

At the last minute we are including a submission to the International Commission on Education and Learning for the Twenty-First Century by the International Council for Adult Education which was compiled by a group of adult education colleagues in late March in Toronto and presented to the Commission during their meeting in Vancouver, 11 and 12 April, 1994. The final report of the Commission will be available in 1995. For more information, please write to: ICAE, 720 Bathurst Street, Suite 500, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 2R4.

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ICAE

Adult education and lifelong learning: Issues, concerns and recommendations

**Submission to the International Commission
on Education and Learning for the Twenty-First Century
by the International Council for Adult Education**

Preamble

1. This submission, prepared at the request of the International Commission on Education and Learning for the Twenty-First Century, highlights some major issues, concerns and recom-

mentations regarding the field of adult education. In no way should the following ideas be interpreted as final. They are meant as an invitation to re-think the field and revitalize the necessary debate which needs to take place within the community of adult education and with related fields.

2. Education is undergoing a world-wide crisis. Adult education is part of that crisis, recognized as such by its own community. However, we see this crisis not as a breakdown, but rather as a challenge and as an opportunity for a strong new beginning.
3. While optimism about ongoing and future developments is the spirit with which our group worked, we feel reluctant to opt for the usual and increasingly common path of highlighting a number of success stories. We strongly believe in the impossibility and impracticality of universal models, given not only the diversity of contexts and situations but also the uniqueness of each process. The reasons for optimism stem basically from the experience gained and the openness and self-criticism that have accompanied the field in the last few years, making it possible now to advance and take a qualitative leap forward.

Issues

4. On the level of discourse, much has already been said and elaborated on during the last few decades. Realities and practices, however, have rarely shown that rhetoric translates into coherent practice. The gap between **discourse and practice** continues to be a major issue within the field. The discourse has become stagnant in the absence of contact and learning from other fields (including children's and higher education). It lacks the stimulation of challenging feedback from systematized practices and analyses to cope with a changing reality.

5. As with the regular school system which today faces major criticism and reform efforts, adult education needs **critical analysis and reflection** on lessons learned from past experience, with an eye to the future of our societies. Old approaches which helped to shape adult education policies are still present in many respects but they are rooted in assumptions which are no longer valid in our contemporary world where all important domains related to adults and adult education have seen dramatic changes: work, production, technology, mass media, expectations on education, values, etc.

Concerns

6. At a time when children are taking on traditional adult responsibilities (i.e., working for an income, caring for their brothers and sisters, housekeeping, competing for survival in the streets and sweatshops, etc.) and an increasing proportion of adults are being treated as children in the sense of being seen as passive and unproductive members of society, the differentiation between adult and children's education is becoming nebulous.
7. Adult education is vital for children's education, because it is adults — parents, teachers, politicians, technicians, ruling parties, etc. — who are in charge of educating children at home, in school and through the media, and deciding what, how and why children need to learn. Hence, the usual **dichotomy** between children's education versus adult education (usually expressed in terms of allocation of resources, especially when these are scarce) is a false dichotomy.
8. The emphasis placed on girls' and women's education has not been accompanied by the necessary increase in financial resources. The support systems and measures necessary to

ensure the participation of women are being ignored as well. Primary (children's) education seems to be winning the battle with basic education, to the detriment of adult education. Playing one age sector against another is not the right approach if the goal is to achieve education for all.

9. **Lifelong learning** is a prerequisite for today's society, and even more so for the future. It has implications for schools and institutions of higher learning as well as adult education institutions:
- schools build on what children have learned in their families, in kindergarten, and in their peer groups, but most important is the school's contribution to children's motivation and ability to continue learning;
 - institutions of higher education should not be seen as the provider of the last cycle of education for the privileged few, but as a mass system for an ever-growing number of adults upgrading their knowledge and skills;
 - adult education, in all its different facets and approaches, already deals with the majority of the people in society, since we are all younger or older adults, or children who will become adults in due course.
10. There is currently much talk about **demand-driven education**, but the problem remains as to who will pose the demands, by which procedures, and what relation they will have with the subjective and objective needs of individuals, communities and society. The market has already proven to be a poor guide for investments, and cannot guide education any better. Private enterprise as well as consumers tend to think in terms of immediate needs which do not serve long-range goals well. There is a need for a strategic view which can only come from social

reflection and prospect analysis that must be undertaken by State institutions. We must remember that in social science, more than in natural sciences, reflection and analysis must be accompanied by actions that help to make the ideas a reality. Thus, we need the resolve to shape the world and not merely contemplate the tragedy of billions. As has always been the case, a discussion centred on education is, in the end, also a discussion on what kind of society we dare to hope for.

11. When education is pursued as a sectoral policy per se, it can cause harm and have undesired effects. For instance, **universal basic education** without a change in the strategies of production and accumulation of the corporate world and the State may produce a further depression in salaries and wages due to the excess supply of labour on a global scale. Instead of empowering the people, it could force them to compete for a reduced number of quality jobs.
12. Even though **basic education** is intended to lay the foundations of knowledge upon which all other learning through life would be built, it is a very difficult target to reach. The content of basic education constantly changes just as our world is constantly changing. In many cases the attention given by governments to basic education has resulted in reducing the provision of education to its minimal level thereby degrading adult education.

Recommendations

13. Education appears as a possible panacea for the problems of the world. Among other things, the education system should deliver equity, productivity, citizenship, tolerance, and development. Although any meaningful breakthrough in those areas has an educational dimension, only an **integrated approach**

would be efficient. This means other types of economic and social reforms, extending property rights and accepting other types of property apart from individual property, establishment of a more humane relationship between productivity and access to basic needs, democratization of political power, and development of appropriate technologies, etc.

14. **Lifelong learning**, emphasized strongly in the last couple of years (and in the Faure report itself, 20 years ago) is far from becoming a reality or even being systematically included in policy development and programming. Lifelong learning is the framework within which adult education needs to be understood, but it is not limited to the adult world. It embraces childhood, youth and adulthood, and should embrace all learning environments and learning opportunities (i.e., home, work, school, media, etc.). Thus there is a need to differentiate between lifelong **education** and lifelong **learning** (and adult **education** and adult **learning**). Learning occurs even in the absence of a systematic education process, outside schools and formal education settings. Therefore it is essential to recognize, emphasize, and at the same time, differentiate the various learning environments and opportunities as well as the importance of revising conventional classifications such as those of formal, non-formal and informal education, which no longer belong to well-defined educational realities. Rather, they contribute to artificially separate what is actually an educational continuum.
15. Adult education must become a more **open and flexible system** that incorporates less conventional media such as self-directed learning, distance education, and new technologies. The learning opportunities through the media must be acknowledged. By using these means, adult education can improve access and provision of programmes to those who have traditionally not taken part in it for any number of reasons.

16. The code of conduct of our profession asks for a **lifelong perspective** in the training of trainers, teachers, and organizers involved in adult education. They have to update their knowledge, to improve and broaden their skills, and learn to cope with frustrations on the job long before burn-out occurs.
17. If adults are to learn to **participate in development**, decision-making at their places of work, or becoming self-reliant and responsible citizens, participatory methods and approaches are essential. If creativity in finding solutions to complex situations is increasingly required in the world of adult life, then this should determine the processes of lifelong learning and education.
18. The Education For All Initiative, with its broader vision of basic education, understood as the education which meets the basic learning needs of children, youth and adults, provided a new conceptual and operational framework for adult education, recognizing adults' basic learning needs with the same legitimacy and urgency as those of children and youth. Jomtien's Declaration and Framework for Action also stressed other important elements such as the need for intersectoral approaches to education (supportive policies to enhance learning environments and conditions) and **new alliances and partnerships**.
19. Adult education is not limited to adult literacy nor is it education for the poor. It should not be seen as a compensatory social policy to alleviate poverty, but rather as a tool for **human development and self-reliance (human capital)**.
20. Adult education must be **all-inclusive** by including people of all ages, genders, ethnic and social backgrounds. It must take into account the numerous aspects of lives and identities of the individuals (i.e., citizens, parents, caregivers, workers, educa-

tors, consumers, etc.) and therefore needs to incorporate the learning needs of all adults in all their capacities. Women, in particular, need to be seen not only as mothers or housewives but, first of all, as persons. Immigrants and refugees have identities beyond their labels as such and need to be not only respected, but appreciated in those capacities.

21. Although the number of illiterates in the total world population is decreasing, the rate of female illiteracy is still higher than male. Sufficient research has been accumulated to demonstrate the implications of female illiteracy for **social change and economic development**, for population growth and health and on the relationship between the mother's literacy and the education of the child. More efforts and resources should be concentrated on dealing with male/female literacy disparity. We also know that it is mainly women who are attending the literacy classes when available. There is not sufficient data as to what motivates them, whether they are able to maintain their attendance and interest, how appropriate are the materials used, etc.
22. The conventional notion of literacy/literate needs a thorough revision. Being able to read and write a simple statement of everyday life is not enough to prepare people to face the complexities of the modern world, much less those of the 21st century. Literacy itself is a lifelong learning process — **an ever-moving target**. The abundant knowledge produced in recent years in the field of children's literacy has hardly been disseminated and incorporated into the field of adult education. The recent contribution of linguists, psychologists, and ethnographers has not been sufficiently considered.
23. The **integration of all adult education**, including general, political, cultural, and vocational education into a lifelong perspective is essential. We must overcome false assumptions and dichotomies:

- technical training and re-training go together with the acquisition of social skills;
- key vocational qualifications include learning, communication, and analytical skills on and for all levels;
- learning needs of the individual are increasingly the learning needs of the society;
- there is no ultimate knowledge and know-how;
- personal growth should interact with and strengthen social development;
- the improvement of quality should not weaken the commitment and provision of education for all;
- national efforts should not undermine local, community-oriented structures and their requirements.

24. In *Aid and Education in the Developing World*, Kenneth King suggests that the nineties is a good time for adult educators to take stock of the tradition of small-scale participatory adult education and literacy that has been continuing for the last 20 years. »National and international NGOs like ICAE and the major co-financing institutions are the obvious repositories of what has been learned in the myriad of almost invisible interventions.« (p. 163) The biggest difference of whatever emerges in the revisitation of literacy on a world scale in the 1990s can be made by the contribution of the NGO sector.
25. In adult education, as in other fields, we need to look at **new partnerships** as well as old responsibilities. Public institutions and private companies, voluntary organizations and professional associations, and initiatives in related fields have to share their experiences, and they can all give new life to adult continuing education, including research of the universities and research institutes. Competition and market forces must not prevent cooperation. Moreover, governments must provide constructive legislation and a framework of financial and logistical support which is conducive to the momentous tasks of the next decades which will see more adults living in this world than ever before.

Closing

We understand that our contribution to the work of the Commission has only just begun. We will continue the discussion to provide more ideas for the Commission. As we contemplate the future of adult education and lifelong learning, we cannot ignore the contribution of regional and inter-regional co-operation in terms of information and exchange. Such co-operation provides a forum for critical reflection and constructive exchanges on the challenges of education and learning for the 21st century.

The Commission Members

- Jacques Delors, Commission Chairman, President of the Commission of the European Communities.
- Iseo Amagi, Special Advisor to the Minister of Education, Science and Culture in Japan.
- Roberto Carneiro, President TVI (Televisão Independente), Portugal.
- Ms Fey Chwag, Minister of State for National Affairs, Creation of Employment and Cooperatives in Zimbabwe, former Education Minister.
- Bronislaw Goremek, historian, Member of Parliament in Poland.
- William Gorham, President of the Urban Institute in Washington D.C., USA.
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- Abdallah Laroui, Professor of History at the Mohammed V University, Rabat, Morocco.
- Rt. Hon. Michael Manley, former Prime Minister of Jamaica.
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