

ADULT EDUCATION: A Lifelong Journey

International Trends 2002-2003³

Before developing an adult education policy for Quebec, researchers looked at eleven countries, two Canadian provinces¹, and three international organizations¹ to identify adult basic education trends. They wrote "*Tirer profit des expériences internationales*".² At the end of 2002, they produced several English language summaries. The next few pages are synopses of the English documents, produced by the Quebec ministry of Education (MEQ). They are offered here without critical commentary. Some uncertainty in the use of the words "education" and "training" seems partially attributable to translation. The tone remains positive and inspiring. Ed.



ORIENTATIONS FOR BASIC EDUCATION

All sources mention significant change in industrialized countries due to globalization, transformation of work, and development of information technologies. Adult education is seen as vital to improve workers' competencies and to close the social divide.

Overall assessment

Most countries mentioned students dropping out of training, inconsistent program quality, lack of interest from under-qualified individuals, lack of program funding, and lack of outcomes. Government measures that link funding for adult education to rapid results may make programs less accessible to under-educated individuals and to the unemployed.

Three emerging trends

International policies and orientations can be grouped into three general categories, although there may be more than one trend in a particular country.

- **Adult education should be mainly based on the needs of the job market**

Adult education is seen as essential for economic development and necessary for global competitiveness and to avoid widening the social divide between haves and have-nots.

- **Adult education should be regarded as a right for all in order to develop active citizenship and a more just and democratic society**
From a citizenship and cultural perspective, the needs of individuals and communities take precedence, and learning should involve dimensions besides employability. Learning offers a means of expression and a tool for marginalized groups to find their own solutions.
- **It is necessary to reconcile citizenship and employability**
In this view, adult education is essential to uphold democracies... “[S]ocial integration, the enhancement of employability and personal fulfillment are not incompatible.”⁴

PROGRAMS ASSOCIATED WITH BASIC EDUCATION

Shades of meaning

The definition of “basic education” varies from country to country and, in Canada, from province to province. For example, in Quebec, it refers mainly to literacy services; in British Columbia, it includes the end of secondary studies.

In all countries, to varying degrees, basic education has three objectives: school-to-work transition, social participation or advancement, and personal development.

A few observations about programs

There are both shared and distinguishing characteristics of ABE programs. Differences depend on the extent to which the adult system is seen as distinct from the youth system. The debate is complex. Differences can be highlighted through a series of questions:

- **Program objectives**
What is the place of school-to-work transition, social participation or advancement, and personal development, and what are the links among them?
- **Program content**
Is content limited to literacy (reading, writing, numbers) or does it involve developing new competencies? Is it geared to the specific needs of adults or harmonized to the youth curriculum?
- **Social roles**
Does the program deal with social roles? If so, how? Are they central to the philosophy of the program or used as examples to teach competencies?

TARGET POPULATION FOR BASIC EDUCATION

The size of the target population varies widely from 7% in Sweden to 49% in Ontario. The IALS is frequently used to identify the target. The concern with literacy and basic competencies is new to industrialized countries over the last fifteen years. The most targeted groups are the unemployed, youth under 25, and immigrants. However, most countries admit they are not reaching these groups well, and that they need innovative measures. These include financial incentives, campaigns, and support for community organizations and groups that work with the targeted groups.

Certification of studies and recognition of prior learning

While the majority of countries recognize basic education through a certificate or diploma, it is not clear whether there is social recognition. There is a consensus that this recognition must be based on uniform national standards. In all countries there is talk about the need for recognition of prior learning, but basic education poses greater difficulties. There are some interesting approaches in France, Portugal and New Zealand.

Descriptions of the Record of Competencies in France⁵ and the Record of Learning in New Zealand are included.

CONCLUSION

A summary of the findings supports the importance of Quebec continuing to participate in studies such as IALS and suggests that the experience of some countries should inspire the work here. Four elements are identified as crucial: the goals and content of basic education, recognition of prior learning, mobilization of the target population, and certification. These are elaborated.

Adult basic education: Services undergoing significant transformation

In most countries, it is too early to determine the outcomes and effects of the implementation of new ABE initiatives. It is important to keep monitoring, to inform and inspire those involved in reforming basic education in Quebec.

1 The countries are: Denmark, England, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States. The provinces are British Columbia and Ontario. The organizations are the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), UNESCO, and the European Economic Community (EEC).
2 Québec, Ministère de L'Éducation, Tirer profit des expériences internationales. Québec: Direction de la recherche et de l'évaluation, September 2000. Available in French only.

3 Adult Education: A Lifelong Journey, Basic Education International Trends 2002-2003. Gouvernement du Québec, Ministère de L'Éducation. November 2002. 2002-02-01386. ISBN 2-550-40244-8

4 Commission of European Communities, White Paper on Education and Training—Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society (Brussels: Commission of European Communities, 1995).

5 Jacques Aubret, Le bilan des compétences (Institut national d'étude du travail et d'orientation professionnelle), Orientations, no. 15 (December 1999): 1. Translation.

