

ADULT EDUCATION AND POVERTY REDUCTION: A GLOBAL PRIORITY

Reflections on Challenges Facing the Adult Education Movement

This article considers the topic of adult education and poverty reduction. In particular, my reflections on the topic are based on my practice as Secretary General of the Latin American Council for Adult Education, known for its acronym CEAAL, a network of 206 civil society organizations from 21 different Latin American and Caribbean countries.

CEAAL is an active participant in adult education in Latin America and through joint initiatives with other networks, we also advocate in international arenas to promote education and development with justice and equality.

What have we observed in the field of adult education? What have we learned to date and what are we finding?

1. We have observed an intense process of encounters, exchange, and discussion about our own practices and experiences. Over the past seven years, I can identify at least five international gatherings where we have come together as adult educators:
 - a) V CONFINTEA in Hamburg in 1997
 - b) The review of the V CONFINTEA Action Plan in the Philippines in 1999
 - c) The International Assembly of ICAE in Jamaica in 2001
 - d) The Mid-Term Review of Adult Education Policy six years after the V CONFINTEA in Bangkok in 2003
 - e) This conference in Botswana in 2004.
2. If we add to this, the regional conferences held on different continents and numerous national gatherings, we can attest to the intense production of reflections and the fervent exchange of experiences that has taken place so far. Each of these meetings has resulted in declarations and positions regarding adult education.

3. We also have studies and documents that have sought to develop a State of the Art on our field of work internationally and that have identified specific challenges. I would like to mention a few of the texts that I find most representative and universal:
 - a) *Lifelong Learning: A New Momentum and a New Opportunity for Adult Basic Learning and Education (ABLE) in the South* by Rosa-Maria Torres (2002), published by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association
 - b) *Recommitting to Adult Education and Learning: The Synthesis Report of the CONFINTEA V Midterm Review* (2003), published by the UNESCO Institute for Education and the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association.
 - c) *Including the 900 Million: A Review of World Bank and World Experience in Supporting Programs of Non Formal Education and Literacy for Adults (NFEA)* by John Oxenham. Draft.
 - d) *Conference position paper: adult education and poverty reduction* by Julia Preece, University of Botswana and Ruud van der Veen, Columbia University, U.S.A.
4. So we now face the challenge of reviewing, organizing and systematizing the conclusions and recommendations these materials have to offer as we seek to develop a more coherent and useful agenda for our action, one that helps us to identify lessons learned and the topics we must continue to study and address in an in-depth fashion. In this way, we can adopt and appropriate relevant findings and also, find a guide for our advocacy and lobbying efforts.
5. The VI CONFINTEA is foreseen for the year 2009. We are still on time to present a more precise agenda of reflection that will allow us to take a step forward that will help us take a more in-depth look at adult education rather than going back to square one and repeating what we have already learned.
6. Along the path of these national and international conferences and meetings, we have also observed that there is a “movement” of adult educators built of government officials, civil society networks, researchers and academicians, and funding agencies. How can we promote dynamics to establish more systematic dialogues that go beyond one-time face-to-face encounters among the different organizations that are part of this larger “movement”, this “global community” of individuals and institutions who are convinced of the importance of adult education? Could the UIE, the ICAE or a university foster this exchange even more?
7. However, these dynamics that we have observed and participated in, unfortunately, are not transformed into educational policy in our countries. In most of our countries, adult education is not a relevant piece of public policy. Simply stated, adult education is not a priority. In many cases, from the perspective of government policy, adult education con-

tinues to be poor education for poor people, an education reduced to temporary efforts at literacy. It is critical that our international dynamics translate into political pressure on our governments to overcome their reductionist and limited vision of adult education.

8. Here, we have affirmed the relevance of adult education for fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals; likewise, that out of the six Dakar goals, four concern adult education. How can we convert this relevance into educational policy in our countries? How can we convert this affirmation into concrete orientations for international cooperation?
9. In regards to adult education and overcoming poverty (Please note: we do not only want to reduce poverty or relieve poverty, we want to overcome poverty), it is clear that education on its own is not the single factor that will shatter the perverse logic of poverty. But it is a deciding factor for activating people's and communities' capacities for shattering this logic. Without education, policies against poverty will always be just temporary relief that will increase poverty even more in the long run.
10. Poverty is a multi-dimensional reality with structural roots -- it has at least three expressions: economic and material need, political and social exclusion, and discrimination. From a human rights perspective, poverty is a massive expression of the denial of these rights. Thus, adult education has a clear focus set on affirming, promoting, and defending human rights in all their expressions: civil, political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental. As in the past, humanity was able to delegitimize slavery and then began to overcome it; so today, we must delegitimize poverty, denouncing how it *violates* human dignity and then we will be able to make serious efforts to overcome it.
11. The solution to poverty is a question of economic justice, of distribution of wealth, of political participation, of redistributing knowledge and power, of social inclusion. It is a matter that cannot be faced from a merely educational focus – it requires a more complex vision. Hence, adult education seeks to democratize access to knowledge, it seeks to activate capacities for production and employment, for political participation, and for revaluing human identity and culture.
12. Poverty cannot be resolved without the active participation of the poor. These human beings must become active agents in their own history and their own models of development. The poor do not only survive, they also live, they celebrate and have their own hopes and desires. Thus, through adult education, we, too, have been educated by the poor – we have learned to exchange our knowledge with the poor. In this sense, as adult educators, we are like mid-wives of the words of the poor, of their ideas, and their proposals. Rather than storks who deliver already built solutions, we must learn to be mid-wives.
13. For globalization to be true globalization, it must be inclusive. Social exclusion is the antithesis of true globalization because then only a few small elites are being connected and interrelated. Inclusion implies rec-

ognition, respect, and the promotion of diversity, a critical dialogue that allows for every culture to overcome that which violates its dignity and people's rights. In this sense, adult education is fundamentally intercultural education, aimed at overcoming all forms of discrimination.

14. There are at least five "sectors" of the global population today that especially suffer from poverty and the denial of their rights:
 - a) Women. Thus, adult education must have a clear perspective of gender equity and the promotion of women's power and leadership.
 - b) Indigenous peoples. Thus, adult education has developed an intercultural perspective.
 - c) People with disabilities. Thus, adult education helps to give visibility to these people's capacities.
 - d) Migrant and immigrant peoples. Thus, adult education must develop special proposals for social inclusion.
 - e) People infected with HIV/AIDS. Thus, adult education must favor information, sex education, and the prevention of this pandemic.
15. For all of these reasons, and with the thematic variety expressed in the almost 90 papers presented here in Botswana, it is clear that adult education cannot be reduced to literacy programs or basic education. Adult education is a useful instrument for acquiring the most elemental of skills but people's needs for learning are multiple and thus, we should not stop our climb upon the first or second rung of the life-long learning process.
16. In this process of life-long learning, where we are now situating adult education, there are at least four perspectives that appear to me as our strategic intentions or the key components of any adult education proposal:
 - a) Adult education and building citizenship;
 - b) Adult education and its ties to production and employment;
 - c) Adult education and intercultural dialogue; and
 - d) Adult education and sustainable development, which implies a clear ecological consciousness.
 - e) Adult education and equity and the overcome of all forms of discriminations.
17. In our intention to make adult education relevant, we have the vital task of affirming the public responsibility of all actors in our societies. Without a doubt, the State has a primary and fundamental responsibility: to create the material, financial, legal, and political conditions for guaranteeing the right to education. Companies have the responsibility of benefiting the countries and populations where they generate their wealth. Civil society organizations have the responsibility of fostering community-based organizing their demands for their rights, and the development of proposals for improving public policy. Universities have the responsibility of generating useful knowledge based on our practice. International

bodies and cooperation agencies have the responsibility of mobilizing resources to make processes to overcome poverty consistent. Recently, we are starting to learn how to build bridges among these different actors, which is not an easy task, but it is clear that the new dynamics of education should include activating different actors' social responsibility.

18. In this sense, we must assess the World Bank's interest in addressing adult education issues. Besides channeling credits and financing, the World Bank has become an important institution for producing knowledge and together with the money it loans, it also offers a vision of how things should be done. It may well be the international institution that has played the largest influence on orienting educational reforms in the past 20 years. As such, it is important that the World Bank is paying attention to adult education. How can we accompany them in this process? Could we generate a more systematic process for dialogue, joint research, and proposal development with the World Bank in order to influence our governments' policies?
19. In order to make further progress in our field, we must also develop more research. As I have already said, we need universities to adopt our thematic agenda to favor research that helps us to recognize our best experiences and to respond to the most pressing questions regarding the quality of our educational practices.
20. Education may be the most human of human tasks that we can carry out. It is essential to recreate our societies, to restore dignity to millions of poor people and to restore dignity to the few wealthy people on the globe. For this to happen, we need to once again discuss the ethical nature of the economy and of politics and continue to cultivate our utopias and to feed our own hopes. Undoubtedly, as adult educators, we can make an important contribution in this regard.

Thank you.