

Adult education and publishing Canadian fiction in a global context: a Foucauldian analysis

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Abstract

This paper draws upon findings from a research study on the relationship between fiction, citizenship, and lifelong learning. It includes interviews with authors from several genres, publishing houses, and arts councils. This paper explores many of the ambivalent outcomes of the shifting power elements in publishing that can simultaneously benefit and disadvantage the publication of a national body of fiction. Although focused on the Canadian context, fiction writers and publishers around the globe face similar challenges. Using a Foucauldian analysis, it considers the importance of fiction and adult learning in shaping discourses of citizenship and critical social learning.

Keywords: lifelong learning; Foucault; power; citizenship; publishing; fiction

Introduction

The publishing industry for fiction writing in Canada has undergone tremendous changes in the last four decades, and the fallout from these dramatic shifts is not yet fully understood. This paper uses a Foucauldian analysis to trace some of the dynamics and developments in Canadian publishing to illustrate the mechanisms of power at play and to explore the implications of this for adult education and citizenship. While this paper focuses on a Canadian example, in many countries fiction writers' works provide important resources for the broader population to engage in critical social learning. Through fiction, citizens can explore different stories of nationhood, be exposed to alternative cultural and political viewpoints, develop the imaginative capacity to envision historical events, and be introduced to various locales. Fictional stories may give voice to minority perspectives and challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and social mores. Fiction writers may be seen as knowledge builders, although the kinds of

knowledge they create may not always reconcile with the government's or industry's desired educational trajectories.

The book publishing industry is important because it directly affects who gets to say what to whom, which Michel Foucault indicates is always a key question in identifying power relations. Writers' livelihoods are largely dependent on the publication and distribution of their work, and they are grappling with how the publishing culture is changing with new technologies, shrinking government funding, and the pressures of globalization. These shifts in the publishing industry will affect what role writers will play in creating fundamental aspects of national culture and what kinds of access educators and learners may have to Canadian fiction in the future. Fiction may provide many opportunities for lifelong learning, which we define as learning that occurs at all stages across the lifespan, but particularly with a focus on learning in adulthood. In order to be useful in fostering debates pertaining to citizenship, however, there needs to be a substantive body of Canadian fiction that can serve as a resource for learning, whether this learning occurs in a formal classroom setting, a non-formal site such as a library book club, or through an informal exchange of novels between friends.

Drawing upon findings from a research study on fiction, citizenship, and lifelong learning, this paper begins with a brief overview of debates around adult learning and citizenship informed by the work of Michel Foucault. It then discusses some key Foucauldian concepts that inform our analysis for this paper. A summary of some specific policies and factors that have historically shaped the publication of Canadian fiction is given, and then an overview of the research study, which includes interviews with authors from several genres, publishing houses and arts councils, is provided. Findings and analysis are presented under three headings: Publishing Matters; Governmentality, Self-Regulation and Circulation, and Critical Social Learning and Fiction. The paper concludes with a consideration of the implications of these findings and analysis for adult educators.

Adult education, citizenship & Foucault

A number of critical educators have used Foucault's work to explore debates pertaining to adult learning and citizenship (Fejes & Nicoll, 2008; Petersson, Olsson, & Popkewitz, 2007), as Foucault's work provides important insights into how power shapes different learning contexts. Foucault posits that power is exercised rather than held. Power is a 'set of mechanisms and procedures that have the role or function and theme, even when they are unsuccessful, of securing power' (Foucault, 2004, p. 2). Foucault (1977a, 1977b) argues that power is located in the everyday normalizing discourses of individuals—how they speak, what they speak about, what remains in silence, or how body language is used. Furthermore, Foucault suggests that power is found in the *relations* between entities rather than in individuals or institutions themselves (Foucault, 1980). Thus, no individual, nor any discourse, is ever outside of power. Power flows throughout society like a network in which nodal points produce power that may fluctuate and shift at any given time. 'Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization' (Foucault, 1978/1990, p. 92).

There is ambiguity in how power fluctuates, sometimes in the hands of one group, sometimes in the hands of another, but never with the guarantee that it will stay put or that anyone can hold on to it. One of the main determinants of power involves who gets to say what to whom? Foucault (1978/1990) frames the discourse around power to ask

this sort of question in an effort to account for the fact that it [for our purposes, with reference to publishing] is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said.

For Foucault (1980), a ‘regime of truth’ is established through the dominant discourses that circulate in a society, which constitutes hegemonic practices. Within a neoliberal context, educational discourses frequently reflect the hegemonic framework of the marketplace whereby learning becomes interpreted narrowly as a set of carefully pre-determined outcomes that are deemed to be beneficial to society. Simons and Masschelein (2010) draw upon Foucault’s concept of governmentality to consider how education has become a ‘learning apparatus’ and point out the problems with viewing learning as individualized capital that has to be managed, and that is tied in to a discourse of educational competencies.

Within a policy framework that consistently tries to focus learning on the attainment of ‘essential skills, (i.e., Gibb, 2008; Metcalfe & Fenwick, 2009)—that is, skills that are important to employers—the ‘regime of truth’ that emerges suggests that learning must always be connected to economic prosperity. Learning that may enhance the critical capacity of citizens is unlikely to be encouraged. Yet Nicoll, Fejes, Olson, Dahlestedt, and Biesta (2013) use a Foucauldian analysis to argue that ‘embracing alternative forms of democratic citizenry to those narrowly prescribed through a generalized curriculum is necessary if a more open democracy is to be possible’ (p. 835). If citizens have access to reading and writing fiction that takes up stories integral to their society and how it fits within a globalized context, opportunities may arise to challenge hegemonic assumptions that otherwise limit critical social learning. This may be an essential component of fostering a thoughtful, active, and engaged citizenry.

In his lectures about bio-power, Foucault (2004) identifies circulation at the crux of any political-economical system. While his examples are located in his historical analysis of sixteenth to eighteenth century France, many of Foucault’s points illuminate his critique of how power functions whereby ‘mechanisms of power are an intrinsic part of all these relations and, in a circular way, are both their effect and cause’ (Foucault, 2004, p. 2). Foucault pinpoints the ideas of circulation and materiality as the most important conditions for understanding how power functions. In the context of Canadian publishing, having the opportunity to create the material reality of a published book (whether electronic or paper) and to circulate books (thus provide opportunities for access, distribution and potential learning) are all situated within complicated networks of power relationships.

Elsewhere Foucault discusses how power can be examined through the role of authors and books within any given society. In an essay entitled *What is an author?* Foucault (1984) provocatively suggests that the author disappears, and he echoes playwright Samuel Beckett’s question, ‘What does it matter who is speaking?’ (p. 101). Challenging the notion of authors as self-contained entities somehow separated from the rest of society through their writing he writes:

This usage of the notion of writing runs the risk of maintaining the author’s privileges under the protection of writing’s *a priori* status: it keeps alive, in the gray light of neutralization, the interplay of those representations that formed a particular image of the author. (Foucault, 1984, p. 105)

This ‘neutralization’ is problematic because it ignores that both the author and the writing are produced and received in the context of larger social conditions. What Foucault (1984) then terms as the ‘author function’ refers to the author as signifying

part of a set of relations ‘characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society’ (p. 108). By using the term ‘author function’ instead of just ‘author’, Foucault foregrounds the notion of the speaking subject being constituted through discourse. The ‘author function’ draws attention to the role writers play not just as individual artists or creators of stories, but as citizens situated within particular social, political, and historical contexts, who may have a role to play in expanding social learning discourses.

In terms of power, Foucault (1984) asks strategic questions about ‘the subject’s points of insertion, modes of functioning, and systems of dependence’ (p. 118). The author is an ‘ideological product’ because the notion that the author is the inventor and originator of a constant flow of ideas is ironically the opposite: ‘he [sic] is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition’ (p. 119) of fiction. Foucault perceives the focus on the author as a ‘constraint’, although he acknowledges it would be unrealistic to assume writing could ever stand ‘in an absolutely free state’ (p. 119).

Fiction writers do not craft their books or publish their work in a neutral zone. Decisions around what stories will be told, which books will be published, and which authors will be promoted, are shaped by power constraints and supports. Unless there are supports for Canadian publishers, most Canadian writers would have to publish in the United States or the United Kingdom. Most publishers are interested in publishing books that they anticipate will generate profitable sales in a globalized context. It is unlikely, therefore, that Canadian writers would have as many opportunities to write fiction that take up unique aspects of Canadian culture and identity that pertain to citizenship issues.

Foucault’s analysis (1969/2011) also points out that what constitutes a ‘book’ cannot be neatly demarcated, since it is more than a material item—it is a component of a larger discourse.

Beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network. (pp. 25–26)

Therefore the books that comprise a nation’s literary canon may reinforce or interrogate cultural assumptions regarding citizenship. Any one book does not exist as an isolated entity—it is part of a larger social discourse.

Foucault gives examples of books that carry different kinds of cultural, historical or religious impact, arguing ‘is not the material unity of the volume a weak, accessory unity in relation to the discursive unity of which it is the support?’ (Foucault, 1969/2011, p. 25). Canadian fiction, therefore, is part of the broader conversation pertaining to citizenship; novels are often interconnected at different levels with cultural and national debates regarding identity.

Canadian publishing

A Foucauldian analysis reveals how neoliberal influences, characterized by the power of the unfettered marketplace, have been in some instances challenged by government policies and funding supports that create a counter-resistance to the impact of the global marketplace in shaping Canadian publishing. Olssen (2006) uses Foucault to consider a ‘detotalising’ model of community whereby a certain amount of government regulation

may counter the detrimental effects of neoliberalism on education in which ‘the logic of globalization dictates a greater role for markets uninterrupted by government regulatory controls’ (p. 232). Similarly, if historically there had not been a determined effort by the Canadian government, spearheaded by active lobbying on the part of authors and publishers to create a network of supports for writers to publish fiction within Canada, it is doubtful that a significant body of Canadian literature would have been or would continue to be published.

Like many critical adult educators (Fejes, 2010; Welton, 2005) we recognize current discourses around citizenship and learning are connected to historical factors linked to particular social, political, and cultural events and contexts. Opportunities for learning about citizenship in connection to fiction writing have been shaped by policies that have impacted upon the development of the Canadian publishing sector. Politics have long played a role in shaping the literary scene in Canada. Roberts (2008) comments *The Massey Commission’s 1951 report*, which ‘proposed a deliberate and coordinated strategy for state-sponsored Canadian cultural development . . . led to the establishment of the Canada Council for the Arts’ (p. 148).

Today the Canada Council still plays a central role in providing funding to Canadian publishers and to individual artists, including fiction writers. These programs are linked to a mandate to foster a sense of national cultural identity integral to supporting learning in connection to citizenship.

Back in the 1960s and 70s, Clark and Knights (2011) note that branch plants (foreign owned companies) established a stronghold on textbooks, the most profitable area of publishing, which affected the viability of small Canadian presses to produce less profitable fiction books. Canadian-owned companies, without the ‘economies of scale’ or capital supplied to branch plants by their large parent companies, thus failed to compete in their own domestic market. Branch plants got around regulations regarding Canadian content by adapting American or British texts to meet those requirements.

According to Clark and Knights (2011), the creation of the Independent Publishers Association (IPA) in 1971 (which became the Association of Canadian Publishers [ACP] in 1976), posed a serious rival to the Canadian Book Publisher’s Council, which had been the only trade organization of book publishers in Canada. Notably, most of its members represented the interests of branch plants. The IPA/ACP took the Canadian Book Publisher’s Council off-guard with their strong lobbying and nationalistic focus. They brought the mandate of the publishing industry into the political arena, arguing that Canadian ownership of publishing houses was necessary to ensure the publication of Canadian texts and to address large structural inequities, which in turn would shore up an important element of Canadian culture.

Over the decades, an awareness of the need to broaden the mandate of publishers to acknowledge the increasing diversity of the Canadian population arose. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988) was the first of its kind in the world to ‘recognize the importance of preserving and enhancing the multicultural heritage of Canadians’ (p. 1). First promoted by Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau in the 1970s, the idea became a political reality in the 1980s.

Critical adult educators (Guo, 2013; Mojab, 2005) point out the limitations of a liberal approach to multiculturalism, in which as Guo (2013) states ‘cultural differences are often trivialized, exoticized, and essentialized’ (p. 27). What is needed is a critical approach to multiculturalism that ‘makes explicit hidden or masked structures, discourses, and relations of inequity that discriminate against one group and enhance the privileges of others’ (Guo, 2013, p. 27). Nevertheless, the ideological and material impact of this federal policy continues to influence policy developments and the

allocations of resources. Young (2001) convincingly argues that despite tensions and challenges to be negotiated around complex issues such as race and ethnicity, the supports given by the arts councils and government programs have helped change the face of Canadian literature to become more representative of the country's increasingly diverse population.

As our study shows, today Canadian writers and publishers face many new challenges from globalization. The publishing industry acts as a gatekeeper to determine which authors will get published and reach a broader audience, and which ones will not, although with emerging technologies and big chain store buyers, the gatekeepers are changing. Foucault's work provides a useful framework for analyzing ways in which these changes may impact on adult learning and citizenship in relation to fiction writing.

The research study

This research study explores connections between citizenship, fiction writing, and lifelong learning. Thus far we have conducted forty-one interviews with traditionally published fiction writers. The majority are Canadian, although we included interviews with five American authors and three writers from the United Kingdom to gain insights into cross-cultural experiences. All of the authors are English-speaking and come from the areas of CanLit (Canadian literary fiction), Children's/Young Adult (YA) fiction, and mystery/crime fiction writing. Whilst categorization is not easy as many authors write in several genres including drama or poetry, these categories were chosen to a) include an area of popular genre fiction that reaches a broad audience of readers, as well as b) authors who write for younger readers—thus considering the importance of learning from fiction across the lifespan. Several of these authors have also written books designed for low-level literacy adult learners. Some participants are emerging authors, others are highly recognized, and we used a purposive sampling approach (Collins, 2010) to ensure representation from diverse backgrounds and geographical regions in Canada.

Additionally, we interviewed twenty-two 'key informants'—individuals in the publishing, policy and educational sectors, including arts councils, publishing houses, and creative writing programs. Their viewpoints help to paint a bigger picture of what is at stake with publishing fiction in Canada today.

Like many adult educators, we were interested in considering various biographical as well as social and cultural factors that shape learning across the lifespan (Olkinuora, Rinne, Mäkinen, Järvinen, & Jauhiainen, 2008). To explore this, we used a life history approach for the interviews with the authors. As MacIntyre (2012, p. 190) argues, a life histories approach ensures 'that the learners' experiences of learning' remain the focal point of a study, while at the same time these experiences are understood 'in the contexts of their biographies'. The life history interviews averaged between an hour and a half to two hours in duration.

Scheibelhofer (2008) discusses the idea of the problem-centred interview that combines the 'narrative interview [which] is often used to study biographical processes' (p. 406) with more specific questions brought in by the interviewer in the latter part of the interview to focus in on the information most pertinent to the study. In these interviews we tried to balance giving participants space to share their own stories whilst keeping a focus on the learning experiences connected with becoming a published writer. For key informants, the interviews were shorter and more targeted, focused on obtaining a better understanding of their organization's role in supporting fiction writing

in Canada. Participants could review and edit their transcripts. The authors in this study consented to have their identities revealed, but had the option to select quotations to be used but not directly attributed to them. Key informants had the same options, although they could also opt for complete confidentiality.

In this paper we decided a Foucauldian analysis would work best when focusing upon the complex, fluid, and rapidly changing nature of the publishing industry. We combined this with a grounded theory (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001) approach to analyze the data, recognizing ‘the need for systematic interactions between data and ideas as well as the emergent properties of research design and data analysis, which are in constant dialogue’ (Atkinson & Delamont, 2005, p. 833). Some of the questions pertained to whether authors or publishers had received government funding, connections between Canadian fiction and Canadian citizenship, and the impact of technologies on publishing. With a particular focus on the impact of publishing, we distilled three major themes to explore in this paper: a) Publishing Matters, b) Governmentality, Self-Regulation and Circulation, and c) Critical Social Learning and Fiction.

Publishing matters

Just as Foucault often plays with multiple meanings of a single word, we also use a pun to consider how publishing ‘matters’ to Canadian authors, the government, the industry, and the broader public. Milana (2012) argues that increasingly policies pertaining to adult education are not seen as either ‘a global concern or a national affair’, but rather in terms of ‘global-local interconnectedness’ (p. 783). Historically, the development of government supports for the arts in Canada, such as the Canada Council, have been linked with the belief that it is important to sustain and foster the development of a national body of literature. This is a ‘matter’ of national concern that relates to lifelong learning and citizenship, in that through fiction Canadian writers have the opportunity to create their own stories that can be shared through informal, non-formal, and formal educational contexts (Gouthro & Holloway, 2013). At the same time, however, globalization is changing the nature of the publishing industry.

As Harvey (2006) notes, neoliberal influences push toward open markets, free trade, and lessening government supports for anything that is not deemed to be profitable. Emma Donoghue, an Irish writer who emigrated to Canada many years ago notes that most of her income comes from being published in the United States. She wryly observes ‘you can be an utterly beloved Canadian writer, but if you’re only published in Canada it’s hard to make a living because it’s not a big enough market.’ A neoliberal model for publishing is a death knell for the majority of Canadian writers if they wish to make enough money to be able to dedicate their work life to writing.

The arts councils provide financial support to assist small presses to publish works that are deemed to be valuable representations of Canadian culture. They also have competitions where writers may be awarded money to cover their subsistence costs while they dedicate time to a writing project and provide travel grants so that authors can promote their work and attend literary festivals. However, literary writer and professor, Roy Miki, argues that globalization entered into cultural production, the shift occurred around the mid-nineties. Up until that time, Canada Council saw itself as a cultural creation institution, and that the money was stimulating creativity. When economic globalization came in, culture was economized and we began to think of culture mainly in economic terms. In recent years there have been cutbacks to funding

councils which impacts upon the ability of Canadian fiction writers to publish their work and earn enough money to sustain a full-time career as an author.

Nino Ricci, who has twice won the Canadian Governor General's Award for his literary novels says, 'what is interesting and a bit disturbing to me, is that for twenty years I was able to make a living as a writer, and now that seems no longer possible...apart from a small handful of writers'. A key informant notes that:

McClelland and Stewart [a well-established Canadian Publishing firm] was just finally, officially purchased by Bertelsmann. That means all those Canadian titles are now owned by a German conglomerate, which I find troubling. They say they'll keep their commitment to publishing Canadian works and keeping Canadian works in print, but . . . I don't know that the multinationals have any sense of obligation to publishing Canadian literature.

Foucault acknowledges there are tangible constrictions that shape processes, procedures, and circulation. Borrowing on Foucault's (2004) analysis of circulation, no matter how brilliant a book is, its impact upon society will be non-existent or minimal if it never gets published or circulated to the reading public. Distribution issues are also complicated by changes in the global marketplace. For example, Canadian mystery writer, Elizabeth Duncan, said:

[Canadian] H. B. Fenn has just closed and that was a major distributor. My book is published by an American publishing house that relied on H.B. Fenn to distribute them in this country, so maybe my own books won't even be available here.

Getting published becomes somewhat of a moot point if the author cannot then circulate the book. Publishing 'matters' as well in the material sense—the many stages of production of a book are based in physical reality. We cannot separate out the final product—the book of fiction—from the process of becoming a book. Foucault (2004) in his critique of materiality would argue this process is a large part of where the relations of power are exercised, which involve the author, editors, peer reviewers, government granting agencies, publishers, distributors, advertisers, book sellers, and consumers. At every stage, material realities shape what is possible in the imagined realm of how to publish a book of fiction. These include the costs of paper, cover design, and typesetting as well as the costs of shipping, positioning the book in high profile locations, and the costs of returns.

Foucault (1969/2011) qualifies that matter is 'datum', that is, the facts used for calculation. Any imperative discourse (such as claims circulated in the publishing industry about how publishing should happen) must necessarily work within 'a field of forces that cannot be created by the words of a speaking subject alone, because it is a field of forces that cannot be controlled or asserted within this kind of imperative discourse' (p. 3). This 'material reality' of the changing nature of publishing in a neoliberal, global context creates multiple challenges for Canadian writers and publishers. One key informant discussed 'the evaporating retail market' for hard copy books, noting 'Indigo, which is our big chain . . . recently decided to reduce their inventory to less than 50 percent books now . . . so there's no place to get books out there in front of people's eyes'. E-technologies are also greatly changing the world of publishing and altering the material reality of what constitutes a book.

One key informant who works in publishing notes 'we do have eBooks for all of our new titles and most of our backlist . . . the eBook sales are bigger every month, so it is definitely growing'. In the selling of e-books, Blankfield and Stevenson (2012) argue that publishers are still figuring out how to best protect their electronic legal rights as

illegal sites are multiplying exponentially and all too often 'by the time they [rightsholders] have discovered file sharing, many thousands of copies could be circulating the Web' (p. 86). This raises concerns over whether authors will have a protected income if publishers cannot control the sales of their books.

Furthermore, as Roncevic (2013) states, 'not all e-books may be read on all devices While the number of dedicated e-readers continues to grow, so does the frustration surrounding the limitations imposed on users who own only one reading device or a library able to afford only one type of e-book platform' (p. 11). These devices have been developed along traditional business model lines of competition and exclusion, which leave readers with fewer options to access books or even be aware of their existence. There is also no commitment from companies that develop reading devices to promote fiction according to the authors' nationality. Mystery writer Vicki Delany notes:

I have a Kobo, and if you go on the website, all you see on the front page are best sellers. You can select by category, and if you select Mystery and Suspense, up comes Dan Brown, James Patterson, and those kinds of people; there's no place to look for Canadians. You can search but that means you have to have a name and a title.

Arguably, a huge advantage of e-books is that they can surmount the physical limitations of paper usage and the distribution systems for printed books. At the same time, this has led to a surge in growth in 'indie-writers' who forego the traditional publishing process. As author Susanna Kearsley says:

It's going to change for a lot of writers, especially the writer coming up. You're probably going to get a lot more of them finding ways to publish their own work; you can do that now through Amazon.

While some people believe this offers new potential for authors who have been excluded from traditional publishing to get their work into the public domain, others are concerned about the detrimental impact this might have on the quality of fiction that is available and financial repercussions for established writers (since indie-authors often offer their books for a fraction of the price of traditional books). Overall, there is a great unease as no one can predict the future of book publishing. It is difficult to predict whether there will be adequate supports to sustain the development of a substantive body of Canadian literature, which may have implications for opportunities regarding lifelong learning related to citizenship.

Governmentality, self-regulation and circulation

In developing a critical analysis of lifelong learning within a neoliberal context, Foucault's concepts of governmentality and self-regulation provide useful insights. Tuschling and Engemann (2006) argue that 'governmentality theory focuses on the techniques that allow the alignment of governmental interventions with self-regulative capacities of individuals, simultaneously spawning and utilizing them' (p. 451). The coercive effects of power can be seen when neoliberal values such as individual responsibility, competition, and the overarching need to appease the marketplace are not challenged within lifelong learning policies or wider discourses of learning. As learners embrace this ideology, they may 'self-regulate' by adhering to a notion that learning only has merit if it can be measured, accounted for, and attributed economic value.

Art is an important tool to denaturalize power relations we have become accustomed to, and has often been used by feminists, for example, to challenge learners to think about alternative perspectives and frameworks (Clover, 2010). Jarvis (2012) explores ‘the potential that fiction may have for promoting social critique and action’ (pp. 743–744), considering how learning in connection to fiction may spark empathy. We also see that fiction provides valuable opportunities to critically reflect upon issues connected to citizenship by challenging taken-for-granted assumptions, exploring complicated issues, and providing insights into alternative perspectives. Foucault’s notion of circulation sees power connected to learning moving in multiple ways—not only from the imposition of neoliberal policies and the hegemonic acceptance of dominant belief systems, but also in the forms of resistance that arise to challenge these discourses.

Foucault (1978/1990) argues that the structural divisions of power that characterize circulation is of less importance than being able to identify the underlying desires that imbue change. This desire to change may entail ‘effects that may be those of refusal, blockage, and invalidation, but also incitement and intensification: in short, the ‘polymorphous techniques of power’’ (p. 11). For example, the arts councils can use funds to exert power on the publication and circulation of books by influencing the traditional literary canon, which is a well-established body of literature that has historically lacked diversity. This intervention of the arts councils is important in determining the material reality of what books will be published and given opportunities for wider distribution. One of the key characteristics of the arts councils in Canada is that they have been established to be at arms-length from the government, so that they can be autonomous in selecting what projects they will fund, according to a peer adjudication process. Literary writer and professor Nicole Markotić cautions that:

... the government has cut back on the Canada Council, but then it's given more support to what it calls ‘cultural activity’, which is folk dances, piano lessons . . . things that commodify culture in a particular way. So, in a way, that's the government deciding what art is, and that's dangerous with any government . . . you're going to get artists who turn away from that, and do what they're doing, then no one hears about it for a few decades. Or, they grab onto that, and they're just feeding into an idea of art established by someone else. So that's never good for a country, for a nation.

Implicit in Markotić’s comment is that writers may make ethical decisions as they learn their way into publishing as to whether or not they might compromise their art—or ‘self-regulate’—in order to conform to what they think are the criteria for publications or grants. Markotić further contextualizes what seem to be ‘individual’ choices of authors, observing that how the writing community is shaped through the federal government-at-large funding and policies will have implications for which stories and how stories are told. In addition, she points to the danger of what Guo (2013) defines as a conservative or liberal approach to multiculturalism—in which case deeper levels of critical engagement with important social issues are discouraged while more superficial aspects of cultural diversity are endorsed.

The importance of delving into issues such as diversity is an integral aspect of considering citizenship in an increasingly multicultural society, such as Canada. Literary writer Suzette Mayr comments on how she consciously plays with the complexities of diversity, for example, thinking through first versus second or third generation immigration experiences, or the biases of readers:

It really bothers me that the default position in novels if you don't specify a character's race or ethnicity is that they're white, and probably of Scottish, Irish, or English descent. I

don't want readers in my books to take that for granted even if a character has a certain name, and I don't specify who they are.

Mayr's approach points to how writers can provoke the sort of critical questioning that adult educators can draw upon to examine important social issues pertaining to citizenship by using fiction.

Foucault might ask, 'why now?' Why is it now when neoliberalism seems to have piqued at its height of power since its inception over 60 years ago (see Olssen, Codd, & O'Neill, 2004 for a history of neoliberalism) that Canadian fiction is now embracing diversity more so than it has ever done in the past despite shrinking publishing markets? Neoliberalism places no value on ethnic and linguistic diversity beyond how these 'features' can be incorporated to make businesses run better.

The publishing houses, arts councils, and writers consistently commented that the financial support and a conscious focus on diversity by the arts institutions in Canada have contributed to the higher number of writers of diverse backgrounds being published, particularly in the realm of literary fiction. Hegemony cannot completely ignore the discursive power and claim of the 'author function' in society for better representation of this diversity. So it is not just that fiction writers are choosing to write about diversity more than in the past, but that the Canadian publishing industry, which depends largely on supports from arts councils, is encouraging and allowing these voices to be heard, although not in completely unproblematic ways.

For example, Roberts (2008) points out there were a flurry of newspaper articles from British papers disparaging whether renowned Canadian writers such as Michael Ondaatje or Rohinton Mistry, who are of Sri Lankan and East Indian descent respectively, and whose books are often set outside of Canada, could be named as Canadian authors. Nevertheless, despite such scimmages in the press, an undoubtedly new characteristic of Canadian fiction is the breadth of diversity that explores a wide range of societal issues. Hegemony feels the pushback of the masses, the population, asking for better representation of their backgrounds and experiences. People then believe they are being heard and seen in the portraits in fiction—that their story has merit, and they draw new images in their minds of what it means to be a citizen who 'owns' the language of fiction used to describe their experiences. Fiction provides a conduit for the circulation of ideas about citizenship—about identity, social issues, power struggles, and shifting discursive practices. Nicoll et al. (2013), say citizenship:

... can be analysed in terms of the field discourse as that delineating possible action, the effects of the power relations produced and maintained and as resources that help make specific actions possible. This shifts the focus from the institution of citizenship and the citizen as agent *to* discourses and acts of citizenship and the power relations that these imply and maintain. (pp. 838–839)

This approach to defining how citizenship functions fits very well with Foucault's theories of power. Analogously, it provides a new dimension for thinking about fiction, critical social learning, the 'author function,' and citizenship. Citizenship education is problematic if it tries to inculcate certain values such as defining a normative definition of 'a collective moral character' (Nicoll et al., 2013, p. 835). Fiction and the 'author function,' may work as an example for how to examine what Nicoll et al. (2013) propose are already 'existing discourses and practices' (p. 834) about citizenship that have not received official attention, yet nevertheless shape how citizenship is enacted and engaged with daily.

Critical social learning and fiction

Critical social learning entails having learners engage in dialogue and reflection to explore alternative perspectives and consider difficult issues such as culture, identity, citizenship, and participation in governance. Vandenabeele and Wildemeersch (2012) note ‘learning related to public issues is a multilevel activity’ in their study of how farmers engage in learning related to sustainability through everyday practices (p. 70). For the farmers this involved negotiations with other citizens, environmental groups, and governing councils, as well as personal reflection informed by the media and various biographical experiences. Ultimately, Vandenabeele and Wildemeersch (2012) argue that ‘it is impossible to learn with one unifying truth in mind’ (p. 69)—at least with an issue as complex as reconciling sustainability and modern agricultural processes. A Foucauldian analysis reveals that this is also the case for many issues debated around learning, fiction writing, and citizenship.

Fiction can be a key tool for critical social learning because it provides carefully, artistically wrought portrayals of communities and society that can influence individual and collective views about citizenship. Simons and Masschelein (2010) argue it is important ‘to emphasize a critical attitude towards the present’ (p. 393), which may mean raising contentious issues that need to be debated within localized, national, and international communities. As literary writer Rosemary Nixon states:

Stories have conflict and complications and they deal with things we don't want to look at Look at Mariam Toews' *A Complicated Kindness*. The Mennonites were so upset over that. Look at Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*. The Bengali community was outraged that she . . . because nobody wants their dirty laundry hung, nobody . . . and it isn't dirty laundry, it's being human in the world. So I think it teaches us so much about the way to live and the way not to live; any powerful book does.

The ‘author function’ helps to complicate the discursive terrain of citizenship in the larger cultural context. For example, the Giller and Booker literary Prize nights are highly televised, the Canadian Broadcasting show *Canada Reads* is very popular, and quips on Canada’s diverse population with shows such as *Little Mosque on the Prairies* (alluding to the famous American novel series called *Little House on the Prairies*) suggest that fiction writing is undeniably situated in popular discourse. Here, we want to draw attention to how fiction writers and their works, now inserted into broader popular culture, means that the circulation of the ideas in their writing (if not always the books themselves) circulate ever wider, giving greater power to the concepts they offer. This is a form of critical social learning. If we connect this circulation of fiction writers’ ideas back to the notion of ‘citizenship *from* discursive practices’ (Nicoll et al., 2013, p. 834), we see that the discourse of Canadian fiction writing has the power to influence how people think of their relations to society, to government, and their roles as citizens.

Some critical educators would argue that hegemony allows for these forms of resistance in the belief that they will not result in any significant overthrow of the current power regimes that be—that it is simply an example of ‘repressive tolerance’ (Brookfield, 2005). We would like to think otherwise. Readers/audiences who have now experienced such a broad range of fiction will not willingly go back to narrow forms of prose; they will continue to desire fiction that represents their experiences. As the publishing sector has broadened its parameters to include more writers of diverse backgrounds, a precedent has been set that may shape the evolution of Canadian fiction. Therefore, the possibility of fiction’s power to shape realities including how citizenship

is defined and practiced, and fields of power in the larger society, still poses a real threat to hegemony.

Foucault (1980) consistently advocates for the potential of resistance, arguing, ‘there are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations are exercised’ (p. 142). The ‘author function’ positions writers as important to citizenship, culture, and industry. Writers’ relations to publishers, arts councils, writers’ unions, and creative writing programs shape the ‘author function’ and sometimes form sites of resistance to dominant discourses, thus providing opportunities for critical social learning.

Through fiction, educators in formal and non-formal contexts may introduce learners to complicated social issues that relate to citizenship through stories that take up difficult aspects of a nation’s history—such as the exploitation of immigrant labourers or Aboriginal peoples. Current political debates, such as francophone and LBGTQ (Lesbian/bisexual/gay/transgendered/queer) rights and perspectives may be explored. Through informal contexts, individual readers or members of the public who follow programs such as *Canada Reads*, citizens may be exposed to stories of fictional characters who live in different geographical regions—so a person in downtown Toronto may learn about life in rural Cape Breton by reading an Alistair MacLeod novel. Fiction provides opportunities for developing critical literacy skills; a capacity to not only read about different perspectives, but to appreciate what it means to be a Canadian in a complex global world.

In their examination of the *Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning—European Framework*, Pirrie and Thoutenhoofd (2013) argue that current discourses in lifelong learning have been strongly influenced by human capital theory, which focuses on individuals’ learning skills that can enable them to contribute to the economy. This is a very different approach from lifelong learning as ‘a much broader conception of human flourishing’ (p. 614). They raise critical questions about the orientation of policies around lifelong learning that claim to include considerations of citizenship and wellbeing, but lack theoretical grounding, are imbued with the technical language of competencies, and focus primarily on cognitive learning related to economic objectives. Policies such as these rarely take into account how other policies in the arts sectors, such as in the realm of publishing, impact on opportunities for learning around citizenship. There needs to be a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of how learning around citizenship is integrally connected to a nation’s social and cultural repertoire of knowledge, which is often not explicitly linked to learning and the labour market.

Petersson et al. (2007) contend that governments construct citizens through ‘cultural theses about ‘how to think’’ (p. 52) formed through the relations of ‘an amalgamation of institutions, authority relations, stories’ (p. 52). Fiction can contribute to the multitude of stories that shape learning around discourses of citizenship, but art is not necessarily created (like a policy document) to propel a particular vision of citizenship forward. Fiction writers have the acumen to comment through their fictionalized worlds on a myriad of societal issues, often including voices of marginalized groups, which would otherwise not be heard. This is not to say that all writers are interested in political critiques through their writing. Writers can both affirm or challenge dominant discourses through their fiction. They represent a plethora of views that can allow for multiple ways of problematizing what is citizenship in the Canadian globalized context.

Conclusion

Canadian writers are part of and constituted in and through relations to the larger societal discourse. Thus, an examination of the publishing industry, and a consideration of how fiction can promote critical social learning, also gives insight into larger societal power relations. ‘The author function is therefore characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses with a society’ (Foucault, 1984, p. 108). Foucault (1978/1990) posits that power cannot be analyzed in larger, generalized ways; instead, one has to focus in on specific practices within a particular domain to understand the technologies and effects of power. The Canadian publishing industry’s complexities, and the importance of fiction in relation to the culture, serve to illustrate how authors are positioned in the ‘author function’—in relations with larger institutional organizations that foster or impede their writing.

In a very pragmatic, yet also philosophical sense, Canadian citizens must choose to what extent it is important to support Canadian fiction through tax dollars and government policies, as well as through their choices as readers and educators in using Canadian fiction as a resource for lifelong learning. In Foucauldian terms, this ‘desire’ becomes a form of power to support the work of fiction writers in developing work that can be used for critical social learning. As Biesta (2012) notes in his discussion of Foucault, ‘power and knowledge *never* occur separately, but always come together’ (p. 13). The reading public and educators might take for granted that writers will continue to write and that their work will be circulated, but the institutions that authors must by necessity rely upon to achieve publication may no longer fall under the auspice of future governments, who rationalize away the abstract and intangible benefits of what fiction contributes to knowledge building. A neoliberal framework that emphasizes the values of the marketplace over critical cultural interests may permanently alter opportunities for learning in connection to citizenship if a nation’s fiction is eradicated or diminished in scope.

Although our paper focuses on the Canadian context, we believe that not only writers and publishers, but the broader citizenry in most countries have a vested interest in the production and circulation of fiction. The stories that belong to a nation also belong to its people. We are left uncertain whether future writers in Canada or elsewhere will be able to have access and support to tell their stories as the world of publishing unfolds in ways that mostly mirror a neoliberal mindset. Lobbyists perhaps have less sway now than 40 years ago because governments have less power in the globalized world of multinational companies. In this paper, we want to draw attention to the importance of fiction as a resource for critical social learning related to citizenship. Not only writers and publishers, but educators, as well as members of the reading public including parents of school children, new immigrants, women’s groups—just to name a few, may create resistance to hegemonic belief systems by putting pressure on the gatekeepers of the publishing world to ensure they have access to stories that represent different kinds of experiences and concerns. As power is exercised and circulated through the relations between all parties involved in publishing, we hope that the desire to hear multiple voices in fiction will continue to enhance the diversity of Canadian fiction that is published—in whatever form that may take in the future.

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