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Knowledgeable Economies
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Adult Education and the Social Economy

Re-thinking the Communitarian Pedagogy
of Watson Thomson

Michael Chartier

**A thesis prepared under the auspices of the Northern Ontario, Manitoba,
and Saskatchewan Regional Node of the Social Economy Suite**

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Entreprises sociales
économies intelligentes
et communautés durables

ADULT EDUCATION AND THE SOCIAL ECONOMY: RETHINKING THE
COMMUNITARIAN PEDAGOGY OF WATSON THOMSON

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By

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this thesis is to analyze the philosophy and pedagogy of an almost forgotten figure in Saskatchewan history, whose work has had a lasting impact on the theory and practice of adult education. Watson Thomson, who was appointed as director of the Adult Education Division (AED) by the newly elected CCF government of Tommy Douglas in 1944, initiated an ambitious program designed to animate the citizenry of Saskatchewan, bring a variety of educational services to the common person, and develop co-operative and community enterprises throughout the province. Thomson's work is significant for a number of reasons. First, I compare and contrast it with the pedagogy of Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. Second, I show that it was influenced by the humanistic philosophy of Personalism, especially that of Emmanuel Mounier. Third, and perhaps most importantly, Watson's philosophy embodies insights from the depth psychology of Alfred Adler enabling him to advocate a distinctive, dialogical pedagogy. Fourth, his influence as director of the AED was considerable as can be gauged from the fact that within one year of its formation, the division had organized over 500 study-action groups and more than 100 cooperative enterprises. Fifth, Watson's educational achievements are important not only for historical reasons but as a model for the development of social economy enterprises today, as evidence from a recent UNESCO report shows. The thesis uses an interdisciplinary approach of intellectual biography, historical documentation, and philosophical and psychological analysis in order to establish a comprehensive account of the theory and practice of this important figure.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my wonderful and supportive wife Cynthia and to our son Oscar.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Man [sic] is great only in his wholeness, when we see past as well as present, child as well as adult, female as well as male, Orient as well as Occident; and that greatness is only realized as those opposites come into intellectual synthesis and human reconciliation. Whereas the key word [sic] of yesterday was analysis and the end result atomization, today, having split the atom, we change to concepts of relationship, integration, [and] synthesis (Thomson, n.d. p.5).

1.1 Reinterpreting and Reclaiming the Pedagogical Legacy of Watson Thomson.

The life and work of Watson Thomson have become trapped in an academic/historiographical netherworld. His historical legacy has, over the last three decades, rarely transcended the role of research fodder for a few community-minded graduate students. Were it not for the comprehensive biographical dissertation and subsequent articles written by Michael Welton (1983 & 1987), Thomson's profound transformative-communitarian vision and fascinating life story may have remained in complete obscurity. The failure of Thomson's narrative to gain widespread prominence amongst Western Canadian historians and academics is not due to a lack of significant contributions to Canadian adult and labour education or to co-operative development. Nor was it due to a lack of vision or the pedagogical means to achieve this vision

on the part of Thomson himself. He envisioned nothing less than the cultural, social, economic, and political transformation of the Canadian Prairies — certainly no small task. Owing to extensive experience working in adult education as well as to the profound personal insights gained while studying and living with a group of close companions and fellow intellectuals, Thomson was able to develop a unique and effective educational framework for mobilizing and politicizing Canadian citizenry.

Michael Welton's dissertation on Watson Thomson provides a comprehensive biographical account of his experiences. Tracing his life from infancy and time spent in the United Kingdom to his final decades working as an educator in Western Canada, Welton threads and weaves the subtleties and nuances of Thomson's life into a fascinating narrative. The purpose of this thesis is not to retell Thomson's story. Rather, it will be to examine his philosophy, isolate his educational processes, and discuss its role in the contemporary social economy. As a means of contextualizing Thomson's educational framework, this thesis will focus on Thomson's time in Saskatchewan as an educator thus adding detail to Welton's original discussion and generating new insights into Thomson's dismissal from the Adult Education Division.

When considered today, Thomson's hope of a Prairie renaissance may seem naive. However, this thesis, in part, will attempt to show that due to the circumstances and the spirit of the times in which Thomson was operating, and because he had the support of then Saskatchewan Premier Tommy Douglas and his governing party, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), Thomson's extraordinary vision had a strong foundation from which to build. Through an analysis of the political climate of Thomson's time, particularly during the formative years of his own educational philosophy and practice which took place

during the 1930s, as well as through an analysis of the political and cultural context of Saskatchewan and Canada during the mid-1940s, this thesis will show that Thomson's failure in realizing his ultimate vision of Prairie cultural transformation was caused by an unfriendly national political climate. In making this claim, I will follow up Michael Welton's statement that "[r]ecovering the work of Thomson...provides [the] necessary historical links for those who are educating for personal and social change in our own time" (Welton, 1986, p.138). By demonstrating that it was not a fundamental flaw in Thomson's educational framework which ultimately undermined his vision, but rather a fiercely anti-socialist national political agenda, and by providing discussion of current trends and resurgences in community-based adult education, this thesis will show that Thomson's educational legacy continues to be relevant today.

1.2 The Life of Watson Thomson

1.2.1 The Early Years 1899-1930

Thomson's life began in Scotland on the eleventh of March, 1899. A child who was constantly sick, Thomson grew up self-conscious and considered himself a 'physical misfit.' Originally not able to serve in the First World War, Thomson attended Glasgow University until he was called up for active military service in 1917. Thomson's acceptance into the military allowed him to shed some of his early personal insecurities regarding his poor physical health, and, more importantly, gain his first real appreciation for the profundity of community through the relationships he developed with his comrades while in the trenches (Welton, 1983).

After the war, Thomson returned his university studies and eventually completed his Masters degree in 1923. A month after finishing school, Thomson took his first overseas job working for a friend and then later as a teacher at a Jamaican college. In 1925, Thomson returned to Scotland

where he was promptly offered a position as a superintendent of education in Nigeria which he immediately accepted. It was during these years as a superintendent that Thomson's focus on dialogical education in small groups became a focal point of his practice (Welton, 1983). While he would spend the next couple of years working in West Africa, he was forced to return to Scotland on several occasions due to reoccurring illness. Although Thomson's early years as an educator were formative, his military experience and the personal connection he felt towards soldiers would return during his directorship of the Saskatchewan Adult Education Division during the final years of the Second World War. Furthermore, his chronic illness would continually be a source of insecurity for Thomson. While Thomson was already in the 30s, well travelled, and holding an advanced degree, the most profoundly formative years of his life were yet to occur.

1.2.2 The New Britain Years: 1931-1937

In 1931, Thomson moved to London, where he became a member of the communitarian New Britain Movement. Upon reflection, his interpretation of the 1930s and the 1940s was that they were decades in which people were searching for alternatives to the laissez-faire economics which had dominated the previous decade. The New Britain movement embodied this search for an alternative to the unchecked individualism found in capitalistic societies. Led by the Serbian intellectual Dimitrije Mitrinovic, an imposing and almost mystical presence, the New Britain movement was a communal group which envisioned a new England based on the group's personalist philosophy. Mitrinovic was born in 1888 in the village Donje Poplat, in the Serbian Republic. Early in his life, Mitrinovic played a key role in the "Young Bosnia Movement" and later edited a variety of literary and cultural reviews. He went on to study literature at the

University of Munich and at the beginning of the First World War he fled to England and avoided conscription into the Austrian Army (Welton, 1983).

At its core, New Britain's unique personalism was an attempt to balance the individual's responsibility to himself or herself with his or her community. Welton (1983) maintains that the group was "the enem[y] of all individuals, ideas, societies, and states that denied man the needs of his body, the dignity of his spirit, and the presence and sustenance of a true human community" (p.69). Thomson, enraptured by Mitrinovic's resounding presence would spend the greater part of the 1930s living in close quarters with the inner-circle of the New Britain movement.

In addition to forming a variety of deep personal and intellectual relationships during his time with Mitrinovic, Thomson began developing his own 'transformative-communitarian'¹ philosophy. Thomson's beliefs were grounded in a combination of Guild Socialism, Personalism, and Adlerian psychology. Guild Socialism was generally aimed at balancing the needs of producers and consumers by establishing "industrial democracy by placing the administration in the hands of the workers, but at the same time to eliminate profit by placing the ownership in the hands of the public" (Cole, 1920, p.59). For example, a framework for an alternative system of government would consist of the producers who would be represented by a guild congress while the consumers would be represented by a parliament, both branches sharing authority equally (Russell, 1918, p.65). Thomson's understanding of Guild Socialism would later have an effect on his educational practice and particularly in terms of his emphasis on co-operative development and the economic emancipation of Saskatchewan's populace.

¹ Michael Welton, in his 1983 dissertation, was the first to use this term to describe Watson Thomson's philosophy.

The type of Personalism studied and promoted by Thomson and his fellow cohorts in the New Britain Movement was based on the work of Emmanuel Mounier. A young French writer who promoted his ideas through his journal *Esprit*, Mounier was able to draw together diverse groups of individuals committed to a belief that "...affirms the primacy of the human person over material necessities and over the whole complex of the implements man needs for the development of his person" (Mounier, 1938, p.1). In part, Mounier's Personalism was a movement that sought to balance the individual's needs with the community via a critique of the dehumanization of people under capitalism and the removal of individual rights in fascist states (Mounier, 1938). The need for a balanced society as promoted by Mounier would be internalized by the members of the New Britain Movement, and would affect Thomson's later adult education work in Canada.

Thomson continually struggled with the tension between understanding one's role as an individual, and one's place within one's community. This tension between the individual and the collective was a constant subject of discussion for New Britain's inner circle. As a grounding framework for these discussions, many members of the community, including Thomson, utilized the theoretical work of the Austrian psychologist Alfred Adler as a means of gaining a deeper understanding of community. Adler's work would play an important role in both the open dialogue which occurred in the communal setting of the New Britain Movement as well as providing a theoretical grounding which influenced New Britain's personalism. For example, during the early 1920s, Adler operated public family counselling sessions in Vienna. These open forums put what would normally be private family affairs on public display in order to eliminate the stigma surrounding familial dysfunction by showing that the issues in one family were often the same issues faced by many families. By making issues like family conflict public, feelings of

guilt or shame could be dispelled by demonstrating a commonality amongst families. The public therapy sessions also helped train other professionals in their dealings with similar problems by showing how the facilitating psychologist helped manage problems — meaning that there was an deliberate educative aspect to the sessions (Dinkmeyer & Carlson, 2001). As open group dialogue was an essential part of everyday life in the New Britain community, specifically as a means of facilitating interpersonal connections within the group, it is reasonable to infer that Adler's influence was also considerable in providing a model for Mitrinovic's group discussions.

Adler outlined five basic premises in regards to human behaviour and the relationship between the individual and his or her community which served as foundational components of Thomson's, and New Britain's, philosophy.

1. Humans are social by nature and their primary motivation is to belong to a group.
2. All human behaviour is goal oriented. The specific goal is to define the role which the individual is to play within the group. Furthermore, deviant behaviour is the result of one person misunderstanding his or her place within the community.
3. Action is a choice. Adler postulated that people chose their behaviours based on their beliefs (Mosak & Maniaci, 1999). For example, a person who believes that a "cleanliness is next to Godliness" will pursue specific behaviours that act on and reinforce this belief.
4. Human beings should consider other humans in a holistic sense — meaning that people must be seen as more valuable than simply the sum of their parts, since they have an intrinsic value.
5. One's personal perception of reality may not be accurate. (Beatty, 1981).

It was an *a priori* acceptance of these principles that would later influence Thomson's reliance on group dialogue as a means of bringing people closer together in community (Beatty, 1981). He believed that human beings could only achieve their maximum ontological potential — as contributing and interdependent members of an intimate community — through engagement with community and a full understanding of his or her role within that community.

1.2.3 Crossing the Atlantic: Thomson in Canada 1937-1944

By the late 1930s, Mitrinovic's movement had moved away from its earlier emphasis on liberating individuals from their egotistical individualism towards a more cult-like commune which had experimented with bizarre sexual activities (Welton, 1983). No longer comfortable with New Britain's direction, Thomson travelled to Canada. From 1937 until 1940 Thomson worked for the University of Alberta's Extension Department, this was an opportunity for him to use and improve upon his previous educational experience and personalist philosophy by conducting study groups and engaging with communities throughout Alberta. In 1940, Thomson briefly returned to England to reunite with Mitrinovic and help in the war effort. However, by 1941 Thomson returned to Canada and joined the extension department at the University of Manitoba. Over the next several years, he partnered with the National Film Board (NFB) and, with the help of the NFB's film resources, he was able to attract hundreds of thousands of participants to his study-groups (Welton, 1983). In 1942, Thomson married Mary Jackson a teacher from Edmonton. Mary would support Thomson in his professional endeavours throughout his life, and together they experimented in many co-personal living communities. By 1944, he had become known as a charismatic and respected adult educator.

Thomson continued his educational work in Manitoba throughout the summer of 1944. During the fall of the same year, Thomson met Tommy Douglas, who had recently led Saskatchewan's provincial Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) party to a landslide victory. During the meeting, Douglas asked Thomson if he would like to head a yet to be formed adult education division involving travel throughout the province (Welton, 1983). Thomson enthusiastically accepted Douglas's offer and by October of 1944, he had settled in Regina to work on developing policy and, together with colleagues, to quickly form objectives and methods for an adult education program. Thomson saw three major objectives for the division.

1. To demonstrate to the citizens of Saskatchewan that a socialist government could affect meaningful change.
2. In order to affect the type of economic emancipation that Thomson had envisioned, the Adult Education Division would need to mobilize large numbers of people as quickly as possible.
3. Thomson believed that the "political consciousness of the people must be so deepened that the foundations of prairie radicalism could not be shaken" (Welton, 1986, p.119).

To achieve these goals, Thomson believed that group dialogue and small study groups were the most effective means of 'activating citizens'. He was convinced that via dialogue centred on a central problem or issue, community members would grow closer through the development of emotional connections. He believed that creative reasoning within a community regarding shared concern with one's peers was essential to living a rewarding life. These aspects of Thomson's communitarian education can be seen as further evidence of the Adlerian influence on his pedagogy. On this note, Thomson writes, in an unpublished manuscript, "[t]o live one's life with only the rarest opportunities for direct, immediate and full emotional expression is... to invite

neurosis and to poison the social atmosphere with a progressively deepening unconscious hypocrisy” (Thomson, n.d., p.5).

In order to promote the type of inter-personal dialogue which Thomson envisioned, his department began to promote and involve itself with a variety of progressive educational and administrative activities. These activities included the following:

1. Finding study-group ‘growing points’ comprising at least four individuals interested in the same topic/issue.
2. Organizing conferences to assist returning veterans.
3. Promoting co-operative enterprises, developing educational courses for a variety of labour groups, and creating connections with other organizations (university extension departments, Wheat Pool staff, etc.).
4. Promoting new community centres (McKague, 1981).

In December of 1944, Thomson began a set of radio broadcasts meant to promote his study-groups. In the first of these radio addresses, Thomson states “[t]he knowledge we want to convey is not knowledge for its own sake but for the sake of changing and recreating our human world nearer to the hearts’ desire of ordinary, decent people everywhere. Not study alone, but study that leads to action” (Thomson, 1944, p.1).

By January of 1945, Thomson’s division had been given a budget of \$60,000 for the upcoming year. With a framework firmly set and objectives identified, Thomson and his field workers went to work. For the next eight months, the Adult Education Division spread throughout Saskatchewan starting study-groups in every corner of the province and organizing several large conferences. One conference in Landis, Saskatchewan, was specifically notable as the participants decided to examine the possibility of creating a co-operative farming and living

community. Other programs included informal evening classes in the 'Lighted School' and the promotion of the Prairie School for Social Advance (PSSA), an organization started by Thomson and his communal living partners in Winnipeg. Thomson was generally pleased with the early success of his division, although he felt frustrated by the slow bureaucratic pace of the Government of Saskatchewan. This frustration was due, in part, to his lack of experience working with governments though he was not naïve enough to believe that his transformative communitarian vision would immediately come to fruition. In fact, Thomson believed it would take approximately fifteen years to be realized (Welton, 1987). Unfortunately, after only eight months, Thomson was already operating on borrowed time.

The success of the provincial CCF in Saskatchewan had given the federal CCF party reason to believe that they too might be in a position to challenge the reigning Liberal government. With the eyes of the country on Saskatchewan, Douglas was under pressure by federal party members to reign in the more left-leaning members within his party (Welton, 1987). Shortly after hiring Thomson, Douglas heard rumours of Thomson's connection to the Labour Progressive Party (LPP) which was the reincarnation of the previously outlawed Communist Party. While it was true that Thomson communicated frequently with the LPP and openly praised Soviet communal farms, he was not a Communist. Thomson's personalist philosophy could not be reconciled with the totalitarian tendencies found in communist states just as he rejected the unchecked individualism of capitalist societies. Welton maintains that "[t]hroughout his life Thomson would maintain an ambivalent relationship to the communist movement: attracted by party members' steely dedication and passionate sacrifice, repelled by their rigid orthodoxy and depreciation of the subjective aspects of life" (Welton, 1983, p.45). Despite Thomson's writings and speeches clearly indicating that he was not a Communist, he was continually accused of being a 'travelling

fellow' and subsequently vilified in the national press. While the CCF was used to bad publicity during this period, the accusations of Communism were of particular consequence for the national CCF party. First, with an up-coming federal election and a manufactured sense of distrust that many people had of the CCF, the social-democrats wanted to convince the nation that they were not an extremist party. A radical educator who spoke of things such as community and revolution provided considerable fodder for CCF critics. Second, the LPP had been conducting a covert war on the CCF, planting their operatives within CCF ranks as a means of undermining the party's credibility, as well as competing for voters. Interestingly, while the LPP was itself vilified in the press and often associated ideologically with the CCF, the LPP received considerable support from both the Liberal and Conservative parties (Boyko, 2006). While Thomson's program brought undesirable media attention upon the CCF, if it were true that he was working for the LPP, Thomson, because of his high-profile position, could cause considerable embarrassment for the provincial and federal CCF campaign efforts.

The rumours of Thomson's 'Communist inclinations' continued to grow throughout 1945. In the fall of that year, Thomson's division began publishing *Front Page*, a newspaper which provided the reader with a progressive view of major world events. Thomson promoted the publication with radio broadcasts meant to promote discussion of major issues as a means of 'activating' citizens and facilitating action. Despite having government approval, *Front Page* became a hotbed of controversy. Letters of support and criticism came from all over the country. By the beginning of December of 1945, the criticism became too much. There seemed to be a clear division between Thomson's objectives for the Adult Education Division and the vision of the Minister of Education, W.S. Lloyd (McKague, 1981). Lloyd, under pressure from Douglas

and federal CCF leader M.J. Coldwell, asked for Thomson's resignation. By the end of December, Thomson was no longer the director of the Adult Education Division.

After providing his resignation, Thomson left Regina for the Pacific coast where he and Mary would stay with friends while he reflected on the events of the previous year. Thomson continued to write articles on world affairs and give weekly addresses on the radio. Mary stayed busy with her own education completing two degrees in Social Work and giving birth to two children. In 1949, Thomson published Pioneer in Community: The Contribution of Henri Lasserre to the Fully Cooperative Society. During the early 1950s, he began to work part-time at the University of British Columbia (UBC) correcting essays for faculty. Later, he would become a faculty member himself and would eventually end his career as a professor there. Throughout the mid-1950s, with a grant from the Robert Owen Foundation, Watson and Mary formed what would be their last major co-personal living experiment. It was decided that the community would settle in picturesque Colebrook, British Columbia. The Colebrook community lasted only three years, mostly due to the drudgery of the daily farming activities and lack of utilities. In 1960, Thomson suffered from a stroke. After his hospitalization, he was reluctant to engage in many of previous political and educational activities in favour of a more relaxed perspective on life. Taking in the simple beauty of nature and family, Thomson describes those days as "some of the happiest... of his life" (Thomson, 1966, p.26). In 1966, he published his semi-autobiography and his final work Turning into Tomorrow. On November 25th, 1969, Thomson passed away.

1.3 Thomson and the Social Economy

This thesis will explore the contemporary application of Thomson's pedagogy to the social economy. Recently, much attention has been given to the development of the 'social economy' in Canada. While not easily defined, the social economy generally refers to the specific "foundations, co-operatives, mutual societies and associations that pursue activities that are both social and economic in nature" which are generally involved in the pursuit of "social objectives that meet the needs of ...a community" (The Co-operatives Secretariat, 2004). Generally, these organizations are co-operative and/or grass-roots enterprises that attempt to alleviate social issues through creative organization and entrepreneurship. By using indicators of success not represented by traditional economic assessments such as increases in wealth or trade, social economy projects are usually assessed by the improvement of the quality of life *experienced* by the members of a community. A more detailed description of the Social Economy will be provided in the fourth chapter.

Watson was not alone in recognizing the importance of education to enable a full understanding of the purpose and quality of life outside the fetters of the market. Alfred North Whitehead, for example, wrote that,

Education is the guidance towards a comprehension of the art of life; and by art of life I mean the most complete achievement of varied activity expressing the potentialities of that living creature in the face of its actual environment (Whitehead in Scarfe, 2005, p.17).

Education guides the individual to understand what Whitehead calls the art of life, namely the potentiality for growth in any human being in the context of her environment. This process of life-affirmation is more basic than that of making ever more money. Too often in formal learning environments such as universities and trade schools, education is regimented and inhibited by rigid processes of evaluation and standards to meet the requirements of certification,

often at the expense of emotional and spiritual growth — a claim that will be taken up in greater detail in the fourth chapter.

In response to the sterilization and homogenization of education, there has been resurgence in grass-roots adult education throughout the world — both for the purposes of gaining general knowledge regarding diverse subjects and as a means of solving a variety of problems within various communities. For example, the Calderdale Women’s Centre in Halifax Canada, has been transformed into a successful and unique learning environment where local women come together for educational and personal support. In Zimbabwe, the housing co-operative, Housing People of Zimbabwe, uses small study groups to educate people on the topic of HIV and AIDS (Bjerkaker & Summers, 2006). Recently, in Saskatoon, a group of local citizens and university faculty came together and formed the People’s Free University (PFU) in response to the perceived corporatization of the University of Saskatchewan. Based on the idea that “everyone can learn, everyone can teach” the PFU offered a variety of courses directly related to what the community wanted to learn and was able to teach (Woodhouse, 2005). Although the PFU lasted for only two years, engagement and participation were high. What these groups have in common is that they aim to improve the quality of life in their respective communities, some by dealing with specific issues and others by providing a forum for people to learn about what interests them without the fees and requirements associated with formal education. Additionally, they are all part of the social economy and all demonstrate that there is a community demand for grass-roots education.

1.4 Thomson and Freire

When one considers modern grass-roots educational endeavors geared towards action, the influence of Brazilian radical Paulo Freire often comes to mind. Freire and Thomson share similar ideas yet they diverge on several key points worth highlighting, in particular concepts of an awakening consciousness, the Marxist concept *praxis*, and dialogical education.

Perhaps the single most important concept in the Paulo Freire's educational theory is what he refers to as *conscientização*. Often translated into English as "critical consciousness" the notion of *conscientização* refers to when people come to "perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and...take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 2004, p.35). A closer examination of Freire's description of critical consciousness reveals two fundamental components. First is the ability for the oppressed to perceive contradictions within social, political, and economic institutions. The contradictions which Freire wishes to reveal seek to mask the "oppressive elements of reality" by misleading subjugated people into adopting the value system of the oppressor — a trait often referred to as "internalized oppression" (Overall, 1998, p.80). Furthermore, the contradictions of which Freire speaks are rooted in a "necrophilic" view of the world which can be defined as a discourse that views the world as static and unchanging. By assuming this necrophilic worldview and by internalizing oppression, subjugated people are hindered in realizing their "ontological vocation" of becoming "more fully human" (Freire, p.74).

The second component of Freire's *conscientização* is the belief that people, motivated by their identification of their oppression, will engage in some form of transformative action. Freire maintains that overcoming oppression requires the adoption of a "biophilic" view of the world. Biophilia in this case refers to the love of life expressed by an acknowledgement that world is

continually in process, that it is constantly being created and recreated (Freire, 2004).

Additionally, Freire claims that this view implies that transformative change is truly possible in that the process-oriented perspective recognizes that people continually define their world and not the other way around. Concisely put, critical consciousness is possible when people recognize and take action against oppression.

Thomson's major pedagogical focus was the development of what can be referred to as a "civic" or "community" consciousness. Michael Welton has stated that "Thomson was committed to awakening individuals and communities to a participatory civic consciousness in order to create participatory forms of organization in every Prairie village and town" (Welton, 1987, p.151). At its core, the purpose of Thomson's civic consciousness was to promote his utopian vision of the world. He felt that his communitarian dream could be achieved through the introduction of an educational framework that combined study, which would awaken people to the crises of their times, with the "tools" necessary to affect transformative change (Thomson, 1944). The crises of Thomson's day, at least as he perceived them, were in part manifestations of individualism. In a 1944 radio address, Thomson remarked that personal isolationism is "good for only one thing...the sense of getting your own way and being lord of all you survey" (Thomson, 1944). For Thomson, freedom was engaging co-operatively in one's community which necessitated the discarding of individual needs for communal harmony. The role of education was to awaken people through study by identifying the limitations and the affects of individualism on their lives and subsequently assisting people in taking co-operative action.

Superficially, Freire's concept of *conscientização* and Thomson's civic consciousness are similar in a number of ways. At the most basic level, both theorists' conceptualization of consciousness required the recognition of oppression followed by concrete action. In both cases,

education which brought about consciousness was particularly targeted to those who were considered to be subjugated. However, the theorists differ in their emphases on the causes of oppression. Freire argues that oppression is created when people are absorbed into hegemonic systems through discourses that view the world as static. On the other hand, Thomson saw the individualism inherent in capitalism as resulting in the alienation of the individual from his or her community which help maintained hegemonic control. Despite this difference, both theorists' viewed the widespread belief that change was out of the control of the "common" person as their primary hurdle to societal transformation. Furthermore, this difference is only a differentiation with respect to emphasis. For example, Freire recognizes the threat of individualism when he warns that when the oppressed identify oppressive systems yet do not engage in transformative action they are only "exercising an individualistic attitude towards empowerment and freedom" (Freire, p.23). Here Freire recognizes individualism as a threat to liberation.

At a deeper level, both theorists' concepts of consciousness are similar in that they derive, at least in part, from a Marxist tradition. In his analysis of Marxist humanism, Erich Fromm maintains that the aim of Marx's materialism was the "spiritual emancipation of man [sic], and of his liberation from the chains of economic determination, of restituting him in his human wholeness, of enabling him to find unity and harmony with his fellow man" (Fromm, 1961, p.3). In outlining their emancipatory pedagogies, both Thomson and Freire engage, develop, and appropriate at least three of Marx's aims defined in Fromm's analysis. The first aim is based on the incompleteness of the human being and an assumed need to move towards completion. Freire defines this force as a person's "ontological vocation" carried out through the adoption of process-oriented discourses. Thomson saw the completion of one's humanity as achievable only through engagement with one's community. The second aim developed by

Thomson and Freire is the role of community, of finding “unity and harmony with [one’s] fellow man.” Thomson takes up this idea explicitly, while Freire, in a more subtle way, promotes community through the dialogical process, a point which will be discussed later in this section. Freire’s beliefs and Thomson’s focus on co-operative endeavours are both rejections of the competitive economic framework due to its promotion of inequality and alienation from community. Interestingly, Welton points out that Thomson lacked any detailed class analysis in his own writings (Welton, 1983). One wonders to what role Thomson’s comparatively affluent socioeconomic background influence his lack of a significant class analysis in his philosophy.

In his analysis of socialist education in Saskatchewan, Ormond McKague (1981) reminds us that “[f]or Marx, the essence of human existence is praxis—the fusion of thought, of theory and practice, of philosophy and revolution” (p.73). In Marxist thought, one cannot differentiate between theory and action; they compose two parts of a unitary concept. While both Freire and Thomson are once again indebted in part to Marx in the development of their educational theories, and while their understandings of praxis are fairly similar one to another, Freire remains much more faithful to the original definition.

For Freire, Praxis is the *synthesis* of reflection and action. The concept of praxis is constituted in Freire’s notion of the “word” which is the process of naming or identifying oppression while concomitantly acting against it. In one of his most often quoted passages from Pedagogy of the Oppressed , Freire states that “[t]here is not one true word that is not at the same time a praxis...to speak a true word is to transform the world” (2004, p.88). Therefore, the act of naming oppression or speaking a “true word” is both reflection and action. In addition, Freire maintains that reflection without action amounts to verbalism, while action without reflection is

nothing more than meaningless activism (Freire, 2004). For Freire praxis is only praxis when it is the synthesis of both reflection and action.

Identifying praxis in the work of Thomson is slightly more difficult. Thomson never specifically refers to the concept of praxis by name. However, given the influence of Marx on Mounier, Adler and others studied by Thomson and the New Britain movement, one could assume that Thomson had some familiarity with the concept of praxis. In a radio address Thomson made on behalf of his newly formed Saskatchewan Adult Education Division [AED] he states that,

The knowledge we want to convey is not knowledge for its own sake but for the sake of changing and recreating our human world nearer to the hearts' desire of ordinary, decent people everywhere. *Not study alone, but study that leads to action* [emphasis added]" (Thomson, 1944, p.2).

The emphasized portion of the quote implies that Thomson saw study and action as necessary to one another. Thomson believed that those who wished to study as a means of entertainment or for simply "passing the time" were not living up to their obligations as community members. Moreover, he considered any study that did not facilitate action a misuse of his division (Thomson, 1944). In fact, Thomson went so far as to suggest that study without action would allow fascism to enter 1940s North America unchallenged (Thomson, 1944). Thomson was convinced that study must lead to action and that one without the other was rendered meaningless.

Thomson and Freire likewise both take up the idea that study/reflection and action are both equally necessary in bringing about transformative change — that is to say the awakening of consciousness. However, their theories differ in a fundamental way. Freire specifically mentions praxis by name and he also sees it as a singular concept. Thomson, on the other hand,

sees study as leading to action. In other words, while Freire saw praxis as occurring in the naming of the “word,” Thomson saw praxis as two separate occasions; first study and then action. This slight difference is indicative of the value that Freire and Thomson ascribed to the process of dialogue. Freire saw the process as revolutionary in and of itself and therefore the way in which people actually engaged in dialogue called for deliberate steps and a specific philosophical orientation — i.e., the facilitator’s relinquishment of his or her traditional place of authority and expertise. Thomson saw it as a means intended to bring people closer together and to bring about action that specifically encouraged his communitarian vision; therefore, the educator in Thomson’s framework played a more direct role in suggesting desirable outcomes.

Marx believed that the inability for the proletariat to engage in effective communicative practices was due “inevitably from the combative relations under capitalism and from the attempt by the capitalist class to keep the working class fragmented and unorganized” (McKague, p.73). It was the “combative relations,” the competition among people for the scarce wealth in capitalist society which, led to people to become isolated and alienated from one another. The implied message in McKague’s statement on Marx is that if the working class were able to come together and communicate with each other regarding their oppression, they would be motivated to revolt against the individualization and fragmentation that capitalism created. Both Freire and Thomson take-up this idea of communicative organizational dialogue in their educational thought.

In Thomson’s educational philosophy, dialogue played a fundamental role. This can be deduced from its centrality in the majority of Thomson’s educational initiatives (Welton, 1983). In a January, 1945 government press release describing the structure of the Adult Education Division (AED) Thomson promoted the use of study-discussion-action groups. Often, these

discussion groups would involve some sort of object of study, for example, radio addresses or film strips which would be connected with, either directly or indirectly, issues of concern for the local community. With a focus on these various objects, Thomson encouraged discussion regarding the way in which the circumstances under scrutiny were historically constructed (Welton, 1983). For Thomson, dialogue was not only about developing a solution to a given problem, but the process itself was meant to help people come together as a community.

For Freire, the process of reflection was developed through group dialogue which he defines as the “encounter between men [sic], mediated by the world, in order to name the world” (Freire, p.88). In other words, dialogue occurs when people meet to discuss issues of concern which are defined by the context of their living conditions and worldview for the purposes of overcoming oppressive (de-humanizing) situations. In Freire’s pedagogical framework, discussion is facilitated by an educator who rescinds their traditional place of authority. For meaningful dialogue to occur during an educational experience it is essential that the world cannot be “named” by the educator. That is to say, the facilitator does not lead the group to a predetermined conclusion, no matter how correct or incorrect the conclusion may be. Freire maintains that dialogue must not be “an act of arrogance,” implying a rejection of individual goals, but must be based in “love...humility...faith...hope...and critical thinking” (Freire, pp.90-91).

Freire, much like Thomson, encouraged community-based action, which occurred both during and because of dialogue. Also like Thomson, Freire’s discussions were centered on a specific object of study (e.g. photographs, film, etc.) as the impetus for engaging in political dialogue. Furthermore, both theorists believed that the discussion would result in actions that were meaningful because the problems that were addressed and solved were the problems

identified by the participants. Freire and Thomson both promoted a historical analysis of oppressive discourses and situations as a means of convincing people of the effectiveness of action against oppression. However, they differed from each other in at least one fundamental way. Freire emphatically believed that the educator was not to name the oppression or provide the direction for a solution. Thomson, on the other hand, believed that the only time the dialogical process was successful was when the process promoted a transformative-communitarian vision.

1.5 Methodology

This study endeavours to reinterpret and reclaim the work of Watson Thomson. It will rely in part on a biographical approach focusing on the experiences and ideas of the visionary behind Saskatchewan's Adult Education Division. In her book on the process of writing biography, Barbara Finkelstein (1998) claims that "[h]istorical biography reveals the relative power of individuals to stabilize or transform the determinacies of cultural tradition, political arrangements, economic forms, social circumstances and educational processes into new social possibilities" (p.46). Finkelstein's claim will be interpreted in two ways. First, that the narrative of Thomson's life demonstrates the efficacy of his beliefs as realized through his actions. A correlation between Thomson's educational philosophy and the positive consequences of his study groups will be established and demonstrate the contemporary importance of his educational framework. The second interpretation of Finkelstein's remark focuses on the reinterpretation of Thomson's legacy into "new social possibilities." This will be accomplished through the re-contextualization of Thomson's pedagogical framework for the contemporary milieu.

The thesis will be constructed on the basis of a number of secondary sources and through an extensive review of primary documents, including manuscripts, government documents, personal correspondence and private notes. Moreover, the methodological approach will be hermeneutical. The philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, in defining hermeneutics, maintains that it is the process of interpretation that lets “what is alienated by the character of the written word or by the character of being distanced by cultural or historical distances speak again” (Gadamer in Gallagher, 1992, p.4). Hermeneutics then concerns the interpretation and re-interpretation of text by providing a respectful and representational voice for the text itself. Gallagher (1992) adds that any ethical and accurate interpretation of text requires the identification of the “different factors, including the epistemological, sociological, cultural, and linguistic factors that condition the process of interpretation” (p.5). While the narrative to be articulated in this thesis will provide as objective a representation of the events of Thomson’s life as possible, much of the interpretation of the text will necessarily be subject to the author’s own personal biases and experiences.

When I chose to examine the life and work of Watson Thomson, I was intrigued by the opportunity to work with a large number of primary documents and by the historical period in which Thomson directed the AED. I began the research process with a keen interest in learning about the Socialist and Marxist roots of Thomson’s philosophy as well as the early years of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. This focus came partly from a personal interest in community development and social justice and partly from curiosity that was related to my own family history. While as far as I know, no members of my family knew of Thomson or were involved in the early CCF, many were active a decade later in the development of health care co-operatives just prior to the tenure of W.S. Lloyd as Premier. During the early stages of writing

this thesis, I was concerned that any analysis would be favourable to the actions of the CCF or to a socialist pedagogy. Throughout the research and writing of this thesis, I continually questioned and reflected critically upon my own analyses. This reflective exercise enabled me to question my preconceptions of Thomson's socialist background helping uncover the prominence of both Mounier's personalism and Adler's psychotherapy in Thomson's philosophy.

1.6 Chapter Synopsis

The second chapter provides a detailed analysis of Thomson's personalist philosophy – in particular, a discussion of his understanding of Personalism and Adlerian psychology. Information regarding Thomson's beliefs will be assembled through an analysis of his own personal correspondence and manuscripts as well as his activities throughout the 1930s and the early 1940s. The influence of Mounier and Adler on Thomson will be examined in detail. Within this chapter, the discussion of Thomson's philosophy will include a generalized version of Thomson's pedagogical framework demonstrating how his beliefs influenced and informed his professional practice.

The third chapter provides a narrative which describes Thomson's philosophy in practice during his tenure as director of the Adult Education Division. This chapter builds on the previous chapter and shows how Thomson's educational framework worked in practice. Specific attention is given to the 1945 Landis Conference. Discussion will include an analysis of the early relationship between Watson Thomson, Tommy Douglas, and W.S. Lloyd. This examination will help inform the later discussion of Thomson's dismissal. Further discussion will focus on the role of the *Front Page* and its associated radio show in Thomson's downfall. Especially the manner in which the *Front Page* and its detractors utilized an editorial attack against his division

in major Canadian newspapers. An exploration of the relationship between the CCF and the Labour Progressive Party (LPP) will provide context to Thomson's dismissal. Specifically, the competitive dynamics between the CCF and the LPP created an internal fear within the CCF leadership in regard to Thomson's intentions; namely, they believed that Thomson, along with LPP cohorts, may have intended to sabotage the CCF at the federal level.

The fourth chapter will provide some discussion regarding the modern need for the type of program that Thomson offered. Through the description of a variety of modern grass-root adult education programs and their specific objectives and practices, similarities will be shown between Thomson's work and effective contemporary educational practice. The case will be made that in our modern epoch where prospects for living in co-operative communities as envisioned by Thomson are diminishing, his philosophy can still usefully inform modern educational practice.

CHAPTER 2

COMMUNITY AND THE WHOLE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF WATSON THOMSON'S PERSONALIST BELIEFS

The uttermost self-affirmation is not at all in opposition to the most positive affirmation of others; it is...a condition of it. Real generosity does not come out of self-abnegation; it comes much more readily from one who is capable of confident self-affirmation. It is precisely this unconditional affirmativeness either in reckless exposure of oneself or in equally unreserved criticism of the other... that ordinary, decent human people get the highest kind of courage — the courage to be searchingly truthful instead of un-challengingly “nice” (Thomson, 1966, p.99).

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide a synthesis of Thomson’s multi-faceted personalist philosophy. The most significant portions of Thomson’s life in regards to the development of his philosophy can be attributed to three major experiences. The first was his experience as a soldier during the First World War which was instrumental in the development of his strong dislike of authority and his commitment to community. This was followed by his work as Secretary of the New Britain Movement which was foundational to the development of his personalism. Finally his time as the director of the Saskatchewan Adult Education Division provided him with a unique opportunity, in terms of its scope and size, to put his pedagogic principles and political vision of economic and cultural transformation into practice.

Thomson's time as a British soldier in the First World War was, despite the rigid formality of military training and operations, a liberating experience for him. Illness early in his life and poor health in general had left Thomson feeling inferior. Thomson's acceptance into the military had allowed him the opportunity to feel adequate for the first time in his life. While the horrors of war left their mark on his psyche, the most important thing he took from the experience was a commitment to his fellow human beings, which years later would form the motivational basis for his pedagogy and transformative communitarian vision. In a semi-autobiographical book published several years before his death, Thomson writes that he and his fellow soldiers were "full of shame and disgust" at "how [they] had been made to live" and that they were "full of a black, blind hatred of that nameless power in every nation which we tended, vaguely, to call 'the system'" (Thomson, 1966, p.2). In a moment of personal reflection, he goes on to note that those early war experiences "was the genesis of one of the dominant motifs of my whole life since — a total disaffection towards the status quo, a conviction of the necessity of total and radical change" (Thomson, p.2).

Out of this early disaffection for the status quo came three major issues that he believed required change. They included capitalism for its exploitation of the working class, the nation-state system for its dependence on expansion and war, and finally, doctrinal dogmatism. These three targets, capitalism, nationalism (specifically fascist iterations), and dogmatism, would consistently bear the brunt of his philosophy and pedagogy. Moreover, Thomson did not see these entities as mutually exclusive; rather their relationship could be understood as a sort of pathogenic symbiosis.

In *Front Page*, a newspaper which was published by the AED, Thomson writes,

... [nationalism] seems to be a good thing when a people are fighting for their freedom and a bad thing when it takes on exaggerated and aggressive forms and becomes an obstacle to international cooperation...the world has grown too small for the nations of yesterday and all the most vital cultural and technological forces are compelling the emergence of some larger political unity and some larger loyalty... The way is this: To create something bigger than the nation on the basis of clear, explicit principles so just and so universal as to be good for the growth and happiness of all national groups within its orbit... (Thomson, 1945, p.2).

Thomson believed that nationalism was integral to the dogma of market competition at the core of corporate capitalism² (Thomson, 1945b, p.2). Moreover, its connection to maintaining and expanding national boundaries and identities, made it untenable. In its stead he believed that a world federation of nation-states engaged in the co-operative advancement of humankind was necessary for our survival as a species. The connection between these three ‘evils’ is further illustrated when Thomson states in a different edition of *Front Page* that “...this basic conclusion that capitalism everywhere by its very nature, divides, and cannot unify human society...It can build thrilling and magnificent skyscrapers. **But it cannot unite man in equality and partnership** [original emphasis]” (Thomson, 1945c, p.2). Thomson further states, that he has “a profound disrespect for, and suspicion of, all attitudes to life which are based on some absolute assurance...there is a salutary power in the great question marks which stand at the centre of both man (sic) and his universe” (Thomson, 1966, p.15). This evidence suggests that that he was well aware of the fallibility of great ideas and that the unknown, itself an inevitability, enriches the lives of individuals.

² The connection between capitalism and fascist nationalism is stated more explicitly in another edition of the *Front Page* when Thomson notes that ‘modern democracy’ has its foundation in capitalist thought. He warns of a tension between increasing the freedom of human beings and ever-increasing corporatism that has not yet reached a critical point in North America, but has promoted the ascension of fascist governments in the Axis states of World War Two.

Thomson's early war experiences led to a distrust of the relationship between capitalism, dogmatism, and nationalism. Historian Michael Welton infers that Thomson would become "an outspoken socialist in conviction who believed that "nothing less than a totally new social order would suffice' to prevent another World War" (Welton, 1983, p.24). I shall argue, however, that even though Socialism was an important part of Thomson's philosophy particularly pre-1946, that personalism and Adler's psychological work were considerably more important though it has been overlooked by researchers.

2.2 An overview of Thomson's Personalism

Perhaps the real distinctions which emerge here are between the dogmatists and those who believe in process as closer to reality than dogma, between those – often the same people as the dogmatists – who want to see 'final solutions' in their own time, and those who know that the nature of life is to be an eternal becoming (Thomson, 1966, p.74).

The concept of personalism can be interpreted in a variety of different ways depending on the usage and context. Thomson's own personalism, and the personalism of the New Britain movement, is based on the work of French philosopher Emmanuel Mounier. This section will explain the essence of Thomson's personalist philosophy from its origins in the New Britain movement through to the 1960s, emphasizing Thomson's understanding of the tension between the individual and society. Later sections of this chapter will add depth to the understanding of his personalism through discussion of the Adlerian influences in Thomson's philosophy focusing on the concept of 'wholeness', which is very much connected to personalism and deserves special consideration.

The French Personalist Movement was at its height during the 1930s. Headed by the relatively young philosopher Emmanuel Mounier, the movement promoted its ideas through its publication *Esprit*, which was first published in 1932 (Mounier, 1938). According to Mounier the term personalist can be applied to “any doctrine or civilization that affirms the primacy of the human person over material necessities and over the whole complex of the implements man (sic) needs for the development of his person” (p.1). The movement emphasized co-operation amongst individuals to bring about a new society that rejected both extreme individualism and collectivism. Mounier writes that personalism “stands for a convergence of wills, and it places itself at the disposal of these wills without affecting their diversity, in order to help them search more effectively into the historical situations of our day” (p.2). Mounier’s personalism requires people to work together in co-operative action to protect the social interest in opposition to the promotion of individual gains. It also demands the protection a person’s individuality from the forced assimilation of a fascist nationalism.

The French Personalist Movement was highly critical of any dogmatic adherence to individualism or nationalism. Mounier criticizes capitalistic individualism for its dehumanization of the person which he refers to as a ‘Bourgeois Humanism’ wherein a person “exists only as an owner; the bourgeois defines himself above all as a proprietor. But actually he himself is possessed by his goods. He has substituted *property* for *possession* [original emphasis]” (Mounier, p.18). Furthermore, that bourgeois humanism “is based essentially on the separation of spirit from matter and of thought from action” (p.19) and that by “reducing man to an abstract individuality without vocation, without responsibility, without resistance, bourgeois individualism became the responsible harbinger of the reign of gold, that is, of the anonymous society that is impersonal in its exercise of power” (p.26). Decrying speculative profiteering, the

personalists believed that financial reform was required as a means of changing society.

Reflecting on the New Britain Movement, Thomson emphasizes that one of the goals of the movement during the 1930s was monetary reform (Thomson, 1966).

At the same time the French movement was critiquing individualism, they did not spare fascist nationalism. Mounier writes that fascist societies “propose alike to subject free persons and their individual destinies to a centralized temporal power, and having absorbed all the public and external activities of the nation, to exercise spiritual domination also over the innermost hearts of their subjects” (Mounier, p.28). As individualism separates a person’s spirit from the physical world, fascism seeks to control the individual’s spirit by dogmatic adherence to the nation. In doing so, fascism expunged individual and human rights and became the instrument for a totalizing form of oppression, which “compromised the inalienable rights of the human person, [and] ... in its restoration of the social community ... also set up a system of oppression” (p.35). In contrast, the personalist movement aimed to balance the individual with the collective in its program for major societal change. Mounier states that,

[t]he ultimate work of the revolution is not merely to arouse in the oppressed a consciousness of their oppression thus inspiring them exclusively to hatred and revenge, for this only results in estranging them still more from themselves. Its real work is to educate man to a sense of his personal responsibility and to a desire for improvement, without which the entire social apparatus would only be a good tool in the hands of a bad workman, and likewise to educate from now on to free and responsible action instead of dissolving his human energies in a collective consciousness and an expectation that material comforts can affect a miracle of happiness (Mounier, pp. 61-2).

In his 1983 dissertation on the life of Thomson, Welton describes the personalist movement as belonging to,

...everyone who believed in man (sic) as a personal and communal being mortally endangered by his own political, social, economic and ideological creations...

[anyone who] in the name of man's worth sought simultaneously to save man from isolation and tyranny, and from the furies of individualism and collectivism, could consider himself of personalist (Welton, p.69).

Welton's description of the personalist movement identifies key components of Thomson beliefs, particularly his critique of capitalism, nationalism, and dogmatism identified in the previous section. This becomes apparent when Welton describes the mortal danger of humanity's "political, social, economic and ideological creations" (Welton, p.69).

According to Welton, a personalist saw 'man' as both a "personal and a communal being" and "sought simultaneously to save man from isolation and tyranny" as well as "the furies of individualism and collectivism" (p.69). Here Welton indirectly describes the concept of 'wholeness' as a component of Thomson's beliefs through an emphasis on both the collective and individual person. The concept of wholeness refers to the rhythmic movement from individuality to collectivity through a well-thought out synthesis rather than an either/or mentality³. Thomson's understanding of the concept of wholeness began during the 1930s under the tutelage of Dimitrije Mitrinovich.

³ Thomson writes more specifically about extremes of individualism and collectivism, specifically in reference to the co-personal living communities that he experimented with throughout his life. These communities not only intended to help meet the needs of an individual through shared shelter, food, etc., but connected individuals in an intimate fashion via candid and truthful dialogue. Within the co-personal living communities individuals completed chores throughout the house which included cleaning and childcare and working day-jobs. Their evenings were spent in intense discussion of religion, philosophy, and current events. In his later reflections, he notes that individualism is "is right insofar as it means the autonomy of free and responsible persons – but it can never be an absolute" and that collectivism is "right insofar as it means that the individual rises out of a society and has corresponding obligations to that society – but it too, can never be an absolute" (Thomson, 1966, p.20). The general tone of his writings suggest he viewed the co-personal living communities as meeting the social needs of individuals enhancing the individual but did not believe that the individual needed to deny their personal autonomy or self-determination (p.20). However, on one occasion when defining freedom, he writes that "...the ultimate desire of men and women is not just for freedom; it is for *freedom together with its apparent opposite – commitment, involvement, a giving of oneself away to the collective in service and devotion*" [emphasis added] (p.13). Here he is not suggesting that a person become subservient to their community, rather he is simply using rhetoric to note that preserving individualism requires a balance between personal freedom and group

In a curiously vulnerable and revealing letter written by Thomson in the mid-1960s to the famous singer/songwriter Joan Baez, whom he did not know personally, he refers to his role in the New Britain group as the “national secretary of a movement (not a party but a movement) intent on radical, total, social change and based on groups within which mutual involvement of individuals with each other was also total” (Thomson, 1966b). Thomson saw New Britain as a vehicle for change, one that was focused on the principles of individual interaction where members of developed strong interpersonal ties. Writing about the movement around the same time as the letter to Joan Baez, Thomson identifies four specific objectives/focuses of the group:

1. “...it was a continuous exercise in the ever-deepening socialization of our personalities, as nearly total as we could make it.”
2. “...a training in universalization, chiefly by learning the central religious and philosophical teachings of each of the major cultures... We spent a great deal of time on Vedanta, Buddhism, Taoism, Rosicrucianism and Gnosticism.”
3. “...we studied all the relevant political creeds of the day, specializing in guild socialism and monetary reform, but taking a long, hard look at Marxism.
4. “...we were trained for what was to have been our own function, as initiators of a new kind of revolution – non-violent but radical” (Thomson, 1966, p.11).

Once again the movement itself was not meant as a political party nor was it some sort of disconnected think tank. Rather it was a movement that was committed to concrete action

responsibility. The distinction between Thomson’s balancing of individual and collective rights is clarified through an examination of the Libertarian paradox that when the individual has total freedom, he or she actually has no freedom. Writer Jan Narveson claims that “[p]rotecting everyone’s liberty... means limiting everyone’s liberty.” she goes on to clarify that “in Hobbes’s claim that in the ‘condition of mere Nature’ ‘every man has the Right to everything; even to one another’s body’ ...is equivalent to the claim there are in such a condition no rights at all” (Narveson, 2001, p.50).

through political change, co-personal living through open dialogue and inter-personal socialization. The group educated themselves through exposure to a variety of different cultural belief systems. The action component of the group took place through discussion groups and periodicals intended to spread their beliefs. In their attempt to create a communitarian Britain, the group strongly emphasized discussion of the individual/collective dichotomy and avoided an either/or position. In its place, and perhaps influenced by their studies of Eastern philosophies as well as the Adlerian roots of the movement — founding members also active in an Adlerian organization — the group settled on a relatively complex conceptualization of the individual within the collective from a ‘wholeness’ perspective.

Welton mentions that what attracted Thomson to the movement was “Mitrinovic’s passionate attempt to comprehend the world as a unified whole which resonated with Thomson’s spiritual need, deepened by war experience, for community and brotherhood” (Welton, p.60). Welton goes on to write, “[Thomson’s] preoccupation with the concept of wholeness... and conviction passionately avowed that the nucleus of a new society could be built on the “primacy of persons” are anchored in the New Britain movement” (p.81). Reinforced here is the connection between Thomson’s need for community, brought on by war experiences, and his aversion to dogmatism and the either/or mentality of the partisan politics of the time. In his later work, Thomson defines ‘wholeness’ as the synthesis of,

two qualities ... First of all, we shall imply a state of ‘peaceful co-existence’ between conscious and unconscious aspects of mind in which the sub-rational forces of the unconscious are kept under some, but not too much, control – not too much because these forces are also well-springs of creativity, the source of what we call spontaneity. The second aspect of ‘wholeness’ that we have in mind, which can also be thought of as a criterion, is the range of one’s capacity to accept and include all kinds and conditions of fellow humans... The two aspects of ‘wholeness’ then, are related in this way – that the range of one’s capacity to accept is determined by the

degree to which one has accepted oneself, including the unconscious aspects of one's own being (Thomson, 1966, p.34).

The 'wholeness' to which Thomson refers is rooted in Adlerian psychological concepts which influenced his thought. Emotion or the "sub-rational forces" are understood and are to be controlled to the point that they do not hinder the creative capacity of the human being. This is an important consideration in regards to Thomson's belief in the need for honest and open dialogue among people. Limiting or ignoring emotion would hinder creative problem solving and work counter to the essence of education. The other key component in his understanding of wholeness is the ability for the individual to be hospitable to the beliefs of the other.

Finally, in terms of his discussion of wholeness, Thomson states that "[t]o separate body and mind...leads to as many blind alleys as the separation of the political and psychological, the international from the personal, the extensive from the intensive, the outer from the inner" (Thomson, p.33). His concern with the dangers of thinking in terms of dichotomies is central to his thought, particularly with regard to genuine acceptance of others⁴. He goes on to claim that there is a:

propensity here which we can ill afford and must somehow find the way to avoid [to dichotomize the world]. What is less clearly seen is that it cannot be avoided by repression (pretending that you don't dislike what you strongly do dislike), but only by transcending the polarity. That demands the ability to see with some human understanding what is on both sides of every wall or fence erected by human narrowness and prejudice...But this ability to transcend dichotomies is a

⁴ Thomson, writing in another context, mentions a slightly different perspective on wholeness. He writes that community is "the first principle of Wholeness" and that "[t]here is a sense in which the closeness, warmth, and concern of 'community' is the best therapy for our situation of alienation" (Thomson, 1966a, p.141). On most occasions he writes of finding rhythmic perceptions of opposing concepts. In the above passage, he is writing about the whole individual, meaning that a person requires partnership and friendship to be content. A claim that is consistent with Adlerian psychology (Grey, p.37).

criterion of wholeness because it depends basically on the extent to which we have wholly accepted the life which is in ourselves (Thomson, 1966, pp.35-6).

Thomson maintains that a true acceptance of the other must occur in order to develop the type of intensely co-personal community that his transformative philosophy envisions. He goes on to emphasize that a superficial acceptance, such as in the Christian concept of tolerance, wherein a person does not understand and perhaps dislikes the beliefs or customs of the other but simply ignores those emotions (not properly balancing the sub-rational forces discussed earlier) undermines possible intimate interpersonal connections among people. Finally, Thomson once again mentions the prerequisite that we must first understand and accept ourselves before we can accept others. His understanding of self-acceptance is rooted in Adlerian psychology and will be explored further in the next section.

The means by which a personalist will face some of the difficulties of genuinely accepting the other in order to understand the ‘whole’ includes the following:

...with many other polarities – commitment/detachment, subjective/objective, for instance – the appropriate pattern of reconciliation is not any ‘splitting the difference’ but a rhythmic alternation between the opposites, each of which is realized to its fullest and then yields place to other as the situation changes. With still other polarities...the creative reconciliation comes about by *containing the opposites*, appreciating both of them to the fullest, until out of this tension of continence a third is born, not a compromise but a new thing – above and between (Thomson, 1966, p.42).

Here Thomson deepens his account of personalism. The rejection of the Other is damaging to both the possibility of developing intimate relationships by severing similarities and precluding further possibilities for growth and personal insight. Furthermore, Thomson’s rejection of dogmatic adherence to the virtue of a single concept over another is repeated. The ‘rhythmic alternation’ between opposites is fundamental to his educational philosophy. It calls for

intensely open dialogue resulting in growth, or education, which is created by transcending any simplistic binary understanding.

Finally, a person's ability to understand the concept of 'wholeness' can be determined as follows:

When we say that the chief test of wholeness is the person's capacity to hold in himself the tension of all great opposites, we are in effect saying he is never at the mercy of his own reactions, he is never compelled, by forces within himself, to take sides. So he is *in* a certain class but not entirely *of* it; *in* a certain religious tradition but not entirely *of* it. The whole person, in short, is one who cannot quite be contained by any of the barriers which divide us from the rest of human kind. Something in him — Intelligence? Empathy? Loving concern? — enables him to live not on the fence but on both sides of every fence" (Thomson, 1966, p.44).

Thomson believes that a person's ability to be self-affirmative is based on their ability to transcend, or rather not be limited by, the belief system in which they have been reared. In other words, they are able to identify and accept another's practices and belief systems, without accepting them wholly as a part of their own beliefs but identifying the connection between oneself and the other. Thomson, did have concerns about relativism, writing in a newsletter written to his co-workers in the AED that,

the relativist position has its dangers too. One can become excessively tolerant. Many of the social and political opinions held by large numbers of many people in western Canada, no matter how excusable they may be in relation to their cultural background from which they come, are nevertheless dangerously ignorant and anti-social (Adult Education Division [AED], 1945, pp.5-6).

In summary, Thomson's personalist philosophy developed through his early experiences during the New Britain years. It requires a person to overcome their cherished beliefs and any either/or understanding of the world. Furthermore, the concept of 'wholeness' is fundamental to Thomson's personalism as it guides his considerations in solving social problems and issues.

Diversity of thought is important, taking into account a variety of cultural beliefs but a completely relativistic stance is unacceptable.

2.3 The Adlerian Foundations of Thomson's Philosophy

Much discussion thus far, particularly in the introductory chapter, has focused on the political aspects of Thomson's approach to adult education. While Thomson's political actions are often considered the most significant part of his career, they are based on his philosophical pedagogy. In other words, his politics, were imperfect means to his vision of a communitarian utopia — and therefore secondary to his personalism. The first public lecture that Thomson attended in London prior to his experience with the New Britain movement was a discussion sponsored by the Adlerian society and the New England group — the early name of the New Britain group (Welton, 1983, p.53). Thomson found this first lecture stimulating. He specifically enjoyed the open discussion which occurred afterward (Thomson, 1966, p.6). Given that his personalist philosophy was the root of his politics and given that the core concept of his beliefs was the concept of 'wholeness', this section will show that Adler's insights into 'wholeness' significantly shaped the core concepts of Thomson's beliefs.

Alfred Adler was born in Vienna, in February 1870. Growing up, Adler himself was not an exceptional student. He also struggled early on with a sense of inferiority due to illness as a child — a history that he shared with Thomson. Author Loren Grey claims that Adler's life "was a vindication of one of his earliest concepts — intellectual compensation over physical inferiorities" (Grey, 1998, p.1). After graduating from the University of Vienna with a degree in medicine, Adler went on to practice as a family physician. For a time, he worked and studied in

Freud's inner circle. Believing that a person's actions are the full responsibility of the individual (Grey, p.4) and that the libido has a diminished role, he split from Freud in 1911.

From his earlier professional years onward, Adler developed his ideas of social equality and relationships "not in the formal dreary walls of college, but in the endless evenings of lively discussion with his friends and colleagues about problems of the day" (Grey, p.2). After breaking with Freud, Adler went on to form his School of Individual Psychology. Interestingly, and relevant to the connection to Thomson's beliefs, in the case of Adler's school, the term individual is a misnomer as it does not refer to a psychology based on the individual person. Rather, the Latin root *Individuum* means "undivided" and his psychology is properly known as "the psychology of the undivided whole" (Grey, p.6). Early in his movement, Adler believed that the driving force behind a person's actions was what he called the 'will to power,' 'striving to power,' or more commonly 'striving for superiority'⁵ which was rooted in a person's desire to overcome their inferiorities through superiority over others (Grey, p.18). However, Adler served for a time in the Austrian army during the First World War, and much like Thomson and many others, returned with a new hypothesis that stunned his former followers. Rather than a will to

⁵ One of Adler's main contributions to psychological thought was the inferiority feeling, which was often called the inferiority complex. Adler was known to say that "I am...the legitimate father of the inferiority complex" (Adler in Bottome, P.147). Adler believed that "every human being's main instinct is the advance from a minus, or inferiority, feeling toward a plus, or superiority, feeling" (p.148). According to Grey, in his early years, he referred to the overcompensation of normal feelings of inferiority to seek superiority of over others as the 'will to power.' However, because of the common misconception that men were superior to women, he later referred to the will to power as 'masculine protest' which meant that in order to overcome feelings of inferiority people sought fictional male ideals such as strength, intelligence, logic, and power (p.18). Grey does not make any connection between Nietzsche's will to power and Adler, although at one point she refers to Adler using the term 'will to power' prior to masculine protest (p.18) and at another refers to 'striving for power' occurring after the term masculine protest (p.5). Books by Allan Savage and Sheldon Nicholl (2003, p.16) and Harold Mosak and Michael Maniaci (1999, p.21) refer to the concept as the "striving for superiority."

power, Adler theorized that a person's primary motivation for choosing behaviour was the "social interest" which he called *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* (Grey, pp.3-4, 8, 19, Orgler, 1963, p.85, Bottome, 1939, p.72). Adler suggested that the "social interest" which was the "correct goal" for human behaviour and interaction could only be "co-operative" (Grey, p.19). In her biography on Adler, Hertha Orgler writes that "[n]o one can detach himself from the community nor from the obligations of community...[c]o-operation was required from men and women" (Orgler, p.79). Mental instability was caused by motivation from incorrect goals which work against social interest. Adler maintains that "[it] seems to be a trait of human nature that when individuals feel weak...they cease to be interested socially, but strive for (personal) superiority" (Adler in Grey, p.16). An example is the capitalist system and its competitive nature, which requires one to assert superiority over another as the manifestation of an unresolved inferiority complex. This example is consistent with Adler's beliefs as he himself is known to have had socialist beliefs (Grey, pp.1-2) Adler believed that personal goals, both correct and incorrect, were learned objectives and in his opinion, could be both learned and unlearned (Grey, p.23). Furthermore, he believed that "true equality could only be achieved by understanding one's mistaken social perceptions and correcting them" which became the basis for his the open and public dialogue that was a major part of his psychoanalytical therapy (Grey, p.55).

For the purposes of understanding his influence on Thomson, the following list of Adler's concepts will be examined as a means of illustrating the connection between the two.

1. Adler believed that people, regardless of culture or geography are more similar than they are dissimilar.

2. Co-operation is a biological necessity. Despite technology allowing people to live less interdependently than in previous epochs, human beings are still completely dependent on others. Adler referred to this as the “iron law of co-living”.
3. Behaviour is based on a person’s perception of reality and not necessarily reality itself. For example a person who believes themselves to ‘inferior’ another based on an arbitrary trait is likely to be driven to strive for superiority over that person or others.
4. The need to belong is a part of human nature, since humans need affection.
5. All human beings are equal. Despite physiological differences, we have the same capacity for contributing to the social interest.
6. Human beings can act in the social interest.
7. “Consciousness and unconsciousness are merely levels of awareness” both of which are integral to our daily living. Unconsciousness generally operates outside of our awareness unless some outside force prompts us to be aware of it.
8. The goal of education is to cure our inappropriate behaviour and dialogue can help a person understand their mistaken goals (Grey, pp.9-10).

The role of wholeness in Adler’s influence on Thomson can be identified as follows. The belief in the equality of people implies more than physiological equality, namely the ability to contribute equally to society. The fusion or synthesis of a variety of beliefs, including apparently opposing beliefs, are consistent with Adler’s belief in the primacy of love as a human motivation. The dogmatic rejection of a belief is essentially an act of superiority — “my ideas are the truth, yours are not” — and is consistent with a ‘striving for superiority’⁶. If education is

⁶ Striving for superiority, or will to power, is a dysfunctional reaction to the feelings of inferiority which Adler saw as natural. Rather than coming to terms with one’s feelings of inferiority, when one seeks to dominate others for personal fulfillment (Savage & Nicholl, p.16). An appropriate reaction would be recognition of the inter-dependent

to be therapeutic, or in the social interest, it requires a synthesis of concepts consistent with Thomson's personalist conception of 'wholeness' meaning that it promotes a balance of individual and collective responsibility and does not subscribe to 'final solutions'. Thomson supported this value in both his written work as well as his practice as an educator. Once again relativism is discounted as it would support values consistent with maintaining the kind of superiority lauded by capitalism and nationalism with which Adler wholeheartedly disagreed.

Adler also believed that the primary human motivator was love as manifested through the "social interest" and connected to co-operation as an essential element in human survival. He saw the need to belong, the equality of people, and the necessity of education as corollaries in this same value system. Thomson's pedagogical beliefs, as discussed in chapter one, centre on a civic consciousness that enabled citizens to act co-operatively to overcome the selfishness and individualism in capitalist society. There is a correlation between his belief in a civic consciousness and Adler's social interest. Thomson believed that through open dialogue, adult education allows citizens to overcome the misplaced need for man to be superior over others. On this note, and in unison with Adler, Thomson states that,

Power as a goal in life is, and always was, nothing but a miserable second-best, a substitute for some achieving of the deepest human desire, which is for personal and collective fulfillment and consequent happiness. Power is the natural goal for the frustrated, the immature and the unimaginative. A second principle...is that the power goal can be genuinely transcended only by redirection into the channel of function and service, and functional superiority is acceptable to the receiver only

and co-operative nature of human beings and seeking help from and supporting community members. A comparison can be made to the concepts of a 'power drive' and a 'power motive.' In his book The Structure of Freedom, Christian Bay explains that a power drive "...results from the thwarting of the expansive biological striving and the feeling of the lack of ability" (1965, p.298). In other words, a person who is not able to exert their individuality in a personally satisfying way will seek to dominate others (Mullahy in Bay, p.298). A 'power motive' is the desire to use "one's abilities" while "expressing one's individuality" but it does not seek to dominate others (p.298). Bay also mentions that "we owe much to Alfred Adler for these insights" (p.298).

when there is an acknowledgement, mutually, of fundamental human equality....Equality in essence, hierarchy in function (Thomson, 1966, p.119).

Thomson's attempts to develop intentional communities where roles are specifically identified are consistent with and show an understanding of Adler's "iron law of co-living."

Throughout this section, the work of Alfred Adler has been described in some detail, including its influences on the theory and practice of Thomson, specifically the concept of 'wholeness' as well as the importance of open dialogue and co-operative living in the social interest.

2.4 Conceptualizations of Community

Based on his emphasis on the 'social interest', or 'civic consciousness' in his educational framework, Thomson defined community as "intimacy, fullness of mutual concern, mutual communication and mutual commitment" (Thomson, 1966, p.135). Consistent with the importance of avoiding the dichotomization between the individual versus the collective, he maintained that "the ultimate desire of men and women is not just for freedom; it is for *freedom together with its apparent opposite* — commitment, involvement, a giving of oneself away to the collective in service and devotion" (Thomson, p.13). The synthesis of personal freedom with social commitment is another example of the influence of Adler on Thomson, especially Adler's concept of the social interest. From an Adlerian perspective, Thomson is remained consistent with the 'iron law of co-living'. For Thomson, true community, involving social interest, was the apotheosis of freedom.

Having lived through the turbulence of the First World War and the decadence of the 1920s, and having witnessed the cruelty and oppression of African colonization, the Great

Depression of the 1930s, and the Second World War, Thomson believed that the co-personal community required to live a meaningful existence “...had been robbed of almost all of its primal meaning. Nothing of its nourishing substance is left to us” (Thomson, p.129).

Nevertheless, he felt that the type of community required could be salvaged.

...we have one immense potentiality, hardly known to our forefathers, out of which a new universal kind of community may be built: the capacity for deep understanding, and, if we will, of deep communication... There is no community at all unless it at some point and in some degree intentional (Thomson, 1966, p.129).

Thomson states that his vision of community goes far beyond simply living in proximity or sharing similar likes and dislikes. It requires a level of inter-personal commitment that is defined through open and extremely candid dialogue.

Thomson believed that the quality of one's life was dependent upon their ability to “establish a new kind of relationship with our fellows in which we really do put “all of our cards on the table” as opposed to wearing “for all public occasions the expedient mask and keep our genuine subjective life locked up inside” (Thomson, p.133). Once again Thomson shows the influence of Adler's open forums. Furthermore, Thomson states that,

If [people] learn the art of full communication, they will in fact lose the sense of isolation and feel currents of fresh life around them. Yet in the end they will, if they are honest, admit that they still have within them a small centre which is still locked up. Exposure is never total. But this is no reason to despair. One learns not only that there is a legitimate core of privacy in oneself, but that it is possible, and infinitely desirable, to act usually in terms of the self which has been divulged, not in terms of that inner core which is still too mysterious to be shared... Accepting such a constitution of ourselves we become more capable of welcoming the unpredicted movements of individual spontaneity – the creative element of life. We don't know it all. We don't even know it all about ourselves. Confronting that humbling fact fairly we can only say: “Thank whatever gods there be that life is still larger than we can yet comprehend (Thomson, p.134).

Thomson acknowledged that the practical limitations of open dialogue meant that one may have a limited understanding of his or her inner psychological workings and therefore unable to ‘fully’ communicate with the Other. However, he sees that as a natural phenomenon of the process and one to embrace to continue to fuller dialogue. Once again, there is a synthesis between apparent opposites in the sense that we cannot accept the other without accepting ourselves, and yet we cannot know ourselves without knowing the other. Rather than becoming frustrated by these apparent paradoxes, Thomson saw the mystery and difficulty as an humbling experience. Otherwise, if one could know all, the essentialism and dogmatism become possible ends.

In addition to some of the more abstract difficulties of open communication, a lifetime of attempting to create these intentional and deep communities revealed other practical lessons to Thomson. In his final work, Turning into Tomorrow, Thomson writes that in order to for a community to gain enough momentum to effect significant change, it must begin as an exclusive group. This involved eliminating early members that are “neurotic” or “fanatical” as a means of developing a trusting environment, or accumulating "a reservoir of mutual acceptance and sense of belonging” (Thomson, 1966, pp.138-141). Once a core group has been established then “niceties” were to be left behind and “uncomfortability” in the dialogical process related to candid dialogue can create “...a genuineness associated with truthfulness as a measure of love” (Thomson, p.141).

In summary, community for Thomson went far beyond traditional undefined inter-dependence and involved an intimate realm of self-discovery and group acceptance. While dialogue is the fundamental component to achieving this kind of community, he believed in the pragmatics of co-operative living in the sense of a shared responsibility and property. While co-

operative living was a good start, genuine openness with the others would be required to achieve the type of transformational vision for which he aimed.

2.5 Thomson's Educational Theory and Practice

Thomson was primarily an adult educator. He received a Master's Degree in English literature, then obtained teaching certification, and worked as an adult educator and colonial superintendent in Nigeria. He was an educator of children and adolescents in London, and then a labour and world issues educator in Canada. He was a proponent of several significant educational ideas. First, he supported the education of the 'common man' and fiercely believed that every person should have a technical education, a cultural education, and an education in the politics of their nation and their world as a means of creating a socially active citizenry. Second, he did not believe in a 'neutral' education and while he was certainly willing to teach what people wanted to learn, he felt that education was and could be nothing but political. Finally, he believed in the necessity of inter-disciplinary education.

In his attempt to bring politicized education to the masses, Thomson believed that, Progress is dammed up by those who presently hold places of special power or privilege, since they know that if these flood-gates were opened their beloved prejudices as well as their cherished prerogatives would be swept away in a great tide of creative energy from the "common man" (Thomson, 1944, p.11).

His disdain for traditional authorities and his belief in uniting the working class led Thomson to look to the masses as the wave of political and economic change. Despite his vision of complete and total change, Thomson saw the practical importance of an educated public in order to bring about such a transformation. He writes that the "[d]emands of any national policy requires an aware public, Because [sic] of modern means of information, people can't become unified

around a common purpose” and that “...no nation can afford to have a public which is not socially conscious, so public education becomes essential” (Thomson, 1945d, p.2). In other words, Thomson saw education as both the means to make the current system more equitable and to overturn it. In both cases, the education of the masses would lead to a more equitable society – how much more depended on the ability of the ‘common man’ to engage in open dialogue.

He put this belief into practice throughout his experiences with the extension departments at the University of Calgary and the University of Manitoba as well with the Saskatchewan Adult Education Division. In an internal memo to AED district supervisors, Thomson writes that,

The success of [Adult Education] depends on the degree of (responsible participation) which is encouraged. It is so easy to do this thing from the top down – as opposed to – having faith in the people. We will provide vitality and obtain achievement if we believe in the Common man and believe in his ability to be an active responsible citizen (Thomson, 1945d, p.2).

In considering Thomson’s pedagogical similarity to Freire taken up in the previous chapter, the two share a strong belief in the ability of the learner to act in their own best interest. However, while Freire believed in the necessity of the learner to name the problem, Thomson believed that the development of community, as defined earlier, was the overall goal of his educational framework system. He was primarily concerned with providing individuals with the ability to live co-operatively and engage in the intense dialogue that is a part of the inter-personal community he desired to create. This lofty goal was always the ultimate end for Thomson’s pedagogy. Welton describes this end as follows, “[the populace] had to undergo a conversion to community, breaking with egoistic individualism. Through dialogue conflicting interest groups had to break through internal divisions of class, race, and sect to find the “truly human” ground of commonality” (Welton, 1987, p.151).

Throughout the 1940s and during the height of the positivist movement, many of Thomson's detractors publicly accused him of being a propagandist on the basis of his explicit assertions that education could not, and should not, be neutral. In an attempt to project Thomson as a Goebbels like character, a Financial Post columnist quotes Thomson as saying,

"Your beautiful neutrality in education" ... "is like non-intervention in Spain. It falls down and leaves the individual completely exposed to exploitation of reactionary forces. There are certain things happening in this very city about which no man is entitled to be neutral. Our job is the liberation of the common man not to leave him unorganized or playing a passive role" (Smith, 1945, p.1).

Thomson recognized that if education was neutral, fascist or authoritarian forces could use it to de-politicize and gain the support of the citizenry. Because of his aversion to authority and dogma, education was to be political as a means of promoting the equitable society. He echoes this sentiment in the training manual for AED supervisors,

Facts are neutral but education is not. How are you going to use these facts and in whose service? ...we must help one side or the other of the world crisis. What are the two sides of our basic struggle...it is simply a conflict between FASCISM on the one hand and THE PEOPLE on the other" (Thomson, 1945d, p.4).

Finally, Thomson believed that the future of education, both within the stone walls of a traditional university and the less formal education taking place in coffee shops and living rooms across the world was headed towards a multi-disciplinary approach. In regards to the university and its future he maintains that "[t]he modern university, in fact, is not properly so-called; it is rather a multiversity, a place of many 'disciplines', each speaking a language of its own and none attempting to make common human sense of the whole" (Thomson, 1966, pp.73-4). In part, Thomson's inter-disciplinary approach to education is consistent with his belief in the necessity of an activated citizenry. To engage in a meaningful understanding of politics, economics, and world events, citizens should understand the vocabulary, history and general concepts of a

variety of disciplines. For example, to understand the causes of an international conflict, they should understand the history of the region, the politics, the cultural considerations in problem solving, and a variety of possible resolutions and the impacts of those resolutions. Thomson believed that teaching a citizen politics alone would do little to help him or her make a socially responsible decision. On this note, he writes "...when people know so little of the realities of their contemporary history, when their reactions and preoccupations are so irrelevant to the real issues, they cannot be other than the victims of history" (Thomson, 1945d, p.2).

Thomson's adherence to a specific educational methodology was less important than the aims and results of the educational experience itself. On the one hand, he used any vehicle to deliver the required message. This included film, radio, written publications, and so on. On the other hand, what was always required was some form of dialogue, either in a larger group after, say the delivery of a keynote address at a conference, or in a small group which took place in a rented room in a school. Welton maintains that the "small study group remained the indispensable context for learning to transform self and society through dialogue and action" (Welton, 1987, p.152). During a particularly large conference in Landis, Saskatchewan, Thomson encouraged the audience to "speak freely," and that "[o]ne of the difficulties of our democracy is that people do not speak their minds... [t]his is a mistake" and that they should "[s]peak [their] criticisms and doubts now, while [they] are attending [the] conference" (AED, 1945c, p.5). Without fear of disagreement, he consistently strove to create the opportunity for people to speak openly about their beliefs and concerns.

Generally, Thomson believed in the need for the education of the 'common man' to be non-neutral and to allow the citizenry to overturn the economic and political systems of the day. He also critiqued the traditional closed disciplines of both universities and the professions, and

suggested that a comprehensive understanding of significant problems and their resolution could only be achieved through collaborative problem-solving and a multi-disciplinary analysis. Finally, despite the variety of educational methodologies employed by Thomson, interactive dialogue was always a major component of his practice.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a discussion of Watson Thomson's personalist philosophy. Beginning with a discussion of his anti-authoritarian tendencies developed during his experiences of the First World War to his account of the concept of 'wholeness' within his personalist philosophy. The often over-looked influence of Alfred Adler has been discussed, highlighting the influences of Adler on Thomson's belief in the necessity of co-living and community, the concept of the 'whole', and the 'social interest'. Thomson's conceptualization of community was discussed in greater detail, highlighting the various levels of community, including traditional co-operative communities as well as the deep communities involving honest and intimate dialogue. Thomson's educational thought was discussed in terms of the impossibility of education to be politically neutral, its foundation in dialogue, its goal of concrete action, and its multi-disciplinary nature.

CHAPTER 3

THE SASKATCHEWAN ADULT EDUCATION DIVISION

Education is not as large as life... it is not an action group or an organization. It may and should develop many projects for itself but accepts none a priori, from outside itself. It may organize itself in an ad hoc way... But its primary concern is with being rather than doing and it will always cherish the fluidity and spontaneity of the living being: organism rather than organization” (Thomson, 1966, p.135).

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a discussion of the period between 1944 and 1945 in which Watson Thomson served as the director of the Saskatchewan Adult Education Division (AED). By discussing the events that began with Thomson’s appointment as director by Tommy Douglas through to the time of his forced resignation just over a year later, I show that his personalist philosophy was translated in to an effective adult education program. I begin by discussing the events leading up to Thomson accepting the position of director followed by a detailed description of the AED proposed work program. This section is crucial to demonstrate the connection between Thomson’s educational thought and practice. After a description of the educational format used by the division, I provide a discussion of their early successes. This will be followed by a discussion of the controversial events that led to the end of Thomson’s role as

leader of the AED which show that the alleged failure of the division was not a result of any educational practice but of rather the polarised politics of 1940s.

3.2 Thomson and the Saskatchewan Adult Education Division

3.2.1 Coming to Saskatchewan: Accepting Douglas's invitation

While leaving the once influential New Britain movement in the late 1930s for the unknown possibilities of Canada, Thomson returned almost immediately to his familiar roots of working in adult education. From 1937 until 1941, he worked for the University of Alberta Extension Department while also working on various labour education initiatives, including creating chapters of the Workers Education Association (WEA) (Welton, 1983, p.66). After 1941, Thomson took an appointment with the University of Manitoba. While working in Winnipeg, Thomson, a group of friends and fellow professionals, including his wife Mary and friends from Edmonton, formed the Roslyn Road group.

For Thomson, Roslyn Road was in many ways a chance to relive the excitement and camaraderie he experienced during his years with Mitrinovic. It was his chance to direct the discussion and play the role of leader. At one point, Thomson had wondered if he too had become a 'little' version of Mitrinovic (Welton, 1983 & Thomson, 1966). Much like the New Britain group, the members of Roslyn Road lived and studied together, taking in guests who passed through Winnipeg and were like-minded. They stayed up into all hours of the night discussing world events, philosophy, religion, and the means to affecting wide-scale social change. One result of the late night discussion was the development of the Prairie School for Social Advance (PSSA) which was the means by which the Roslyn Road would connect with the

world outside of their intimate community (Prairie School for Social Advance, 1944, p.2).

Reflecting on the origins of the PSSA, Thomson states,

Prairie School was formed out of the realization that the present crisis needs a new kind of education, education about the issues of central importance in the solving of our economic and political problems. The new education knows that the solution is in the hands of the people. The purpose of Prairie School is to help them solve their own problems and get on the march together (PSSA and the Needle Trades Council (NDT), 1944, p.3).

While Thomson and core members of the Roslyn Road group made up part of the PSSA, the school enlisted members of a variety of labour groups and associations on the advisory board. Other notable members included University of Saskatchewan professor Carlyle King and Eric Gutkind, an intimate friend of Thomson's, well known for his book Sidereal Birth and his intellectual relationship with Albert Einstein. Throughout its infancy, the PSSA conducted seminars, engaged in discussion groups, distributed educational materials consistent with their political goal of educating Canadians about the troubles of the times⁷, and achieved some success in drawing significant crowds to these events.

At the same time as the PSSA was beginning to develop momentum, the once intimate Roslyn Road group was beginning to fall apart. Thomson had taken on the informal role of head of the Roslyn Road group because of his experience and age. In later, rather vague writings he suggests that his role as a leader in the group drew the ire of many of the younger members to the extent that if any new opportunity were to arise, it would be in the best interest of the group that he should take it (Thomson, 1966, p.14, 17). The group did not suggest that Thomson must

⁷ Examples of PSSA activities include: "Not Bread Alone" a brief publication on the future of the labour movement, Labour Weekend Forum Oct. 8 & 9th 1944, "After the Peace – What?: is Collective Bargaining Enough?" forum held December 9th & 10th, 1944. Also, discussions held by the PSSA in the summer of 1944 in both Saskatoon and Winnipeg on topics such as world trade, the Bretton Woods's conference, and Prairie development (PSSA, 1945, pp . 1-2).

leave Roslyn Road, some members felt that some time apart would be in the best interest of all. That opportunity would come from the newly elected Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in the province of Saskatchewan.

On June 15th, 1944, Tommy Douglas led the provincial CCF party to a decisive victory winning forty-seven out of fifty-two seats. As part of the new government's plans for Saskatchewan, Douglas and his Minister of Education, W.S. Lloyd planned a major re-organization of the provincial school system and wanted to inaugurate a new formal adult education program. Guiding this plan was a confidential memorandum from the previous year that stated,

A CCF government must be prepared to initiate attractive and widespread programs of adult education, and to use in its programs the new educational media and techniques of radio and film. Needless to say, this job cannot be entrusted to the Extension and Adult Education departments of the universities as currently controlled and administered. It is a job for progressive educationists (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), 1944/5, p.3).

Given clear direction for the development of adult education programs by his delegates with an emphasis on utilizing the new technological methods of the day, and given Thomson's reputation as a fiercely progressive adult educator with extensive experience with university extension divisions and his close relationship with the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), he was an unrivalled choice for the job. In the late summer of 1944, Douglas met with Thomson at the Barry Hotel in Saskatoon and extended an invitation for him to develop and direct an adult education department in Saskatchewan. He would be responsible to the Minister of Education to promote co-operative development and general education to the masses. Thomson suggested that he was taken by surprise at Douglas's invitation, but because of the increasingly tense atmosphere at the Roslyn Road house, accepted the opportunity (Thomson, 1966, p.14).

3.2.2 The Saskatchewan Adult Education Division: A Program for Change

In October of 1944, Watson and his wife Mary left their intimate community and home on Roslyn road for a new life in Regina. While the climate of the group had been tense at the time of Thomson's departure, he would remain in contact with many of the members over the coming year during his direction of the AED and for many years after the dissolution of the group in 1946. The ongoing activities of the PSSA kept Thomson connected with his close friends and an informal promise for PSSA funding dollars by Douglas kept hopes high for the radical educational collective. Within weeks of arriving in Regina Thomson began assembling a brief to be presented to the Saskatchewan legislative cabinet detailing his vision for the future activities of his division. Perhaps due to the confidence and excitement Thomson felt towards his new position and its potentialities, his early impressions of the young Minister of Education and the newly elected CCF government were positive. In a letter addressed to Roslyn Road and to Eric Gutkind in New York, he writes,

I like Lloyd more and more all the time and I get a feeling from all the cabinet people I have spoken with that they expect our program to be big and significant. Several times I have felt that even though I have been thinking in pretty large terms, maybe they are not large enough to yet fill this tremendous wide open opportunity which they are prepared to offer (Thomson, 1944, p.2).

Thomson's initial excitement at the scale of his division and at the immense political and financial means provided by the government made the eventual failure all the more difficult for him. Although he was welcomed by the CCF during the first few months after his arrival, less than a year later his impression of Lloyd, Douglas, and the CCF changed dramatically.

In preparing his brief to the legislature, Thomson suggested that he needed to outline “the only possible attitude to adult education for a socialist government to take” as repudiating the liberal “neutral theory of education.” Rather, what was needed was an “invited direct coordination of adult education with general political strategy in the province” (Thomson, 1945, p.1). Consistent with his beliefs in the non-neutrality of education Thomson suggested a subjective model of education for the division and confident in the values of the CCF Thomson and aligned the division’s objectives with the politics of the social democratic government. This was a strange move considering his aversion to authority and government and it did not last long. After submitting his brief Thomson was forced to wait longer than he anticipated for a response. He believed, with good reason, that the fault for the delay lay in the timing of its presentation during the Christmas season, and that the government was busy with the many responsibilities of approving new programs. When Thomson finally received a response to his request for \$100,000 in funding, he was disappointed that the division was only allocated \$60,000 a year⁸ (Thomson, 1945f, p.3). Despite this set-back he went to work setting up the organizational structure of his division and the educational framework for its operations.

The division’s operations were separated into three separate groups with different mandates. The most significant and controversial area was “World Affairs Study,” which focused on both local and global political concerns. Due to Thomson’s knowledge of world events, his passion for political, social, and economic change, and his ability to lead groups in intense problem solving discussions, he was most involved in this area. The second area was

⁸ In his work on Thomson, Welton mistakenly states that the division received \$100,000 in funding which was later decreased to \$60,000 (Welton, 1986, p.141). In the spring of 1945 increased operating costs and early success had forced the AED to request increased funding. The government provided an additional \$20,000 to their budget for a total of \$80,000 (Thomson, 1945e).

“Citizenship Education” which provided the “elementary tools of language and expression” (AED, 1945d, p.7) and was aimed at immigrants as well as under-educated (i.e. illiterate) members of the population. The third and final area within the division was the “Lighted School” which focused on providing education on subjects where there was “spontaneous demand” (AED, 1945d, p.7). The Lighted School area was, generally speaking, non-political and was concerned with providing education on subjects such as leather-craft, astronomy, etc. In his later reflections and writings on the division both the areas of Citizenship Education and the Lighted School received almost no mention but Thomson’s lack of concern for areas outside of the World Affairs Study was more apparent than real even later in life. In a radio broadcast in December of 1944 which introduced the program to the people of Saskatchewan, he clearly expressed his own goals for the division.

...the services of our office will be at the disposal of all of you who want to learn and study everything. If you want to study medieval heraldy — o.k., we’ll try and find the material you need, even though we may feel a little sad about the direction of your interests. But those of you wishing to take initiative towards making life in your own community more in line with modern science and more cordially co-operative, we’ll certainly be behind that with everything we’ve got! (Thomson, 1944d, p.4).

Despite the mandate of the Lighted School, and less directly Citizenship Education, Thomson felt passionately that the people of Saskatchewan should become familiar with global and economic concerns. My discussion on the educational operating structure and methodology of the division will focus on this area.

3.2.3 Study-Action: The Heart of the Adult Education Division

Education for the People—All the People. Education for Action – cooperative responsible action. Education for Change – inevitable and desirable change. Power to the People (Thomson, 1944e, p.5).

The foundation of the AED's educational functions was the "Study-Action Plan" in which it described a "comprehensive adult education program... through which the 500,000 men and women...are being encouraged to become active citizens and fully-rounded personalities" (AED, 1945e, p.1). Within the first paragraph of the plan Thomson's concern with active citizenry and its connection to the Adlerian concept of "social interest" is prominent as is his concern with the hospitable and truthful "whole personalities" of the citizenry. The study-action plan suggests that the division start its transformative work by dispatching five district supervisors to various regions within the province where study-action groups could be developed. The plan suggested that the district supervisors utilize means such as film, records, pamphlets, and similar resources that would alert community members to issues that the division believed should concern them. The report defines their role as "organizers, promoters, publicists, directors, and researchers" (AED, p.1).

Once interest developed in an area of concern the supervisor would hold a 'weekend school' where the AED would invite relevant speakers to discuss the issues brought forth by the community in conjunction with AED staff. The district supervisor engaged in dialogue with community members, and with the added help of audio-visual cues intended to stimulate further discussion, a full-fledged conference with professional speakers took place. Supervisors were required to identify 'starting points' in which three or more community members were interested in a topic relevant to their own community. From this starting point a plan would develop for a

permanent study-action group (AED, p.2). The ‘starting point’ group would be encouraged to help the AED gain a better understanding for the community by distributing questionnaires that probed the area for specific political, social, and economic concerns. By identifying community concerns, the division hoped to motivate the citizens to action by facilitating discussion on developing meaningful action based on their concerns (AED, p.2).

The AED’s study action plan suggested that in order to meet the challenge of transformation envisioned by Thomson, the study-action groups should consist of a cross-section of individuals including farmers, merchants, labourers, professionals, clergy, administrators, and citizens in general (AED, p.2). In order to create long-lasting change, communities should become familiar with their own resources, finances, and personnel. Once the action group was established a physical inventory was taken. The group then made itself aware of the “fears, prejudices, inhibitions, virtues, prides, talents and the common faith that binds ...neighbours together...” (AED, p.2). Given Thomson’s concern with an uncompromisingly truthful dialogue and the role of openness in his pedagogy, the importance of identifying and accepting these fears was essential and the role of an ‘emotional inventory’ in the AED’s action plan was crucial. Without the ability for people to work together over the long-term, any realistic change envisioned by Thomson would be unlikely. When the physical and emotional climate of the community had been catalogued, they would submit an application for additional support from the AED (AED, p.3).

Once a study group was established, it enjoyed a relatively unhindered ability to direct its own actions and the AED only provided aid in areas requested by the group — usually through organizing conferences and speakers or by developing and distributing informative pamphlets. As a group grew and focused on a cause, the AED suggested that each action-group develop sub-

committees to efficiently manage community affairs. Specifically, it was suggested that the committees direct program planning, the provision of speakers, technical help, secretarial tasks, identifying instructors and other community personnel, and raising and managing a budget (AED, p.3). After a group took control of their own affairs and was fairly well organized, the AED suggested that a community council be created that helped to supplement the work of the elected municipal government and work specifically in the area of recreational activities within the region. Included in the area of 'leisure activities' are "adult education, recreation, rehabilitation, social welfare, health, co-operatives, reconstruction, agriculture, community finance, civil projects, and general public relations" (AED, p.4). In other words, while the community council would complement the municipal government, it would also assume ownership of many of the activities associated with municipal governance. Activated citizens indeed! The community council was also charged with development of a community centre which would function as both an educational and cultural centre. The creation of a community centre was to be the first priority of the council.

The Study-Action group would form the community council, represent a cross-section of the community, and seek to ameliorate community problems through surveys, discussions, and forums. It would also work towards forming new study-action groups where required. The purpose of the plan, with no direct ends mentioned other than a continual citizen engagement in community affairs, provided a framework for Thomson and his division to 'activate citizens.' While the formalized 'study-action plan' suggested no specific end, Thomson's own writings, radio addresses, and correspondence suggest that he saw co-operative development in the form of both co-operative living and the development of co-operative enterprises, as a key component of study-action.

In an early radio address to the people of Saskatchewan, Thomson maintains, ...the key to the whole modern problem, the problem of war, poverty, and fascism in a world which wants and is ripe for creative effort, plenty and comradeship – lies in our ability to rise to the demands of two things – Science and cooperative human relations (Thomson, 1944d, p.2).

Immediately identifiable in Thomson's statement is his dislike of nationalism, capitalism, and fascism, which were discussed in the previous chapter. Furthermore, the combination of technology and of co-operation is identified as the means to the transformation of Prairie society. Thomson considers co-operation and community as the means to subvert the status quo. His aversion to simple dichotomies is evident when he writes:

...capitalist enterprises are marvels of coordinated effort... [and] there is a certain sense in which it is even true to say that there is more cooperation in capitalist business than cooperatives can show, so far... the trouble, of course, that the teamwork of capitalism is based on the coercion of money and with the initiative and direction all from above and not at all from the Common Man and his decent purposes (Thomson, p.2).

Thomson believed co-operative and community enterprises should replace private capitalist corporations and factories and take on an ambitious role of restructuring the workplace through the use of democratic "bottom-up" principles and the inclusion of technology and science.

In addition to his claim that co-operatives in a new society should increase in both size and role, Thomson suggested that there must be a change in people in order to achieve this end. This requires considerable effort, because,

There is an illusion abroad... that man is naturally a cooperative and socially-minded creature. The truth is that man is naturally so, only under certain conditions – when he is at ease, unfrightened [sic] and with nothing around to stir the quite opposite passions of which he is equally capable (Thomson, 1945g, p.2).

The consistency of this statement with Thomson's personalist philosophy will be taken up in greater detail in the following chapter. However, Thomson promoted personal change through a pedagogy that helped individuals become a contributing member of their community as a component of his educational program.

In summary, Thomson's formal plan for the transformation of the populace began with a district supervisor promoting discussion of current events and their relation to the everyday life of individuals within a community. Once interest developed within the community, the supervisor helped facilitate the creation of study-action 'starting-point.' The small group, with the help of an AED supervisor as an advisor, began to discuss issues within the community and identify community related problems. If this beachhead began to grow, discussions continued to identify and provide additional knowledge within the group. Once the group was large enough, and provided that it represented a demographic cross-section of the community, it would start an inventory of financial resources and the capacities and skills of community members. In order to work successfully, the group would identify the beliefs of the individuals in an open and honest way through intimate dialogue. Once these inventories were conducted, applications for additional assistance to the AED could be made for additional help in organizing conferences and bringing in speakers and experts to help educate the citizens and to facilitate plans for concrete action. The action group then formed a community council which was to provide direction for an extensive range of governance activities usually undertaken by municipal officials. A community centre was to be developed and was meant to function as an educational, cultural, and recreational centre. Finally, the action group would communicate and work with other communities developing larger and larger networks of activated citizens. While the 'study-action plan' did not suggest any pre-defined end, Thomson continually promoted a co-operative

community, one with large enterprises that produced on the same scale as major capitalist corporations of the time. However, unlike private corporations they were to be governed from within and to operate in the public interest consistent with Guild Socialism. Thomson saw the necessity for personal change, particularly confidence in oneself to ensure positive relationships with others, which was a key component of his personalist and its Adlerian roots.

3.2.4 Adult Education Division Activities: January 1945 to August of 1945

For Thomson and his staff, the first months of 1945 were filled with many organizational tasks which consisted of developing policy for the division, hiring and placing staff, and communicating with government officials. Publications and information pamphlets were drawn up and distributed and district supervisors were dispatched to their regions. As very little is mentioned about the early activities of the Citizenship Education and Lighted School, it can be assumed that they were either still in the process of being organized or were providing basic educational services. At any rate, they were not of great concern to Thomson. Nor did he concern himself with the continued refinement of the study-action plan. The refinements themselves included the development of yet another type of school, one that would specifically train district supervisors and study group leaders. Roslyn Road's PSSA would eventually take over for the AED (AED, 1945f, p.1). Thomson believed that the division was a facilitator for co-operative development, current events education, and basic citizenship education. On the other hand, it was also an introduction to the intense communitarian and labour education that was part PSSA's agenda. Thomson lobbied for government support of the PSSA from his first meeting with Douglas through to his resignation. Although Douglas promised support and Lloyd eventually secured a \$500 of funding for the PSSA, it never materialized. The money was rescinded leaving

members of the PSSA in debt over a conference (Thomson, 1945e, p.3). Whether or not Thomson's insistence on government support for the PSSA was a contributory factor in the subsequent request for his resignation is unknown. Neither Thomson himself nor any of the research or documents indicate that this was an issue.

Throughout the spring of 1945, the division continued to promote its program, receiving both support and criticism from local communities as well as from outside the province. Towards the summer of 1945, the first opportunities for advanced development of the study-action groups began to appear. Perhaps the most significant 'beachhead' community, at least in terms of providing Thomson with the opportunity to realize his vision, was the farmers and citizens of Landis, Saskatchewan. The area had for some time already been discussing the possibility of co-operative farming in order to make the best use out of their finances through sharing equipment. At the time, Landis was home to a credit union, a co-operative department store, a co-operative oil business, and a co-operative butcher store (AED, 1945b, p.3). Thomson, his staff, and active community members planned a three day conference where the AED would organize speakers and the community members would encourage a variety of people to attend with the intention of ensuring a plurality of community perspectives. The conference took place over three days from June 29th to July 1st, 1945. In keeping with the world issues theme of the AED, speakers were brought in on the first day to discuss successes in co-operative farming in Russia and Palestine and emphasize the cultural and social significance of these practices, specifically the benefits. Thomson had an opportunity to address the audience both as a speaker on co-operative living as well as on the activities of the AED, at one point he told the audience:

What we are here for is to assist you people in making an enquiry into what co-operative farming really means, and to encourage you to consider what you, the people of Landis, can do about it. You may decide to drop it. I hope not. You may

decide to STUDY it further. Or you may decide there is important ACTION to be taken right away. Study-action is what we in the adult education division believe in (AED, 1945b, p.4).

By the end of the general sessions the conference had attracted approximately 360 individuals (p.1). After the keynote speakers, conference organizers asked the audience to break into smaller groups where local farmers and their families discussed what co-operative farming meant to them. Once the participants had an opportunity to discuss their beliefs and feelings, the smaller groups reported back to the larger group.

On the final day of the conference, only a small group of about forty-three people remained. Nevertheless, the final day was a representation of the success of the study-action program. The individuals who attended grouped together to create what would have been the first “co-operative farm with co-operative community living in Canada” (AED, 1945b, p.1). The ambitious project was to be organized in two phases. First, during the winter of 1945-46 the individuals would create a plan that would efficiently utilize their land, equipment, and labour capacity. The second phase would require the committed community members, at this point eighty-two in number, to engage in the study of an efficient grouping of their households and the means by which to assign duties for childcare, food preparation, etc. (AED, p1). Thomson considered the involvement of the community of Landis, both those who attended the first days of the conference and those who remained committed to co-operative living as “a most impressive affair and a genuine demonstration of the beginning of a people’s mobilization for constructive purposes” (Thomson, 1945c, p.1). At the mid-way point of his directorship of the AED, the Landis conference was a major success for Thomson and his division.

3.2.5 A “Sad Comedy of Errors”: The AED from August to December, 1945

Throughout the first half of Thomson’s tenure the focus was on the development of policy and the planting of seeds for change. Working in conjunction with the Saskatchewan co-operative movement, the AED was able to organize a major conference in Landis at which Thomson was able to promote his own personalist and communitarian principles to the local citizenry. The potential impacts of the division’s activities were immense, especially if the people of Landis were able to develop a successful co-operative enterprise. Excitement was certainly in the air during the first half of 1945. However during this period, problems began to arise. While Thomson had received much praise for his radio broadcasts, his compassion for returning soldiers, and his study-groups, criticism and suspicion began to accumulate, a National Post article on his direction of the AED was less than positive. The author compared Thomson’s work to the propaganda of the totalitarian regimes of Communist Russia and Fascist Germany and Italy — a stinging irony for a person who was unequivocally opposed to the dogmatic politics of those governments. The author added insult to injury when he claimed that “Mr. Thomson has never known to keep silence where he detects anywhere around him disagreement with his own views” and that “Canadians would do well to look carefully at what the Saskatchewan people have got themselves in for. The evidence strongly indicates that they are in for a mass propaganda drive of the Goebbels variety...” (author unknown, 1945, p.1). The criticism heaped upon Thomson by the national press did not penetrate deeply, but other events and suspicions about his relationship with the Labour Progressive Party (LPP) would begin to create suspicions amongst Thomson’s former supporters; specifically, suspicions about his motives among the senior members of the federal and the provincial CCF.

While the fall of 1945 represents the final tortured months of Thomson's leadership of the AED, by September of that year there was very little to indicate how events would unravel in the coming months. Thomson mentions in passing tensions between the government and himself but everything continued to go forward. By late summer/early fall of 1945 the division had amassed a group of approximately 1,500 voluntary leaders of study-action groups in about 500 different communities. In addition to these impressive numbers, approximately one hundred community projects had been initiated through the study-action program⁹ (AED, 1945d, p.6). Other areas of the Adult Education Division had become increasingly prominent. Since its inception the Lighted School had a relatively low attendance, although not much emphasis was given to this area of adult education. The first relatively unorganized season of the school had 218 students who studied such subjects as oil painting, French, child psychology (a roundabout inclusion of Adler), and clay modeling. Not included in this number were approximately ninety-two people who received certificates in First Aid from St. John's ambulance (AED, 1946, p.1). The Lighted School program was set to go into full swing in the winter of 1945-46. And while it tended to focus less on political concerns, overtures were made by the division to transform the generally politically benign activities of adult education to those that were more politically based (AED, 1945d, p.3). Moreover, significant interest had been shown in the development of community centres which were an integral component of the study-action plan. In addition to the educational and cultural community centres, much interest had been shown in the development of a wide variety of other recreational facilities (Arnason, 1946, p.1). Thomson had to be pleased with

⁹ These claims were made by the division itself in a promotional pamphlet. While there is little reason to doubt it, very little is known about many of the programs and there is a general lack of information as no specific records remain in the AED documents. One assumption is that many of the projects described here may include the development of community centres and other recreational facilities.

some of these early successes. On the other hand, he was still far away from the type of transformation which he envisioned. Considering the immense scale of his previous educational projects, where attendances numbered in the hundreds of thousands (figures that include his work with the NFB), the level of participation that actually occurred during the first part of 1945 was a disappointment. Nevertheless, both the initial policies set by the division and the formally submitted documents showed that the division itself was moving ahead at a successful pace. Programs continued to develop and community-based projects were gaining momentum and while Thomson was being vilified in the press the overall record was good.

As a means of engaging the citizenry in an increasingly intense way, the AED developed what was an original and powerful educational tool. A two-part interactive educational program combining what was called *College Radio* and *Front Page* was proposed by Ed Parker, a talented and ambitious staff member of the AED¹⁰. While the idea was original as well as bold and had the blessing of the CCF government, it would prove to be the defining factor in Thomson's departure from the AED. The idea of the program was to create a radio based discussion forum on world topics facilitated by Thomson, members of the AED, and invited guests. Listeners were invited to participate and guide the discussions. The program was recorded, details added, and distributed in *Living Newspaper*. The department described the project as follows:

...a radio school for citizen reporters and editors. Regular newspaper readers are invited to form their editorial caucus around the Radio College program, to criticize and evaluate the points of view of the editors of "Living Newspaper," and then note how closely this "Front Page" follows the policy of the radio editorial caucus, where it deviates from the viewpoint of the listening caucus (Editor, 1945, p.1).

¹⁰ In his article on Thomson, Tyldesley gives Thomson credit for creating the Living Newspaper when in fact proper credit is due to Ed Parker, the promotional director of the AED (Tyldesly, 2002).

The combination of the two programs was meant to involve listeners in a discussion of world issues while at the same time focusing on discussion that was of interest to them¹¹. The program ran for a ten week period and developed a large following that provided positive feedback which including more than 800 supportive letters¹² (Thomson, 1945e, p.4). At the same time, the initiative also drew criticism from significant individuals provoking an unexpected and unpleasant response from the government.

In a statement that could almost be seen as prophetic of W.S. Lloyd's developing feelings towards Thomson and the activities of his division, he writes:

We are living in an age of high pressure salesmanship of ideas as well as of things. This high pressure salesmanship has developed to the point that it is a potential threat to consumers' judgment. This is true whether one is buying soap or reading an editorial. Safety and sanity lie not in curtailing the salesmanship (unless it is dishonest) but in developing a critical, analytical, consumers' judgment of things and ideas. This is the basic job for education at all ages. (Lloyd, 1945, p.1)

With the bad press that Thomson had been receiving, as well as increasing suspicions of his political leanings, Lloyd's comment was a message for Thomson and Parker that their activities were coming to an end. Thomson already seemed to have had some concerns about his relationship with Lloyd before the first publication of *Front Page*. He went to speak with the Minister inquiring about the government's intentions toward the program and specifically to

¹¹ The headlines of the *Living Newspaper* include such topics as Nuclear Arms, Racism in Canada, African Colonialism, Labour Rights, the search for WW2 war criminals, and Fascism. The paper also provided information and support for local issues such as support for the University of Saskatchewan student publication Sheaf and its demands for answers to the treatment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War (Williams, 1945, p.1).

¹² While letters arrived from all parts of Saskatchewan, Canada, and even a high commissioner of New Zealand, one notable letter was from Gregory Vlastos, a renowned professor of philosophy, who praised *Living Newspaper* for talking "with people, not at them" and that "There is nothing the least bit stuffy or prim or intellectually holier-than-thou about it." He went on to state that the AED "have solved the problem of the medium in which "adult education" should express itself in a world like ours...I simply feel extraordinarily pleased about the work that is being done by yourself and your associates..." (Thomson, 1945g, p.1).

confront Lloyd about the rumours of his alleged Communist inclinations. Thomson must have been fairly frustrated by these rumours and the diminishing support by the government for the PSSA. As early as August of 1945 he offered his resignation to Lloyd if the latter believed him to be undermining the CCF. At this meeting, the Minister reassured him that no such rumour was circulating and not to be concerned. This assurance delighted Thomson and he thought no more of it, at least for a short time (Thomson, 1945e, p.3).

As the AED continued to publish and broadcast *Front Page* and *Radio College*, both letters of support and criticism continued to pour in. While the citizenry generally showed approval of the politicized educational program, the government itself was becoming concerned about the controversy that the division was stirring up. Thomson noted that after the fifth issue of *Front Page* the Minister sent a strong letter of disapproval accusing the division of “spectacularism” that attempted to “direct [the] thinking” of Saskatchewan’s people and that the “practices were incompatible with “legitimate adult education”” (Thomson, p.4). Surprised by Lloyd’s remarks, Thomson and Parker went to meet with the Minister who informed the duo that the tenth issue of the *Front Page* would be the last. Thomson pleaded with the Minister, utilizing the 800 or so positive letters to support his case that the program was meant to be controversial but was having an impact (Thomson, p.4).

Thomson now began to see the writing on the wall. Around November of 1945, at about the mid-way point of the *Radio College* program, the government took back a \$500 grant that it had given to the PSSA which the school had already budgeted for organizing a conference. Members of the PSSA and Roslyn Road were now liable for this debt which was a considerable amount at the time (Simpson & Marshall, 1946, p.2). While the negative response to political activities might have concerned Thomson, his biggest problem was to come. By the fall, rumours

about his alleged relationship with the LPP were rampant among the federal and provincial CCF party members. Many of the questions raised about Thomson occurred prior to the federal election in the spring of 1945. A warning was put forward by the American Consulate stating that,

The Communists have taken over what started out to be an educational institution for workers, the Workmen's Educational Association...The principal public activity of the Communists in Quebec Province at the moment is support of the Labor Prog. Party. The party will run several candidates in the federal elections soon to [sic] be held. At the moment adherents of the party are condemning [sic] the CCF party. No public announcement has been made to that effect but it appears that in Federal elections the Labor Prog. Party will support the Liberal Party where it has no candidates of its own (Taylor, 1945, p.3).

Thomson himself had organized chapters of the WEA in earlier years and had occasionally spoken at LPP events often suggesting co-operation amongst individuals and labour groups. He also openly praised many of the communist farming experiments occurring in Russia. For example, he spoke positively about Soviet communal farms during the Landis conference, a fact that did not sit well with Lloyd (Welton, 1983, p.165). However, despite this praise for many of the practical ideas of Communist Russia or the LPP, because of his dislike for adherence to 'final' solutions he could not come to terms with the totalitarian direction of the Soviet Union. In regards to the rumours of his work with the LPP, Thomson would write:

I had consistently taken the stand, and still see no reason to think otherwise, that the fact that communists agreed with my opinion was not sufficient reason either for changing my position or for ceasing to express it. I also found out that I had made more enemies in Saskatchewan than had ever declared themselves as such, notably some Catholic clerics. [It was a] [s]ad comedy of errors (Thomson, 1966, p.19).

The executive members of the CCF, including Coldwell, the federal leader at the time, refused to associate with members of the LPP. Furthermore, like-minded hard-line CCFers such as Coldwell would publicly state that at least one well-known LPP official was "the scum of the

earth” (Boyko, 2006, p.135). The LPP, meanwhile, was attempting to undermine the CCF, even if that included developing partnerships with the Liberal and the Conservative parties and the CCF went further in their contention that Thomson was a fellow travelling communist. They noted that a split in the Manitoba CCF was supposedly caused in part by intrusive LPP members and by visitors and several key members of the Roslyn Road group who were outright communists. Given Thomson’s prominence in the group, he could not be trusted (Simpson and Marshall, p.2). Thomson had heard that Douglas himself had sent a letter to British Columbia warning of his arrival, essentially telling people that he was sympathetic to the LPP meaning that he intended to undermine CCF efforts in the province. Thomson had no evidence that the letter was actually sent (Thomson, 1945e, p.3). The suspicions of Thomson’s intentions and the controversy caused by the *Radio College* program only needed time to ferment before they became of sufficient concern to remove him from his position.

On December 15th, Thomson went to speak with Lloyd and to ask his permission to attend a conference. Lloyd granted permission but told him without giving any reason, that when he returned he should seek a new job. Thomson was hurt by being fired for the first time in his life and submitted his resignation which was promptly accepted by the government (Thomson, 1946, p.6). He chose not to fight the request for his resignation, although later in life in a letter to friends and colleagues he would express some regret at not doing so,

...many urged me to fight the government’s decision. I decided against doing so. It was all too personal. By not stating more frankly what their case against me was, the government gave me no grounds on which to take my stand. Of course, I could have forced their hand by refusing to resign, and perhaps I should have done so. But I have no stomach for that kind of embroilment (Thomson, 1960, p.19).

Any immediate and public reaction about the firing would not have been out of character for Thomson. After all, he was an outspoken critic of the status quo. It is possible that he did not

react because it was just too personal and he was hurt by the alleged betrayal. Years later Thomson would reflect on his time in Saskatchewan with disappointment and melancholy. However, his immediate reaction was anger. Because of the reassurances given by Lloyd and the early support from the CCF for his ideas and program he felt betrayed. His original distrust of authority seemed justified. Within the CCF, the dismissal of Thomson remained a relatively minor issue. However, in a letter written about six weeks after the dismissal to the National Secretary of the CCF, future National Democratic Party (NDP) leader David Lewis states that "... the Living Newspaper [Front Page and Radio College] and its principal protagonists, Watson Thomson and Ed. Parker have individually and collectively blown up" and that "[t]he unfortunate experiment simply destroyed itself, and the only unfortunate feature about the whole affair is that the bad taste lingers on in the collective provincial mouth" (Schumiatcher, 1946, p.1). The CCF did not miss Thomson. And he felt the same of the CCF.

I'm going to write a book (maybe a book and a pamphlet) and I'm going to construct them and time their publication in order that they should be the most damning and damaging anti-CCF thing that ever happened...If the CCF Govt. can be persuaded to finance me for the period of time required to write the book, then, I think you'll agree, that it is just a piece of very enjoyable irony (Thomson, 1946, p.2).

The bulk of Thomson's anger with respect to the events of December, 1945 would eventually subside. However, he would never be able to come to terms with the humiliation he felt because of his dismissal and the disappointment from seeing his vision undermined by officials he had so closely trusted.

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the events leading up to Thomson's appointment as director of the AED as well as those resulting in his dismissal. It has described in detail the Study-Action program that was at the heart of his applied pedagogy. Community councils were to take root in a number of places throughout the province with the ultimate goal of sharing responsibility for local governance with municipal officials. Examples were discussed about the application of the plan to real life events; most notably, the Landis conference in June and July of 1945. Finally, the details surrounding Thomson's dismissal were discussed, and information provided about the antagonistic relationship between the LPP and the CCF, which had a bearing on his dismissal about which he clearly felt betrayed.

The following chapter will provide an analysis of these events in light of Thomson's philosophy as discussed in the second chapter. A discussion of contemporary adult education and possibilities for the inclusion of Thomson's Study-Action Plan will also be discussed.

CHAPTER 4

EDUCATING FOR ACTION: THE PEDAGOGY OF WATSON THOMSON AND THE CANADIAN SOCIAL ECONOMY

It is not a sentimentalist's dream, but an imperative demand of the historic situation today that mankind find the way to organize itself in an effective unity and ... men and women are found who are capable of the pan-human reconciliation which must underline that organized unity if it is to have hope of permanent vitality. Political, economic and technological forces will exert pressure towards global unification, but the necessary accompanying qualities of personality will be there *only if we choose* to work in that direction [original emphasis] (Thomson, 1966, p.34).

4.1 Introduction

The first three chapters of this thesis have provided an overview of the life of Watson Thomson, a description of his educational philosophy, and an account of the pedagogy in he put into practice during his directorship of the Saskatchewan Adult Education Division. This final chapter examines contemporary applications of his pedagogy. Throughout his life he, like many of his generation, hoped that rapid advancements in science and technology would free humankind from the day-to-day drudgery of production and labour. This dream failed to materialize. During the twilight of his life, Thomson saw the gradual end of European

colonialism, the rise of the international economic development paradigm, the dawn of the computer age and the commercialization of jet powered aircraft. With changes in international relationships and advancements in communications and travel, Thomson foresaw, like many of his contemporaries, the inevitable move to a global society. In the quote at the beginning of this chapter Thomson, based on his lifetime of experience, warned that the promises of world peace and prosperity could only come to fruition if individuals learned to balance the tensions and oppositions within themselves and their communities. This final chapter provides an examination of the state of contemporary adult education in Canada, its place in the social economy, and a contemporary role for Thomson's personalist pedagogy.

4.2 Canadian Adult Education in the Contemporary Context

Canada has a rich and storied history of socially progressive adult education. From the beginning of the 20th century onward, formal and informal educators have utilized periodicals, radio, television, and any available space to discuss crises and issues of the day. Through discussion and education, these adult learning communities helped bring co-operatives, credit unions, health care, schools, and other essential services to their towns and cities. In the latter half of the twentieth century, adult education as a discipline increasingly began to focus on meeting the needs of the marketplace. As innovations in communication and production began to advance rapidly, corporations required employees to be fluent in the newest technology. Universities and governments increasingly focused on educational policy that supported the needs of companies (Belanger & Federighi, 2000). At the same time that Canadian adult education shifted from a community to a corporate focus, it became increasingly diverse, fragmented, and invisible to the 'casual observer' (Selman in Collins, 2006). By the end of the

20th century the economic and social impacts of international economic development and globalization had revealed themselves as the modern oppressive torch bearer of the colonial legacy (Sachs, 1999). Nevertheless, educators practicing socially progressive adult education have recently begun a slow return to prominence.¹³ This section provides a discussion of modern critiques of corporatized, neo-liberal adult education.

In 2000, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) published an international study on adult education as the book Unlocking People's Creative Forces: A Transnational Study of Adult Learning Policies. The study promoted a movement towards national education policy development based on community directed initiatives. In part, the authors, Belanger and Federighi, suggested that top-down initiatives that were excessively geared towards corporate training did not inspire individuals to further education nor did they result in an increase in employment. They note that “[i]n the final decades of the 20th century, an emphasis on the economic implications of adult learning has come to dominate the field¹⁴ (2000, p.37).

In Canada, Rubenson and Walker suggest that the corporate paradigm began to shape adult education policy from the early 1990s onward (2006). They are critical of this direction in that it “reduces adult education to an instrument for the development of an appropriately skilled workforce” (p.181) and because the social aspects of national policy have simply been “tacked

¹³ In Canada and other Western nations, adult education as a discipline continues to struggle as university administration and policy-makers phase out or assimilate adult and continuing education programs. However, government funding to non-governmental organizations as well as autonomous non-profit organizations providing adult education services has generally increased as has demand for these services (Belanger & Federighi, 2000)

¹⁴ The authors go on to state that “[p]aradoxically, while the military machine was said to exist for the sake of peacekeeping, education was attributed the task of increasing the competitiveness between different economic systems and growth models to strengthen a series of modernisation efforts” (p.37).

on' to an economic framework" (p.184). Collins (2006) notes that "...seemingly progressive adult education discourses now become merely accommodative of neoliberal imperatives around the marketization of education... that favour private sector interests...[and] are unmindful of participatory decision making" (p.119). Sumner warns that "...education is on the cusp of being converted to a service that only private producers can provide..." (2005, p.112). Similarly, McMurtry claims that "[a]s 'business methods' increasingly penetrate education, life everywhere is rapidly and "inevitably" made to conform as service and consumption functions of the Global Machine" (2003, p.5). Other Canadian academics who have recently demonstrated concern over market influences steering educational policy include: Woodhouse (2005), Welton (2006), and Bouchard (2006).

Educational policies and initiatives that promote professional development are not the key issue in such criticism of the corporatization of education. In fact, they are important for ensuring that changing professional standards are met and are personally rewarding. The concern among critics of corporate driven educational policy is that it subordinates the public good to private interests. Belanger & Federighi write,

...the market actually negates any opportunity for involving social groups in planning programs and negotiating educational content. The interplay between explicit short-term demand and the supply of services determines the rise of one sector and the demise of another... while this type of organisation may be of interest to new providers, it usually falls far short of meeting the broad, long-term aspirations of the populations, and thus social demand (2000, p.34).

Educational initiatives that promote technological or professional literacy in the name of international competition systematically exclude the educational yearnings of whole populations

and deplete public funds either directly by financial support or indirectly through the time, effort, and money spent on government studies, policy development, and marketing¹⁵.

By subverting the needs of the public, market based education has supplanted the fundamental idea that education should contribute to the common good through an improvement in the lives of individuals. This process of improvement may occur in a variety of ways. Sumner suggests that public education should contribute to ecological sustainability (2005). Tomasevski (2003) suggests that education should “enhance social cohesion, and more than anything, it should teach the young that all human beings — themselves included — have rights” (p.33). Woodhouse provides a complementary statement when he suggests that “[i]ndividual freedom of action can best flourish in a community that supports and refines peoples` diverse interests” (2005, p.225). Examining the historical legacy of Canadian adult education, Welton claims that practitioners have traditionally sought to promote the development of human potential (2006). Adult educators have promoted democratic models of education that sought to expand the general knowledge and self-determination of individuals. Often, while the focus is on individual improvement, the means have been centred on dialogue that promotes co-operation and community.

The various approaches to adult education promoted by academics often have explicitly political goals. Collins maintains that “...a critically informed and politically engaged pedagogy is necessary to defend and advance the still relevant liberal-progressive and social-democratic aims of prominent Canadian adult educators” (2006, p.199). In Western Canada, the political

¹⁵ Rubenson and Walker (2006) provide examples of Government of Canada sponsored reports that promote market driven adult education. Examples include *Lifelong Learning and the New Economy*, *Learning a Living*, *Knowledge Matters: Skills and Learning for Canadians*, and *Achieving Excellence: Investing in People, Knowledge, and Opportunity*.

roots of adult education go as far back as the beginning of the 20th century. During the period of Western agrarian revolt, secular institutions such as Wesley College, Manitoba College, Regina College and others “became the disseminators of the social gospel”¹⁶ (Allen, 1992, p.563) as did well known publications such as the *Grain Growers Guide* (Allen, 1992 & Welton, 2006).

The focus on education as a process for creating the political means and will to effect change continued through the following decades. Women’s movements utilized ways of organizing education to promote gender rights (Roome, 1992 & Welton, 2006). In the east, university extension divisions sought the development of co-operative enterprises and credit unions (Welton, 2006). Throughout the mid-part of the century, the National Film Board (NFB) toured the country providing access to news and film for hundreds of thousands of rural residents. The Saskatchewan Adult Education Division (AED) advocated economic reform and co-operative development throughout 1945 (Welton, 1983 & 2006). The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) provided a forum for political and cultural commentators to disseminate their views and politics. For example, George Grant, a notable Canadian philosopher and political thinker, began his career working for the Canadian Association of Adult Education (CAAE) in the 1940s. During the 1950s he provided a series of engaging lectures for the CBC on a variety of political

¹⁶ The agrarian revolt took place between 1916 and 1926 and was caused by an under-representation of Western interests in parliament. Allen (1992) suggests that its supporters “toppled three provincial governments, strengthened the agrarian hold on another, routed one federal party and government and made the life of the successor a tenuous one” (p.561). The social gospel refers to the discourses which combined politics and religion during the early part of the 20th century. It took “your love of God, which in its practical form is the love of your neighbour into politics” and argued that “religion is for everyday, but more especially for Convention day, Nomination day, Election day until our legislative halls are purged of those who represent the most heartless and selfish instincts of the race...” (Partridge in Allen, p.565).

topics¹⁷ (Christian, 1993). Mass media and extension departments continued to promote politically oriented adult education programs throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

However, around this time many extension and continuing education programs began to focus increasingly on professional continuing education and professional development. The Centre for Continuing Education at the University of British Columbia is one such centre. Throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s they increasingly developed programs and policies based on professional needs, although they continued to develop programming for Indigenous peoples and women (Selman, 1975). By the 1980s and 1990s adult education policy focused on meeting the needs of the corporate market. Nevertheless, much of the political activism amongst practitioners remained because of the intervention and programming of local authorities and non-profit organizations (Belanger & Federighi, 2000).

Critical adult education concerned itself with improving the lives of individuals through community development, ecological awareness, rights education, and political organizing. Adult education policy can be evaluated upon its ability to achieve these various goals and its capacity to facilitate a process of inquiry that brings about change. Belanger and Federighi suggest that,

The quality of adult learning policies is measured by the real observable possibility the subjects have to be intentionally and consciously involved in changing their material and intellectual conditions, and not merely in changes in established educational infrastructures and educational and cultural products and services (2000, p.29).

Market based educational policies or initiatives fail for several reasons. First, spontaneous individual inquiry is limited by and directed towards corporate interests. Woodhouse (2005)

¹⁷ The series of lectures was called "Philosophy in the Mass Age" and provided commentary on economic, educational, and technological developments, religious topics, Marxism, and the role of the philosopher in effecting change. The lectures were successful and proved Grant to be an original and insightful thinker, and a book by the same name was published the following year, 1959 (Christian, 1993).

states “[e]conomics excludes the subjectivity of human experience and focuses narrowly on the abstractions of *homo economicus* without recognising the limits which this imposes on inquiry” (p.130). Second, as corporate adult education seeks to make Canadians competitive in the global market and drive innovation (Rubenson & Walker, 2006), it undermines co-operative values and their role in individual and social change. On this note, Phipps writes,

Cooperation must come to prevail over competition and integration must prevail over disjunctiveness. The economic, social, and intellectual gaps among and within nations must be narrowed, not further polarized, so that the extreme gaps between poverty and privilege, ignorance and knowledge, that prevail in the present world order are reduced and higher levels of justice and equality are attained (2005, p.40).

The co-operative and integrative transformation that Phipps calls for in his article on educational reform in China challenges the concept of competition as an overriding principle in economics and education in favour of one that promotes mutual support, community, inter-connectivity, and social justice. Throughout Canadian history, adult education has vehemently promoted political action, co-operative development, bringing individuals closer together in community in opposition to the ever increasing pressure of the market.

John McMurtry’s philosophical framework provides a powerful tool for understanding and critiquing the destructive impact of the market, in general, and market driven education, in particular. McMurtry makes a distinction between two value systems, which he refers to as “the life code of value” and “the money code of value”, and which he considers to be in a life and death struggle (1998, pp. 28-30). The life code of value is a non-anthropocentric ethic that conceives of humankind’s responsibilities towards nature and life as a function of our relationships with all living organisms — “a felt bond of being that crosses boundaries of membranes, classes, peoples, and even species” (1998, p.23). This life-based or biocentric ethic that McMurtry argues is inherent in civilized sensibility is inclusive of both the human

communities to which we belong and the biotic community of which we are a part, and it forms an integrated value system that connects human concerns with those of life in general. As he puts it: “life’s growth is the ethical sovereign” and it “is to be protected and developed as the first priority of society” (1998, pp. 384-385).

Historically, the life code has been sustained by a series of interlocking institutions, “the civil commons”, whose roots “predate the market by millennia” (1998, p. 26). McMurtry defines the civil commons as “society’s organized and community-funded capacity of universally accessible resources to provide for the life preservation and growth of society’s members and their environmental life-host” (p.24). Evidence of the biocentric ethic at the core of the civil commons is manifested in the need for humans to care for the growth of the planet. The value of human life can be sustained and developed by means of universal access to such aspects of the civil commons as clean air and water, health care, recreational facilities, education, public television, public infrastructure, etc. A society based on the life code of value views access to the civil commons as a right with the corresponding societal obligation to support its interlocking institutions. When an institution of the civil commons, like education, becomes a commodity for sale on the corporate market, access is determined by the ability to pay, not by one’s right as a member of the human species. Not only does this exclude large numbers of people from post-secondary or adult education, but it denies to them the comprehensive range of understanding which they might otherwise have learned to value.

This aspect of the money code of value — to price its goods in terms of the ability to pay - is related to the principle of self-maximization, or “consistently seek[ing] to gain as much for oneself as possible,” (1998, p.128), which characterizes the corporate market. The function of the money code, as its name suggests, is “to produce ever more money for money investors and

speculators” (Woodhouse, 2001, p.217). Any damage inflicted upon the planet, its myriad species, human beings or the civil commons is disregarded as just another “externality” beyond the computation of business costs (McMurtry, 1998, pp. 9, 57). This is but one of many ways in which the money code is handicapped by a “system-bound blindness to destructive consequence ... an automatized preference to seek and accept more money as an unquestioned good” (1998, 17, 32). By preventing thought beyond its own presuppositions, the money code has become a value program, closed to other alternatives, requiring its agents to “enact its prescriptions and functions as presupposed norms” (1998, p.6) even when these are life-destroying and “pathological” (1998, p. 17).

The recent collapse of the American housing market is a grim example of the functioning of the money code of value. As a result of nearly a decade of housing speculators and mortgage lenders seeking to maximize their money profits, large numbers of people have lost their homes. The immediate impact of the deregulation of the housing market in the United States helped drive home prices up through access to non-traditional mortgages such as interest-only loans often with temporarily reduced interest rates. The requirements of a reasonable ratio of purchase price to wage made home buying inaccessible to many working class families, and under normal conditions of supply and demand, should have caused prices to eventually decline. However, in their determination to seek as much gain for themselves as possible, banks changed their lending formulas, allowing families earning modest wages to purchase expensive homes and go increasingly into debt.

Not surprisingly, McMurtry argues that knowledge has been reduced to a commodity like any other by the money-code of value.¹⁸ Where knowledge “increases corporate revenues” it “is good and to be approved” of, but research that is not focused exclusively on adding value to products or practices “is bad [and] to be condemned” (p.142). This is the true meaning of the “knowledge-based” economy¹⁹. He criticizes the new knowledge economy for excluding research in areas that are not profitable. Furthermore, McMurtry demonstrates a concern for the autonomy of Canadian universities, which is systematically undermined by an almost exclusive focus on research that promotes private profit rather than knowledge for the public good.

Such old time thinking as the pursuit of truth as an end in itself, or critical understanding without deference to special interest, is no longer education’s vocation. Knowledge instead comes to mean whatever idea advances the business profitability of the sponsoring corporations that own and use it (p.180).

Consistent with historical trends in Canadian educational thought, McMurtry argues that education based on life affirming values is an integral part of the civil commons. Educational forms that support democratic governance “is the civil commons in collective action and thought” (p.371). Given the historical role of education in the development of individual and collective rights in Canada, its replacement by technological literacy and corporate research, the goal of which is to make ever more money for investors, is a direct threat to democracy and the civil commons.

¹⁸ Sumner (2005) reiterates this claim stating that “[c]orporate globalization is based on the money-code of value—that is, it operates out of a system of values that puts money first and foremost... (p.9).

¹⁹ In the knowledge-based economy, only research and information which contribute to the needs of the market count as knowledge. As a result, we have entered “a new dark age ... in which the distinction between truth and falsehood collapses and commercial advantage rules as the final arbiter of knowledge...” (McMurtry, 1998, p. 179).

In this section, I have provided a discussion and historical context to contemporary adult education in Canada. The examination was focused on the role of adult education in the development of co-operative enterprises and the rights of individuals and communities. Critiques of modern adult education and its emphasis on meeting corporate objectives were outlined. In the following section, I will demonstrate that there is a revival in demand for community and politically based adult education.

4.3 The Rising Demand for Adult Education

The development of political movements is often based on small groups of concerned individuals interested in improving their communities. To understand and promote their causes, these groups utilize a variety of different activities and methods based on traditional educational methods. The use of magazines and periodicals to disseminate information often combined with informal study groups/circles has been a particularly common strategy. Currently, these small grassroots study groups are seeing a worldwide resurgence in popularity. Government policy-makers are becoming increasingly aware of this demand. This section will demonstrate that there is an international reappearance (including in Canada) in the demand for grassroots adult education.

Belanger and Federighi's five-year study examining the state of adult education policy development in twenty-four countries included both industrial and developing nations. In the West they found that,

Adult general and community education, previously threatened with being replaced entirely by work related training, is now in great local and national demand in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States... Rapid changes in social life have in turn prompted training activities within organizations. Millions of

people in the voluntary sector, women's groups, environmental groups, and cooperatives have joined together to strengthen their ability to take individual and collective action (p.8).

In Canada, they identified an increasing trend in demand for organised adult learning over a thirty year period. In 1969, individual participation in adult learning was approximately one in fourteen and five years later demand rose to one in six. In 1983, participation in adult learning was approximately one in five and by the mid-1990s it was nearly one in every two and half individuals (Belanger and Federighi, 2000).

One might argue that there is a corresponding correlation between the rise in participation and the corporate driven paradigm of adult education are connected. However, this correlation is unlikely to represent causation. Belanger and Federighi's UNESCO study on policy discovered trends that discounted this claim, showing that demand for adult education is "being expressed in relation to the quest for quality of life, the revival of urban life, the strengthening of participation in community organizations and local community life, and the revitalization of previously repressed cultures" (pp. 7-8). Furthermore, they noted the decline in the predominance of work as the definition of education and social life. They suggested that this cultural change is resulting in "collective action that is relatively independent of the world of work [and] is creating new expectations, including demand for learning — in women's movements, environmental groups, associations to revitalise regional cultures..." (p.13). Furthermore, this collective learning is often politically based and involves the development of action plans²⁰.

²⁰ "Whether in agriculture, health care, the environment, population policy or the fight against racism, almost all action plans today include a significant information-education-counselling (IEC) component. In Morocco, for example, family planning policy is now based primarily on women's education programs, often in liaison with local centres..." (Belanger & Federighi, p.16).

The increasing demand for participatory politically based adult education has not gone unnoticed by policy-makers. At a 1997 UNESCO conference on education, approximately 1500 delegates from over 140 different countries voted unanimously to recognise the “rise in adult learning aspirations ... to ensure that all can participate actively in the development of their communities” (p.12). Moreover, the UNESCO study suggested that although trends in adult education emphasized business needs, many governments continue to recognize “other learning aspirations, including second chance education, personal development projects, civic education, community education, general and formal adult education, popular education, and language learning” (p.11) providing some hope that future policies will continue to move in progressive directions.

Since the early 1970s, Canada and many other nations have seen a continuous rise in the demand for grassroots, community-based education. While the overall trend in education has been an increase in corporate driven ideology, policy makers in supranational organizations like UNESCO are aware of an increasing demand for lifelong and/or politically-based learning initiatives. The following section will provide a discussion of the contribution which the pedagogy of Watson Thomson can make in the context of the current growth in community-based education.

4.4 Contemporary Policy Considerations for Thomson’s Educational Framework

The penalty of learning and practising the rudiments of truthfulness in human intercourse is that one develops a new sensitivity to the pretenses, deceptions and outright lies which pervade the fabric of our power-striving societies (Thomson, p.147).

This section will bring together many of the concepts discussed throughout this thesis in order to show that there is a definite and unique role for the pedagogy of Watson Thomson today. A brief examination of the state of the ‘social economy’ in Canada, understood in the context of the critiques of corporatism and resurgences in contemporary adult education, will demonstrate that there is a demand for the politically based pedagogy promoted by Thomson and others. While the general methodology of his pedagogy is similar to that of other well known educators, including Paulo Freire, Thomson’s philosophy provides a unique foundation that separates him from others. Finally, this section will provide an evaluation of Thomson’s work in light of recommendations on policy development from Belanger and Federighi’s 2000 UNESCO report on the state of adult education.

The term ‘social economy’ lacks a generally accepted definition (Government of Canada [GOC] 2004, Bouchard, Ferraton, & Michaud, 2006, Mackinnon, 2006, Fontan, 2006). However, the Co-operatives Secretariat of Canada provides a description to help identify initiatives and programs that fall in line with the social economy.

- a. It consists of “foundations, co-operatives, mutual societies and associations that pursue activities that is both social and economic in nature” (GOC, p.4).
- b. Objectives are focused on meeting the needs of the community. Commercial activities must reinvest profits to serve social ends.
- c. Organizations within the social economy are based on democratic decision-making models. It should utilize a one-vote one member process.
- d. Organizations rely on both paid employment and volunteer services. (pp.4-5)

Organizations considered to be a part of the social economy are not private nor are they public.

The social economy represents organizations that operate within the traditional economic system

but their primary goal is not private profit, rather it is the advancement of social well-being through economic activities. Bouchard, Ferraton, and Michaud provide further clarification of the social economy by identifying four criteria:

1. The enterprise must carry out an economic activity producing either a service or a good such as daycare co-operatives or producer co-operative.
2. Rules or policies that limit the distribution of profits among members. For example, retail co-operatives or credit unions that provide a small return but reinvest the majority of the profit into the organization or community.
3. The voluntary association of members based on the initiatives of the individual members or groups. The development of health care co-operatives throughout the 1960s in Saskatchewan is one such example where communities required essential services and came together to form an organization that met those needs.
4. A democratic governance process based on use instead of capital invested. For example, co-operatives based on "one member, one vote" (Bouchard, Ferraton, & Michaud, 2006)

Consistent with the definition provided by the Co-operatives' Secretariat, these criteria provide a rubric for examining whether or not an enterprise or an organization fits within the parameters of the social economy. Similar descriptions and definitions are provided by Favreau, (2006), Fontan, (2006), & Centre for Urban and Community Studies, (2003). Mackinnon (2006) describes the social economy as being complementary and "somewhat synonymous" (p.26) with community economic development as they both aim to meet social needs through economic activities.

The social economy, particularly in Canada, is represented by a large co-operative movement. These enterprises vary in size and scope, but are generally focused on helping meet

social needs and are often developed through community interaction and inquiry. Since the late 1960s there has been a renewal in the development of social economy organizations throughout the world (Favreau, 2006). The demand for these organizations can be demonstrated by the number of enterprises that currently exist. For example, as of 2004 there are 500 nursery and childcare co-operatives providing almost 30,000 families with the opportunity to direct the care of their children (GOC). There are almost 300 recreational co-operatives in Canada that operate a variety of community centres (GOC). Tens of thousands of other individuals are affected by housing, health, and educational co-operatives throughout Canada. The social economy also consists of other types of enterprises that support community education and development such as Quint Development Corporation in Saskatoon, which provides housing and economic development support to the inner-city through its programming (GOC).

In addition to the co-operative model, other associations and mutual societies are flourishing in Canada. In Quebec, over 7,000 organizations (including co-operatives) can be found that fit within the parameters of the social economy. These organizations employ over 120,000 individuals with revenues of over 17 billion dollars (Fontan, 2006). A 1995 survey of social economy enterprises in twenty-two countries estimated that the organizations had a combined revenue of more than 1 trillion dollars (Centre for Urban and Community Studies, 2003). These organizations seek to meet the immediate needs of communities across Canada based on principles of democracy and equality consistent with McMurtry's conceptualization of the civil commons. Moreover, the social economy continues a legacy of grassroots co-operative organization promoted by Canadian adult educators over the past century.

Since the social economy is based on small, often service oriented businesses, adult education programs that are geared towards business tend to exclude independent producers and

micro-enterprises around the world (Belanger & Federighi, 2000). Furthermore, because policy too often ignores the needs of these small socially oriented organizations, adult education programs do not support community development in a meaningful way. Belanger and Federighi state that,

Challenges facing contemporary societies, wherever they may be, cannot be confronted without relying on the increased capacity and participation of citizens. There is no solution to the geometric increase in health care costs without new health care promotion policies and prevention and education strategies. There is no solution to rising criminality while the number of prisons continues to grow and there are no active policies to rehabilitate inmates and develop the human resources of poor communities. Environmental risks cannot be dealt with unless people are increasingly enabled to take action themselves and to garner information from a variety of sources (pp. 77-8).

The social economy is one component of the civil commons because it is a democratic, community-based economic set of institutions that supports and facilitates projects that sustain individuals, communities, ecology, and social justice. A fundamental criterion of the social economy is that individuals and communities work together with the aim of providing universal access to services and products that their communities desire without an emphasis on profit. Most definitions of the social economy require enterprises and organizations to have explicit policies that limit the distribution of profits to its members in favour of reinvestment in the organization and the community. As a result of this community based approach, these organizations have managed to survive the onslaught of the global market despite the odds. Whether it be in the form of health care, community kitchens, community gardens, alternative power co-operatives, recreational facilities, these institutions share the characteristics of the civil commons by enhancing life for their members and the communities of which they are a part.

Furthermore, the social economy as part of the civil commons is dependent upon progressive forms of adult education that support knowledge developed at the community level.²¹ While formal adult education has focused on corporate education and the “knowledge-based economy,” progressive adult education has continued to focus on meeting the educational needs and interests of individuals and communities. For example, the People's Free University (PFU), a Saskatoon based educational collective which provided university level courses to community members based on the principle that every person has the right to learn and every person has the ability to teach. The PFU provided a forum for individuals to speak about topics that interested them or about community issues of concern. On the one hand, there are formal, market-driven education and the knowledge-based economy, whose practices of training for employment in the market correspond to the overriding goal of maximizing profit at the core of the money code of value. On the other hand, there are progressive forms of adult education located in the social economy as one of many institutions of the civil commons, whose goal is to enhance the scope of life by promoting a more comprehensive understanding among those who learn.

Thomson’s educational practice, as discussed throughout this thesis, was based on political and philosophical principles found in the work of Emmanuel Mounier, Alfred Adler, and to a lesser extent G.D.H. Cole. The inclusion of the concept of wholeness enhances the development of a fluid and spontaneous ‘organism’ in the context of a process of open dialogue that characterizes Thomson’s account of an inter-personal community. The following ideas provide

²¹ “It is... necessary to examine the typically educational function of community life as a means and site of the production and appropriation of knowledge. Community life not only expresses the ‘narrative knowledge’ of the ‘people’, but also provides immediate and concrete opportunities for acquiring other forms of knowledge...the primary terrain for policy intervention consists of modifying conditions that tend to destroy the development of community life” (UNESCO, p.114).

an outline of Thomson's pedagogical ideas based on an examination of his philosophy in chapter two and his practice as described in chapter three.

- a. Adult education cannot and should not be politically neutral. It should support decision-making and action at the local, national, and inter-national levels.
- b. Dialogue is the key component to any educative experience. Dialogue that is honest must be encouraged and a respectful approach to conflict must be taken.
- c. The facilitator must avoid simple dichotomization. Effort should be taken to view the rhythms and nuances of binary concepts. A dialectical approach may be of use in the attempt to see "both sides of the fence".
- d. The educator may be an expert but only insofar as they are there to play an advisory role. They may provide one possible solution, or one part of a solution in an inter-disciplinary environment, but they may not use their position as an expert to advance their own agenda.
- e. Solutions must be consistent with the "social interest" which is based on the belief that human beings require community and are inter-dependent. Education that supports competition and 'social positioning'/ superiority of one individual over the other is psychologically pathogenic and is indicative of an incomplete or unsuccessful dialogue.

These principles provide a general framework for planning and organizing an educational program based on Thomson's beliefs. When utilized in appropriate circumstances, they can support the development of enterprises and projects consistent with the requirements of the social economy. An important observation and recommendation of the UNESCO report on adult education was that the development of educational policy should rest on three considerations: first, the formation of organised political groups; second, the regulation of learning activities;

and third, the distribution of the benefits of learning (p.35). A brief examination of these policy development objectives, Thomson's pedagogy, and the social economy will show important areas of overlap where progressive education can benefit the civil commons.

With regard to the first aim, that there should be an organised political subject, Belanger & Federighi suggest that:

The political actors involved are the first to benefit, in that they can enhance their capacity to manage collective learning processes. If, for example, government, business or the social partners in a given set of firms invest in adult learning based exclusively on the demands of the firms and their personnel, they may obtain the desired economic results, but run a high risk of excluding the broader demands of other social groups in civil society and coming into conflict with them. (p.36).

The individuals engaged in the process should be the primary beneficiaries of the educational experience. Consistent with demands of progressive adult educators, Belanger and Federighi suggest that policy makers consider educational programming in terms of the effect on the immediate community and its members. Thomson's educational framework is in agreement with this suggestion. In fact, his pedagogical framework is only successful if it meets the needs of communities. Although the implication in the UNESCO report is that these needs should be met by enterprise development, Thomson, while not disagreeing, suggests the importance of going further by meeting the psychological and spiritual needs of individuals through a dialogue that brings humans closer together. Thomson's pedagogy listed above shows that his emphasis on dialogue, political action, and the social interest all support the primary political actors. Furthermore, Belanger and Federighi support Thomson's emphasis on inter-personal community development and meeting social needs when they declare that the "active participation of citizens is a dominant theme in new adult learning policy. Helping to construct a collective identity is a

particular focus of attention during phases of ... general social mobilisation based on new ‘social contracts’” (p.45).

The second major recommendation of Belanger and Federighi’s UNESCO report aims at the regulation of the learning process.

...the aim of regulation should not be considered... in terms of a simple redistribution of resources and roles and the readjustment of established power relationships or norms in the immediate field of education and training. On the contrary, in its initial stages, the policy-making process is essentially an exercise in analysis and exploration. Its initial task is to define the issues, goals, strategies and guidelines likely to help develop a social project and, to this end, to organise the provision of learning and the conditions for taking part in it...adult learning policy ...creates spaces where the adults themselves potentially make decisions that more broadly affect the direction and conditions shaping their own future development, both individually and collectively. This recognition of the close relationship between the democratisation of daily life and the intimacy of the act of learning...requires that we constantly resituate policies with politics (pp. 36-7).

In examining Belanger and Federighi’s recommendation on regulating the learning process parallels can be identified between the development of the AED during its beginning months and the UNESCO report. The early months of the AED were focused primarily on policy development. Its study-action plan required workers to visit different parts of the province gathering information and speak with people throughout the province. Unlike Freire, who believes that the oppressed should name the issues that concern them, the UNESCO study supports Thomson’s approach, according to which members of the adult education division/program initially use discussion to enable community members to generate ideas around issues that concern them. Once this initial stage of exploration is complete, community members are encouraged to continue to move towards independent study groups, eventually leading to the development of enterprises supporting the social economy.

The third and final recommendation for the development of policy for adult education suggests the redistribution of the benefits of learning. Belanger and Federighi state

A study of the situation today indicates that rapid implementation of adult learning policy is due to what could be called “tri-partite nature of anticipated benefits”. First, there is the development of a work force who are capable of taking part in an ever-more sophisticated production process and use their skills to increase the added-value of products. Second, given the contradictions inherent in all late modern advanced societies, there is the need for citizens to be able to take independent action. Third, there is the production of cultural goods and services, and the emergence of “learning societies” (p.37).

The authors suggest that policy development which promotes learning can contribute to the work force, strengthen individual agency, and develop ideas and knowledge in general. Once again, these suggestions are consistent with Thomson’s educational programming. First, while Thomson was critical of corporatization, he did see the need for a training component for adult education. In this regard, his concern was primarily centred on the education of immigrants and soldiers returning from the Second World War. Furthermore, the development of learning communities was a goal of Thomson’s planning and they were represented by the hundreds of study groups which developed as a result of the work of the Adult Education Division and the informal communities that were created during the operation of the Lighted School. His vision, more than anything else, focused on the development of the individual personality in order to balance many of the tensions facing people, specifically those between individual and community needs. In order for adult education to help an individual develop a sense of agency, he or she needs to understand how to do the moral or the right thing. While ‘the right thing’ may differ from individual to individual and community to community, Thomson’s dialogical process and philosophical foundations provide a framework for ethical dialogue and action.

Thomson's legacy as director of the Adult Education Division coupled with his unique personalist philosophy and pedagogy provides a rich framework for developing policy consistent with both current UNESCO recommendations and with other popular contemporary approaches. This section has also demonstrated that the social economy is an integral part of the civil commons. Both share the same value system, according to which the needs of individuals and communities take precedence over private profits. In practice, this means that only those enterprises that provide services that enhance life will be supported. By examining Belanger and Federighi's UNESCO report, this section has shown that they promote a vision of adult education consistent with that of Thomson. Finally, it has shown that Thomson's personalist philosophy provides a reflective and critical framework for developing the social economy.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of current trends in progressive adult education and its historical context. A focus was placed on contemporary critiques of the prominence of market driven paradigms of adult education, which have become the focus of Canadian government and university policy. Using an extended international study, this chapter has also shown that there is a worldwide resurgence in politically based adult education that focuses on meeting the needs of communities. The social economy was defined and discussed, showing that its principles were consistent with the idea of the civil commons which promoted individual and collective health by basing objectives on human need over market interests. Parallels were shown between the recommendations of the UNESCO report and the social economy. Finally, Thomson's pedagogy and practice was evaluated in light of contemporary policy development recommendations.

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