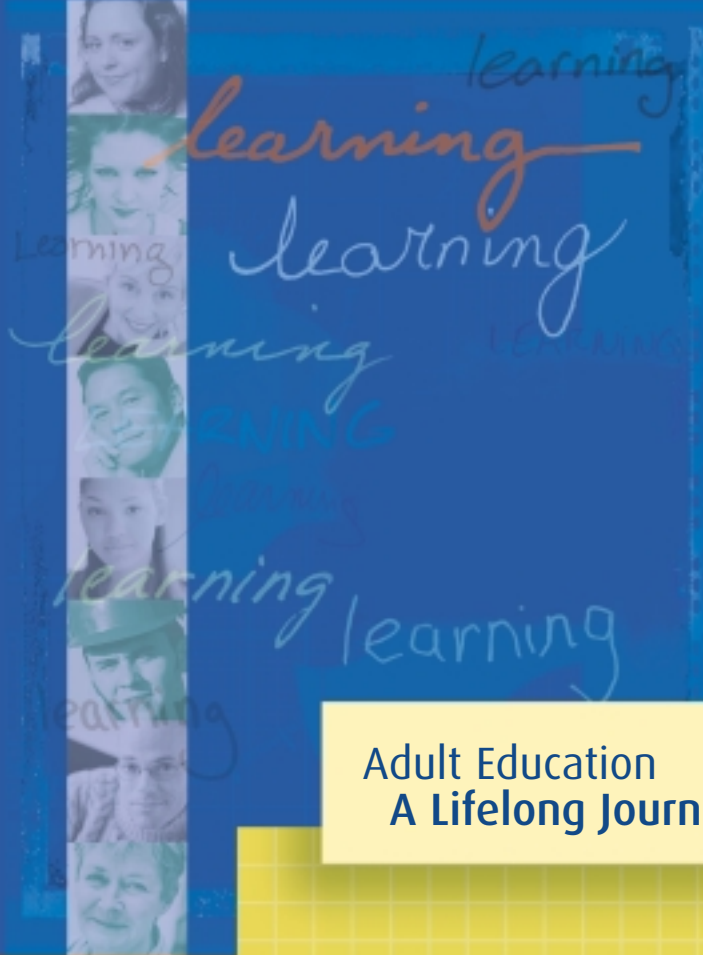


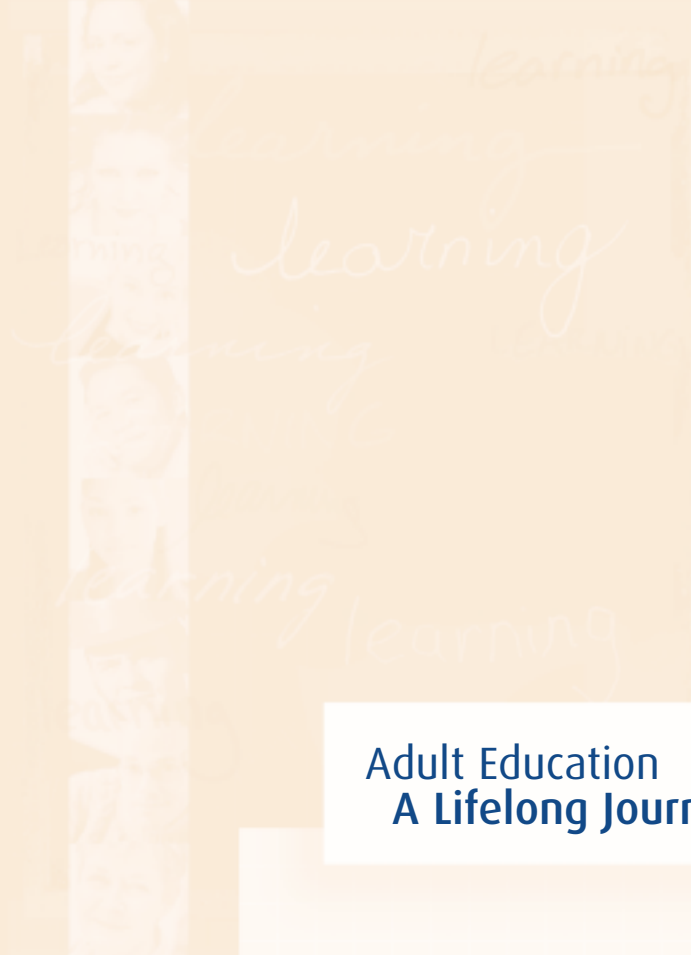


Adult Education A Lifelong Journey

Basic Education

International Trends

2002-2003



Adult Education A Lifelong Journey

Basic Education

**International Trends
2002-2003**

The Direction de la formation générale des adultes would like to thank everyone who helped produce this brochure.

COORDINATOR

Diane Grimard

Direction de la formation générale
des adultes

AUTHORS AND RESEARCHERS

Diane Charest

Direction de la recherche et de
l'évaluation, Ministère de l'Éducation

Sylvie Roy

Consultant

ASSISTANT AUTHOR

Marie Dufour

Communications Writer

PRODUCTION TEAM

Carmen Allison

Professional Development Consultant

Margot Désilets

Professional Development Consultant

Denise Beauchesne

Education Consultant, Commission
scolaire de la Capitale

Denyse Tremblay

Professional Development Consultant

Marie-Paule Dumas

Professional Development Consultant

ENGLISH VERSION

*Direction de la production en langue
anglaise*

Services à la communauté anglophone

RESOURCE PEOPLE AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT

This brochure was made possible through
the efforts of numerous collaborators from
the Ministère de l'Éducation.

A wind of change is sweeping across the field of adult education and training in most industrialized nations. Several countries are redefining the adult education services they offer, particularly with regard to basic education.

This change is underway in Québec too. The Ministère de l'Éducation is preparing to offer new basic education services for adults. In this context, it would be useful to examine the main **trends** in this regard in industrialized countries. This brochure is based on a more in-depth analysis entitled *Tirer profit des expériences internationales*.¹ This analysis takes into account the orientations for basic education, the programs associated with basic education, the target population, as well as the certification of studies and the recognition of prior learning.

The following eleven countries were considered for the purposes of this research: Denmark, England, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States. Two Canadian provinces, British Columbia and Ontario, were included in this study. The perspectives of three international organizations, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), UNESCO and the European Economic Community (EEC), have also been taken into consideration.

¹ Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Tirer profit des expériences internationales*, series of documents on adult basic education (Québec: Direction de la recherche et de l'évaluation, September 2000). Available in French only.

ORIENTATIONS FOR BASIC EDUCATION

In general, all the sources consulted mention that industrialized countries are undergoing significant changes as a result of the globalization of markets, the transformation of the world of work and the development of information technologies. In addition, adult education has become vital not only in order to improve workers' competencies, but also to reduce the social divide between those who have access to the job market and those who are excluded from it.

Overall assessment

In their evaluation of the systems set up for adult education, most of the countries studied mentioned the following problems: students who drop out during training, the inconsistent quality of the programs offered, the fact that under-qualified individuals lack interest in training, the lack of funding for programs and the lack of results.

In addition, governmental measures that link funding for adult education to rapid results may make programs less accessible to undereducated individuals and the unemployed.

Three emerging trends

The policies and orientations adopted in adult education and continuing education and training at the international level can be grouped into three categories corresponding to the trends presented below. However, it should be noted that in several countries, more than one trend has emerged.

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

From this perspective, adult education is viewed as essential for economic development and necessary for countries to remain competitive worldwide and to ward off the risk of a social divide between the haves and have-nots. It is a question of matching labour force training to the needs and logic of the job market. This is the position advocated by the OECD, among others.

Adult education should be regarded as a right for all in order to develop active citizenship and a more just and democratic society.

The Hamburg International Conference on Adult Education and UNESCO as a whole advocate the principle of the universal right to adult education. The needs of individuals and communities must take precedence over economic needs, and learning should involve other dimensions besides employability. Viewed from a “citizenship” and cultural perspective, learning becomes a means of expression and communication, as well as a tool to help marginalized and excluded groups find solutions to their problems.

It is necessary to reconcile citizenship and employability.

This middle ground is more in keeping with the position of the European Economic Community. According to this organization, in order to uphold solid democracies, it is possible—and crucial—to ensure employability and labour force training without neglecting the development of an active and critical citizenry. “In modern Europe the three essential requirements of social integration, the enhancement of employability and personal fulfilment are not incompatible. They should not be brought into conflict, but should on the contrary be closely linked.”²

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

PROGRAMS ASSOCIATED WITH BASIC EDUCATION

Shades of meaning

The definition of the concept of “basic education” varies somewhat from country to country. For example, the levels of education covered by basic education are not the same everywhere. In some cases, this training corresponds to what are known as literacy services in Québec, whereas in other cases (e.g. British Columbia), it extends until the end of secondary studies.

In all countries, but to different degrees, basic education is designed to enable people to achieve the following three objectives: school-to-work transition, participation in society (or social advancement) and personal development.

A few observations about programs

The analysis of basic education programs in the countries studied reveals certain shared and distinguishing characteristics. These characteristics are summarized below in the form of questions.

- **Regarding program objectives**

What place do school-to-work transition, social participation and personal development objectives have in the program and what link is established among them?

- **Regarding program content**

Is the content strictly limited to literacy education (reading, writing, counting) or does it involve developing new competencies? Has the program been geared toward the specific needs of adults or harmonized with the content of the youth-sector curriculum?

- **Regarding social roles**

Are social roles dealt with in the program and, if so, how? Are they central to the definition of the content or do they serve as an example used to teach competencies?

The breadth of the content of existing programs thus varies from country to country. Most importantly, there are significant differences in the design of basic education programs. These differences depend on the extent to which the adult education system is seen as a separate entity in relation to the system offered in the youth sector. The debate on these issues is very complex.

TARGET POPULATION FOR BASIC EDUCATION

The target population represents a large segment of the total population, ranging from 7% in Sweden to 49% in Ontario. Illiteracy and the lack of basic competencies have become growing concerns for industrialized countries, whereas less than 15 years ago, some countries hardly admitted there was a problem. The results of the *International Adult Literacy Survey* (IALS) are now frequently used to determine the target population.

The target groups receiving the most attention are the unemployed, youth under the age of 25 and immigrants. Special programs have sometimes been designed for these groups (particularly in the case of young people and immigrants), and some training is based on their specific characteristics (in the case of the unemployed).

Most countries admit that they are reaching very little of the target population and that a variety of original measures are needed to remove the participation barriers for the most disadvantaged groups. These measures include financial support for adults who wish to pursue training, extensive campaigns to promote adult education and support for community organizations and groups that work directly with marginalized communities.

Certification of studies and recognition of prior learning

The majority of countries recognize basic education through the certification of studies or a diploma. However, it is impossible to say whether this official recognition of basic education translates into recognition by society at large. The documents consulted clearly reveal that a precondition for this recognition is that academic certification be based on uniform, recognized national standards.

There is talk virtually everywhere about the need to recognize experiential learning, but this seems to pose difficulties as regards basic education. More research should be conducted in this area. The record of competencies used in France and Portugal appears to be an interesting approach. The same can be said about the Record of Learning used in New Zealand.

THE RECORD OF COMPETENCIES IN FRANCE

Since July 1992, the validation of occupational learning has been guaranteed by law. It is accepted that the practice of an occupation leads to the acquisition of competencies and knowledge, some of which can be recognized as equivalent to the knowledge and skills required to obtain a diploma. Learning acquired in community life can also be recognized. Adults' personal and occupational competencies are evaluated using a record of competencies, which is described in the law as follows: "The activities involved in drawing up the record of competencies are designed to allow workers to analyze their occupational and personal competencies as well as their aptitudes and interests in order to outline a vocational plan and, if applicable, a learning plan."³ Experiential learning can be recognized in the form of a diploma or credits toward the certification of studies at all levels of the French school system.

By law, workers are allowed to take time off from work to draw up their record of competencies. The results of this process are used to determine the skills they need as well as the ways to acquire them. Records of competencies are drawn up for various segments of the population (e.g. young people, workers and the unemployed).

³ Jacques Aubret, *Le bilan des compétences* (Institut national d'étude du travail et d'orientation professionnelle), *Orientations*, no. 15 (December 1999): 1. Translation.

THE RECORD OF LEARNING IN NEW ZEALAND

In 1990, the government of New Zealand established the National Qualification Framework (NQF) in order to provide adults with a coherent and credible mechanism for the validation of their knowledge—however it was acquired. The standards used to evaluate knowledge are prepared at the national level. Developed by a group of experts from the education community and industry in consultation with personnel from relevant government departments (education and other departments), the standards are reviewed regularly. Each standard outlines a set of competencies that correspond to a specific level of education determined in the qualification system. What the adult must know and be able to do is specified at each stage.

Adults are evaluated on the basis of these standards. They can gradually accumulate credits towards the certification of their studies. They can acquire credits in any association recognized by the National Qualification Authority (NQA). All organizations must also recognize credits obtained in other accredited organizations. In fact, the standards and the targeted learning outcomes are uniform. The means used to achieve the results (meet the standards) as well as the type of training needed to achieve the results vary greatly from one organization to another.

The system has eight levels of qualification or difficulty. The first three levels correspond to Cycle Two of secondary school and basic vocational training. When an adult obtains a credit, the central authority, i.e. NQA, is informed. Once a year, the learner receives a transcript of all credits obtained during that year. Even if the adult has not obtained his or her diploma, he or she can submit this official document (*Record of Learning*) to employers and educational institutions if he or she wants to pursue training. Training for local evaluators, regional round tables, the reassessment of work, where necessary, and joint evaluations help to ensure the consistency and reliability of the system.

CONCLUSION

Several countries are currently rethinking the adult education services they are offering, especially their basic education services. The reasons for these reforms are essentially the same everywhere: the globalization of markets, transformations in the job market, demographic changes, advances in information and communications technologies, persistent unemployment and the need to avoid the risk of a social divide between the haves and have-nots.

Quite frequently, national analyses are supported by international comparisons of public literacy levels. The use of data provided by the *International Adult Literacy Survey* allows countries to assess their situation in this new context. This is why it is important for Québec to participate in such studies in order to evaluate the progress made in literacy education. Furthermore, the experience of certain countries, such as England, the United States and Portugal, should inspire the work being done in Québec. These countries are implementing concrete measures to meet various needs in adult basic education. Four elements are of particular importance, since they are crucial issues both here and abroad: the goals and content of basic education, the recognition of prior learning, the mobilization of the target population and the certification of basic education.

Basic education goals and content

The scope of basic education varies from one country to another. In certain countries, it is practically limited to literacy education: reading, writing and counting. Elsewhere, it also includes familiarization with information technologies and social skills (e.g. problem solving, teamwork) and sometimes includes second language training. The competencies deemed necessary to develop the basic education content therefore vary from one country to the next, although there are points of agreement surrounding certain key competencies. While the desire to offer training that focuses on adults' needs is always present, the models advocated to achieve this goal differ. In certain countries like the United States and Portugal, programs focusing

on social roles are currently being prepared outside the regular education system. For example, starting from the principle that successful programs are those that meet people's needs, the Americans have designed their curriculum on the basis of extensive input from adults across the country. Other countries, such as England, focus more on harmonizing the youth-sector and adult education systems by adapting the learning content to adults' life situations.

Program goals are also different. Some countries are concerned with rapid integration into the job market, while others focus on the acquisition of broader competencies and concentrate more on long-term training.

Recognition of prior learning

For several countries, the recognition of prior learning has proved to be a very important element in efforts to mobilize the target population. The premise is that adults would be more interested in pursuing studies if their prior learning were recognized, since the training period would be shorter. On the other hand, up until now, the recognition of prior learning has been mainly associated with vocational education. Most countries are still reflecting on the mechanism to be implemented in order to reach undereducated adults and give them access to basic education.

Besides New Zealand, Portugal is doing particularly interesting work in this area. According to one of the basic principles of the Portuguese model, the different competencies acquired in various spheres of human activity must be rigorously evaluated and officially recognized. In addition, the new basic education program will involve carrying out an assessment upon registration in order to determine an adult's knowledge pertaining to the key competencies required.

During the validation and recognition process, the adult will have his or her competencies recognized by accumulating credits that will be recorded in a personal record of competencies. The recognition of experiential learning should lead to official validation (i.e. certification of studies or credits that exempt the adult from part of the training

that he or she wishes to undertake). The Portuguese model clearly identifies the issues involved as well as the conditions necessary for the establishment of a legitimate system for the recognition of experiential learning.

Mobilization of the target population

It has been observed everywhere that undereducated individuals rarely enroll in training activities, so it is necessary to find innovative and original means to encourage them to do so. Various initiatives have been implemented to encourage participation in the countries studied. One such measure is the development of a credible and standardized system for recognizing experiential learning. Some countries have also undertaken various publicity campaigns (e.g. education week, television programs, advertising aimed at certain groups, awareness-raising updates for employers). Local community-based services (as in Portugal) have also been established for adults to answer their questions about training. Additionally, financial incentives to encourage adult enrollment are being examined. Finally, several countries emphasize the vital role that community associations play in reaching out to the most marginalized segments of society and especially in providing them with training opportunities. This is why community associations deserve careful consideration; many of their initiatives and orientations may provide inspiration.

Lastly, several countries chose to target certain groups to whom they offer basic education activities or programs as a matter of priority. These groups are essentially the same everywhere: the unemployed, youth under the age of 25 and immigrants. It is worthwhile examining the extent to which these services are adapted to the needs of the target groups.

Certification of basic education

The certification of basic education has also proven to be a very important issue. Several countries currently provide or will soon be providing official recognition of basic education. The various reasons

that have been put forward to justify this certification concern the partners involved as well as the adults enrolled in basic education. At present, there is still no information on the value attached to this official validation. Does society recognize this diploma? This is a question that must be carefully examined.

Adult basic education: services undergoing significant transformation

In the majority of countries, the implementation of new basic education programs is not sufficiently advanced to determine their effects and draw conclusions.

Nevertheless, it is important to continue collecting information on the development and implementation of these new programs. The resources thus compiled will be a valuable source of information and inspiration for those involved in the reform of basic education in Québec.

