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Major Trends in Research Themes from AERC Proceedings (1990-2001)

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Abstract: The roundtable will focus on a critical literature review research approach and preliminary trend findings from a document analysis of the research themes from AERC proceedings from 1990 to 2001.

Keywords – adult and continuing education history, critical literature review, AERC proceedings

As the Adult Education Research Conference (AERC) is about to celebrate its 60th year, an exploration of a subset of the different trends that emerged in the field of adult and continuing education research seems fitting. The precise decade of 1990-2001 was chosen for particular reasons that will become evident in the narrative that follows.

The *Handbook for Adult and Continuing Education* series has long served as the historical demarcator of the current state of the field of adult and continuing education for both educators and practitioners. Sometimes those choices in content have been contested (see *Making Space*, 2001). Between the handbooks that emerge every ten years, the AERC serves as the main annual conference gathering for the profession in terms of current completed empirical research studies. Understanding the different forces driving the field over time can be difficult to discern, so taking a longitudinal approach can be instructive in locating major trends. Taylor (2001) employed such an approach in outlining the articles that did not make it into the *Adult Education Quarterly* (AEQ) during that decade, which produced some interesting findings.

The analysis of all paper publications from the AERC proceedings between 1990 and 2001 will help determine the level of influence of AERC on the handbooks and vice-versa. The first phase of research was collecting the AERC proceedings for said decade. When possible, digitized versions of the publications were obtained to help facilitate the process.

An important part in the planning of a critical literature review is determining the organizational structure of categorization prior to the actual analytical work (Imel, 2011). For the purpose of this research, we will follow a thematic structure guiding the reading of the publications from the AERC proceedings. Roundtable sessions and symposiums will not be included in the analysis. An initial spreadsheet will be populated by the reported themes of each AERC published paper.

Following the initial reading phase of the research, our analysis work will employ a chronological lens followed by a historical lens. Aiding in that approach will be cross-examination with theme topics that populated the Merriam & Cunningham (Eds., 1989) and Wilson & Hayes (Eds., 2000) *Adult and continuing education handbook* volumes, the Sheared & Sissel (Eds., 2001) response to the 2000 Handbook contents *Making space*, and Taylor's 2001 article *Adult Education Quarterly from 1989 to 1999: A content analysis of all submissions*. In doing so, we will establish correlation or disconnect with the emergent trends outlined in those works.

While it is too early to make any claims, initial testbed findings are showing a strong representation of articles that could be linked to the 2000 handbook. For the 2001 year of the AERC proceedings, 71 out of 78 publications have been selected for further examination. Each

of the publications will be categorized by themes and coded with keywords from cross-comparison. After an initial phase of coding, we can observe emerging trends for topics such as diversity, identity construction, international and cross-cultural education, distance education, and workplace learning. Also, what is becoming evident is the major prominence of transformative adult learning theory in the papers analyzed.

Overall, this roundtable aims to create engaging dialogue surrounding the development of this research approach in the identification of trends in the proceedings from 1990-2001. The hope is that through dialog, we can deepen our approach in terms of analysis by obtaining feedback through reflections of the lived experiences during that decade. The desire is to then present the fully completed research at the 61st meeting of AERC in Vancouver, B.C.

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