learning connected to fiction writing.

Our working definition of fiction is that it is works of imaginary prose that includes novels and short stories, as well as many children’s picture books. At the same time we recognize that the conventions defining what constitutes fiction are not always easily demarcated. As Dong Gu (2006, p. 313) argues, the traditions shaping Western fiction have called into question by postmodernists in recent years, but within Chinese traditions there has often been a “rejection of the dominance of realism” and a willingness to include “different representational modes”. The issue of genres and sub-genres is also often a contested one. The categories of literary/mystery/children/YA were useful in establishing some parameters around participant inclusion for the study, but boundaries around different types of authors are not neatly prescribed as many authors write in different areas – as poets, non-fiction writers, or academics in addition to writing fiction.

One to two hour, face-to-face life history interviews were conducted with the authors. Like Labaree (2006, p. 122), we chose this approach to explore the ‘contextualized journeys’ of authors looking at their ‘occupational induction experiences’, or their learning trajectories in becoming published authors. The interviews with the key informants involved more targeted questions and lasted approximately forty-five minutes. Interviews were transcribed and sent out to the participants, which they had the opportunity to edit, if they chose. Authors who agreed to participate in this study agreed to have their identities revealed, although they were given the option to select

parts of their transcripts where quotes could be used but the identity of the participant would remain confidential. Key informants were given the same options, but were also given the option for complete confidentiality if they so wished. In addition, a review of policies and literature pertaining to fiction writing and programs that support fiction writing, particularly within Canada, is included as a part of the study.

Data Analysis

Some of the questions that participants were asked were developed in connection to the researchers' interest in citizenship and fiction writing. These included, for instance, whether they felt it was important for readers to have books written by Canadians, if authors or publishers had received government funding and whether they thought that was important in sustaining opportunities for Canadian writers. Other themes that connect to citizenship, such as the focus on geography with its emphasis on the importance of the actual physical landscape, emerged more from analysis of the data. As White, Oelke & Friesen (2012) suggest as good practices in working with a large qualitative data set, our initial themes were identified with a preliminary analysis of the first few transcripts. As Charmez (2005, p. 517) argues, 'coding gives a researcher analytic scaffolding on which to build'. From there, further categories were identified to be coded; a practice which is consistent with what Cresswell (2009, p. 187) notes is, 'the traditional approach in the social sciences [which] is to allow the codes to emerge during the data analysis'. Transcripts were read individually, then quotes from different coded themes were extracted and compared, and then the transcripts were reviewed again to assess whether further themes should be identified. To ensure consistency, we have periodically

reviewed the data with ongoing discussions between different members of the research team. We also recognize differences in transcription styles can create inconsistencies (White, Oelke & Friezen, 2012) and so we have had edits done by the same research assistant to ensure consistency.

In considering how a focus on social justice may influence the way in which researchers may assess data when coding, Charmez (2005, p. 517) points out that it might 'lead a researcher to note points of struggle and conflict and to look for how participants defined and acted in such moments.' In this paper, because we wanted to examine how fiction may be used to sustain a radical focus in adult education that challenges a neoliberal framework for learning, we decided to focus on three thematic areas that have emerged where issues pertaining to citizenship have been raised and reflected upon by participants. Drawing on the data from the interviews, the discussion of each theme is substantiated with quotations from the transcripts. The themes are organized as follows: (a) unity as disunity; (b) a sense of place; (c) reading, writing and citizenship.

Unity as Disunity

Robert Kroetsch's (2004) essay 'Unity as Disunity: A Canadian Strategy' argues that a Canadian sense of identity is characterized by its marginality and multiplicity, resisting a homogenous or singular form of narrative. Like many contemporary nation-states, Canada has a diverse population shaped by a history of colonization and impacted by ongoing migration. Exploring citizenship and fiction writing within Canada requires acknowledging the complexity and heterogeneity of these learning experiences. Whilst this study focuses on the Canadian context, many of the ideas discussed may resonate

with what learners and educators in other countries in a globalized environment might similarly experience.

Citizenship not only encompasses legal and political realms. It is also informed by a knowledge and understanding of the cultural and historical contexts of our defined nation states. Fiction writers give greater insight into cultural mores. Fiction writers let us walk in the shoes of others, so to speak, when we enter into the imaginary realm, where our imaginations are engaged in dialogues about lives that may persuade us to feel what it is to be part of or alienated from communities and explore our individual relations with our country. Fiction provides us with a way to engage in learning around social justice concerns and moral debates. As mystery writer Garry Ryan elaborates, ‘I like the whole social commentary that goes on with a crime novel because I think lots of times it's a snapshot of the world ... the kind of society we live in’. The morals, values and belief systems within different societies are explored within fiction, and crime novels are often seen as the modern morality tales that take up current issues pertaining to justice, equality, and freedom.

Canada as a nation-state, as is the case of many countries around the world, has a history complicated by a long history of colonialism. In the Canadian paradigm, we have played the role of both the colonizers and the colonized. As adult educator Julia Preece (2008) points out, defining what constitutes a postcolonial society is sometimes problematic. For instance, literary critic Diana Brydon (2007) argues that First Nations people are still being colonized by other Canadians. She and other postcolonial critics reject narratives of nation building such as ‘the railroad built from sea to sea’ because it does not take into account narratives of many marginalized, ethnic groups exploited in

this process. Similarly, critical and feminist educators argue that accounts of learning often exclude important stories from women, colonized peoples, and other minority groups, and that issues such as gender, culture, race and class need to be taken up in discourses around citizenship (Bannerji, Mojab & Whitehead, 2001; Butterwick, 1998; Guo, 2010).

When engaging with fiction, we are encouraged to consider the complexity of living within a nation that has a long history of immigration, resulting in a diverse population. Highly acclaimed literary writer, Nino Ricci, describes the town where he grew up in southern Ontario, an area where he has situated a couple of his novels:

> The town saw many waves of immigration going right back to the British and French; there was a substantial French population around that area. There were Mennonites, Lutherans, Ukrainians, Belgians, Portuguese, Lebanese, a lot of Mexican migrants, and people from India and Barbados...that community is one of only three or four rural Italian communities in Canada, so it was distinctive in a way, but also a microcosm of Canadian society.

The richness as well as the tensions of a changing society, which has moved rapidly towards high rates of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration are often taken up in Canadian fiction. Literary author, Emma Donoghue explains, ‘my next book is going to be a collection of short stories all about immigrants… having been through this immigration process twice myself, moving first to England and then to Canada, I’m really intrigued as to what that does to people’s lives and their identities’.

Sometimes this exploration of diversity entails exploring painful experiences. In his interview, Roy Mikki shares his thoughts about being a Japanese-Canadian writer:

> I grew up in the shadow of the internment process. And that cataclysmic event for my family had a lasting effect on me as a writer and as a thinker. I've had to grapple with the effects of internment, psychologically, emotionally, and historically. A lot of my writing stems from it, and in part it's the thing that motivated me to write. It's also a history that I've had to negotiate as a limit on my imagination. It has both allowed me to write and it has also challenged me to go beyond it… Racism was common in my early life growing up in Winnipeg. We moved to Winnipeg in 1947, which was a time when Japanese Canadians were allowed to settle in Winnipeg. Before that it was illegal to live in the city…

In order to challenge learners to consider the need for radical social change, they need to be made aware of injustices and the ways in which the rights of citizens in a supposedly democratic nation-state can be quickly eroded, such as when Japanese-Canadians were interned during WWII. Through the use of fiction, radical educators have the opportunity to engage learners in critically exploring how people's lives are shaped by cultural, political and economic decisions. Educators may choose to draw upon a critical literacy framework, which Soares (2010, p. 487) defines as 'a pedagogical approach to reading that focuses on the political, sociocultural, historical and economic forces' that shape learners' lives. Through fiction, insights may be gained into issues that may otherwise seem distant because they occurred in the past or to people living in different regions or cultural groups. Understanding how individual lives are situated within a particular nation-state, such as Canada, reshapes and complicates one's understanding of what it means to be a citizen of this, or of any country.

Some authors such as Louise Penny reflect upon the both the richness and tensions created by Canada having foundational influences from both French and English communities. “My parents weren’t among the Anglophone population for their generation. There were quite a few who lamented the loss of power, the influence, and they weren’t among them. They understood that this [rise of French language and cultural rights] probably should have happened a long time ago.” In her (2010) novel, *Bury Your Dead,* Penny explores some of these tensions between the English and the French speaking populations in Canada, looking at the small enclave of Anglophones living within Quebec City, with the province of Quebec (which is mostly Francophone) surrounded by the larger, predominantly English-speaking culture of Canadian society. In a story that is layered at many levels she raises questions about how two cultures can co-exist despite historical and present day conflicts, while celebrating the unique cultural aspects that they each contribute to Canada as a country.

As Holden (2000) argues, despite the conflict characteristic of a postcolonial society, an important component of developing a strong Canadian sense of national identity has been the support given to developing a distinct body of Canadian literature. For educators, an understanding of these debates augments and complicates notions of Canadian citizenship and learners’ identities and can be used to help foster critical educational contexts. Examining whose stories are told, considering what voices are subdued and which ones are dominant, exploring alternative viewpoints and perspectives, are all means by which learners can reflect upon important issues pertaining to citizenship.

A Sense of Place

Perhaps one of the ongoing features of Canadian literature is the focus on place. Much in the same way the geo-political terrain plays out in the nation's politics, so does geography take on importance in fiction. As New (1997, p. 17) argues, Canadians 'have long thought of themselves in connection with the land'. Although physically large, our populated areas are relatively small compared to many countries. Jessica Simon, who is a mystery writer from the Canadian North, states, 'the landscape plays a huge role in my books. There's almost a half a million square kilometres of Yukon and 35,000 people living there. We've got more moose and caribou running around; we've got more bears around than we have people.'

Detailed portraits of place contribute to Canadian's collective imagining of what it means to be a citizen in this country and invites readers from other countries to envision Canada's unique sense of place and culture. In his writing around Canadian literature, Robert Kroetsch (1989, p. 5) contends 'the human response to this landscape is so new and ill-defined and complex that our writers come back, uneasily, but compulsively, to landscape writing' (p. 5). Readers are invited to explore through fiction a myriad of images that are narratives of what it is to be Canadian. Even if you haven't been to Cape Breton**,** reading Alistair MacLeod's fiction vividly depicts aspects of those regions. As MacLeod reflected in his interview, 'So when I decided to write about Cape Breton I said, Well, if D. H. Lawrence is going to write about his place, and Emily Bronte was going to write about her place, Thomas Hardy is going to write about his place, why not me?'

Canada is a geographically large nation with a diverse and dispersed population. Through fiction, writers can create stories around different lives and invite readers to learn about different parts of the country. Peter Cumming, whose children's books are set in various Canadian locations where he has lived, ranging from the Martime provinces to the Magdelene Islands (small French speaking islands located miles off the coast of Quebec) and in the far North, reflects on his experiences in living in different parts of the country and how it shaped his writing:

> So it came out of this desire for us to be part of the geography of Canada. I don't know whether it's a wanderlust or ... I suspect it's got to do with moving around as a child...I think people who live in different places have a different cultural perspective on the world than people who live in one place; and it's not to say that one is better than the other, but I think there's a difference.

Writing fiction is a way to explore these unique geographic locales, and through reading his books children are exposed to different places and cultures within Canada.

Connected with the landscape is the extreme climate that is a part of many Canadian regions. Giles Blunt, who is best known for his series of literary crime fiction novels set in northern Ontario, talks about his decision to set his books up there, even though most of his adult life he has lived in either New York City or Toronto.

> You take this totally for granted when you grow up in a place like North Bay – that it's so cold. You're sitting in a house that's 72 or 75 degrees warm and it's 40 below outside. 40 below. You're getting into outer space territory with 40 below. I mean at 40 below your face hurts the minute you step outside. You have to have a heater to heat the block of your car...you don't walk

> anywhere...if you come there from New York, you think, Oh God, why does anybody live here, this is insane. You think of the fragility of it. Here's this house, this completely artificial heated structure surrounded by, essentially, a moonscape...amazing. And also the incredible beauty of it that you take for granted when you're going up forest covered hills and the rock cuts, and the lakes.

During his return visits to northern Canada to visit family he realized that this locale had a particular kind of desolate beauty which could be seen as 'exotic' to people from other places. An important aspect of Canadian writing, for many authors, is having the opportunity to write about the uniqueness of their own country, thus raising an appreciation of its singular and yet diverse geography, architecture, and climate.

Christine Walde reflects upon the importance of the land in shaping her own writing, saying 'I always think of Alice Munroe [an acclaimed Canadian writer] who talks about how she loves the woodlots of southwestern Ontario. So I always had one of those in my backyard.' She talks about the setting for her young adult novel:

> I think the reason I say geography is important is because I think it really defines who you are as a human being…Growing up, being surrounded by cornfields, knowing that the back woods was there. The woods that Megan, the narrator goes into in *The Candy Darlings* is modeled after the woods that I grew up in…it was a beautiful property. It had huge, black walnut trees on it, old cedars, pines…'

For many authors, the sense of place connected to the physicality of the landscape and the environment was an important factor for them as they considered the influences that

shaped their work as Canadian writers, and for many citizens it shapes the concerns that Canadians have as a people. The vast space, surrounding wilderness, and intemperate climate all create particular challenges that are a part of being a citizen of this country.

Writing, Reading, and Citizenship

Many of the participants and key informants commented on the symbiotic relationship of reading and writing. As one key informant noted: 'I would say that creative writing does not serve students very well if it does not involve critical thinking and teaching them how to be readers of both their own writing and of the writing of others…..I don't think you can be a writer without being a reader.' Reinforcing this point, Giles Blunt reflected that after two years of university he took a year off to write a volume of short stories and then decided to go back because 'I realized when I was writing those stories that I needed to read more.'

Author and professor of creative writing, Nicole Markotić, talks about how many students entering her creative writing courses do not expect that they will have to read a lot, yet "even if you're a fiction writer only, or a poet only, you still have to read the other stuff. You're going to learn a lot from reading; it doesn't mean you have to write it'.

Through fiction, many important issues that would not be taken up in a curriculum that is only attentive to the needs of the marketplace are explored. Literary critic Northrop Frye (1963, p. 58) writes:

> The ultimate purpose of teaching literature is not understanding, but the transferring of the imaginative habit of mind, the instinct to create a new form instead of idolizing an old one, from the laboratory of literature to the

> life of mankind *(sic)*, society depends heavily for its well-being on the handful of people who are imaginative in this sense.

Engaging in reading and writing literature helps learner to expand and delve into the complexities of social concerns in society as portrayed through fictional characterizations, metaphors, and narratives. Both reading and writing fiction may encourage learners to develop the capacity to think more broadly and creatively; valuable characteristics for citizens to have within a democratic society.

Important concerns around diversity and inclusion, rights and responsibilities, that are important to debate as citizens in a democracy, are also taken up by both readers and writers of fiction. While recognizing fiction as only one possible avenue to address the issues confronting colonized nations, postcolonial theorists Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin (1995, p. 4) argue 'literature and literary study in the academy have been crucial sites of political and cultural struggle with the most far-reaching results for the general history and practices of colonization and de-colonisation'. These types of concerns often shape our stories and the fiction that we read and write. One of the key informants said:

> I am always surprised at the issues our students bring up and want to explore. In some way they seem way, way off in left field, but they come back to who they are as readers and how their expectations as readers are connected to their communities. How they can be a university student and also a Canadian…many of these issues seem to be ones that are addressed by writers as well as they become more part of the public consciousness.

In reflecting upon the importance of fiction for learning, children's author and elementary school teacher, Gina McMurchy-Barber, shares her perspective:

> We were talking a bit about citizenship and immigration. Maybe writing and fiction is part of creating better people; people who are more engaged in their society. If they can learn to write their own stories, they can connect their story with the rest of the country in terms of citizenship. If you get immigrants who learn to care about their present country, but at the same time can bring their own personal experiences, is that going to create more connected people? I think so, yes.

Fiction writing often takes up issues that are difficult to address in educational contexts, but are essential to consider if adult education is to focus on learning for social purpose.

Implications for Adult Educators

Reclaiming a radical framework for lifelong learning entails challenging the restrictive worldview of a neoliberal discourse that delineates the value of education only in so far as it is perceived to benefit the global marketplace. This is a difficult task, for as Torres (2011, p. 45) notes, 'neoliberalism has created "a new common sense" that has percolated into all public and private institutions and, by implication, into institutions of education, despite their apparent autonomy'.

A critical feminist lens can encourage students to explore how their own biographies and stories, as well as the biographies and stories of others, are linked with larger social structural issues of power. In her discussion of feminist research and the arts, Clover (2010, p. 243) points out that 'as the feminist movement can attest, profound social change comes not from simply staying at the level of the individual but from turning the gaze outward'. At the same time, a critical feminist approach can also draw

attention to the importance of biography in writer's lives, in how it shapes the stories that they develop, which although they may be fictional, are inspired by learning that may have occurred in their own homeplace.

Jarvis (2005, p. 76) notes that engaging with fiction has transformative potential, but there is a 'need to provide opportunity for a critically reflective process that explicitly requires the making of connections between personal and imaginative experiences'. This is not to say that the only way people can engage critically with fiction is if they have an adult educator to instruct them, but it does suggest that one of the roles of adult educators may be to take up the opportunities afforded through the use of fiction, both through reading and writing, to consider possible ways to facilitate learning that may foster these critical capacities. One key informants argues: 'I think we need to find ways to support new voices, new stories, new ideas. I think any attempt to support and advance Canadian fiction should also involve a program that would educate the readers of the value of this work; a two-pronged approach.'

Lifelong learning should be considered an important part of developing as citizens participating within a democratic society, with the ability to contribute to debates and to question the policies and structures that shape the workplace, homeplace, and nation-state. Through the use of fiction, radical educators may discover ways to explore the types of issues that critical and feminist theorists raise as being intrinsic concerns for establishing a more just society, taking up difficult subjects such as racism, homophobia or sexism. Ethical issues in literature are usually represented through character development or metaphorical writing rather than direct, didactic narrative. This ambiguity is what makes for interesting discussions because readers will take up the ethical issues

and interpret them in relation to their own perceptions of the world. Citizenship is defined more broadly than just an interest in the legal and political functions of a society. At the heart of citizenship is also an exploration of what are the best ethical decisions to shape a society and protect individual rights.

If educators use respectful, dialogical methods for teaching, to encourage the development of empathy, understanding, and imagination amongst their learners, there are many different pedagogical strategies educators can draw upon that use fiction to explore notions of citizenship with learners. Yet it is essential that these teaching and learning activities are taken up using a critical approach. As Brookfield (2005, p. 353) notes, critical theorists such as Marcuse and Habermas 'argue that critical thought is impossible if adults have learned only to focus on particulars, on the immediate features of their lives' (p. 353). Otherwise, there is a danger that instead of engaging in a critical learning context informed by theory and a sophisticated understanding of how power shapes our cultures and identities, existing prejudices and biases may simply be reinforced or the learner may simply see the concerns raised in a fictional novel as being an individual problem, not located within broader social constructs.

Sandlin, O'Malley & Burdick (2011, p. 355) discuss how Henry Giroux and other critical academics 'emphasize the role of educators and other cultural workers as oppositional public intellectuals acting to create democratic public spaces that transform social problems'. Arguing for a distinct way of perceiving citizenship, one key informant said,

> Academic citizenship for me is an awareness of the impact, the influence or the power or lack of, exercised by what we do as academics both within the

> academic world and beyond. We say for example, as a citizen, I felt so proud that we won the Canadian or American hockey game! That's one form of citizenship. But within our academic realm, as humans we tend to feel besieged by questions raised about the uselessness of what we do because it's very hard to put a quantitative value on what we produce as humanists. I think that the notion of academic citizenship helps us understand how we play a role institutionally as critics for our students and through the impact we may have on our immediate environment in ways that may not always be apparent. So it kind of forces us to keep troubling the notion of what do we do as academics that has immediate relevance to society.

Sandlin et.al. (2011) note that some feminists challenge the idea of privileging academics as public intellectuals, but there is certainly room for debate as to what are the responsibilities of critical academics in partnering or connecting with other grassroots groups to explore possibilities for education connected to social purpose.

Outside of universities, colleges and formal classrooms, fostering creative writing is another way to support adult learning opportunities that may be linked with exploring citizenship. Several key informants interviewed for this study were involved in programs to encourage the development of Canadian writers, many of whom came from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. These programs are important because they provide support at a systemic level for new writers through mentorship, publication know-how, and writing communities. By encouraging emerging writers from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, the complexities of living in a society that celebrates diversity, and

yet one that is also working through the tensions of change and cultural awareness, finds voice in Canadian fiction.

As Brookfield and Holst (2011, p. 4) argue 'the radical purpose and practice of adult education is concerned with organizing education for and encouraging learning about the creation of democracy in political, cultural and economic spheres'. Creating opportunities for democratic learning requires challenging the narrowness of a neoliberal framework to explore alternative pedagogical strategies. It involves giving learners the tools, such as the capacity to use language to envision and consider alternative worldviews and perspectives. Drawing upon fiction reading and writing may be one means by which radical educators may be able to foster learning for democratic and social purposes.

Reclaiming the Radical

Critical educator Ian Martin (2003, p. 567) argues that 'we keep getting it all wrong because we talk about lifelong learning in educational rather than political terms'. To reclaim the radical vision for adult education, there is a need to challenge the dominant worldview endorsed by a neoliberal framework that articulates education as primarily an individual rather than social concern and that links the value of learning to an economic assessment. Using fiction writing to develop critical and dialogical opportunities to explore topics such as citizenship is one strategy for fostering more holistic and critical approaches to lifelong learning that exposes learners to alternative viewpoints and ways of understanding the world. Brookfield (2011, p. 146-147) claims, 'adult education that focuses on developing artistic sensibility is, in its own way, as full

of revolutionary potential as Freireian culture circles, theatre of the oppressed, participatory research, or education for party activism'.

In challenging the narrowness of a worldview determined by system imperatives, critical educators foster democratic and dialogical approaches to learning, qualities that are imperative for the development of an active and engaged citizenry. Martin (2003, p. 577) states that Margaret Thatcher often argued that 'there is no alternative' as a way of eliminating dissent. Silencing debate undermines the radical potential for adult learning, thus undermining the processes of communicative learning that are an essential component of a deliberative democracy.

Fiction writing provides alternative visions of what it means to be a citizen, whether of Canada, the UK or elsewhere. Exploring the stories shared by other people is a way to gain a deeper understanding of other people's experiences. Radical educators can encourage learners to take up important issues around topics such as citizenship and to challenge the narrowness of a worldview that asserts the dominance of marketplace values. As Martin (2003, p. 577) argues, the 'role of critical and progressive adult education must be to challenge this new common sense and be part of the process of fighting back and showing that there is *never* no alternative'.

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