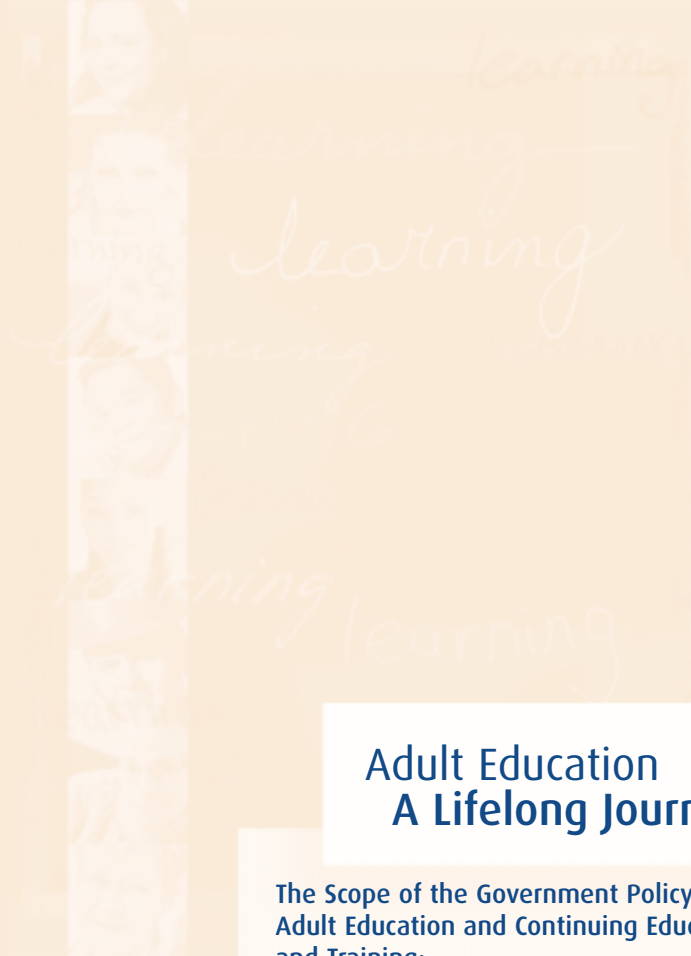


## Adult Education A Lifelong Journey

The Scope of the Government Policy on  
Adult Education and Continuing Education  
and Training:

The Increasing Importance of  
Adult Education in Québec  
Education Policies

November 2002



## **Adult Education A Lifelong Journey**

**The Scope of the Government Policy on  
Adult Education and Continuing Education  
and Training:**

**The Increasing Importance of  
Adult Education in Québec  
Education Policies**

**November 2002**

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

#### AUTHOR

---

***Paul Bélanger***

Professor, Département des sciences de  
l'éducation, Centre interdisciplinaire de  
recherche sur l'éducation permanente, Uni-  
versité du Québec à Montréal (UQÀM)

#### PRODUCTION TEAM

---

***Carmen Allison***

Professional Development Consultant

***Marie Dufour***

Communications Writer

***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.

The recent adoption of the *Government Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training* by the Québec government reflects the ongoing transformation of the education scene in advanced industrialized countries. The purpose of this brochure is to contextualize the basic education priority set by this policy within the more general trend of emerging educational societies and of the recognition of lifelong learning.

Three themes are emphasized in this document: the complementarity and specificity of education in the youth and adult sectors, the difficulties related to expression of the demand for adult education and training and, lastly, the integration of basic education into the life of every individual.

### **The complementarity and the specificity of education in the youth and adult sectors**

The education scene in advanced industrialized countries has completely changed over the years. The adult education sector, once marginal, has grown in terms of numbers to rival the youth education sector. Moreover, this new sector makes a vital, complementary contribution to formal education. The mission of raising the public's general education level is now a lifelong process and requires an intergenerational strategy.

### ***Education in the youth and adult sectors: two equally important areas of the new education scene***

Québec is becoming an education-oriented society in which adult education and continuing education and training have become as important as education in the youth sector (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Total population of learners in the youth**  
**and adult education sectors (Québec 1995-1996)**

Youth Sector		Adult Sector	
Elementary	550 000	Elementary	-
Secondary	500 000	Secondary	210 000
College	170 000	College	65 000
University	130 000	University	100 000
Workplace	-	Workplace	700 000
Other	-	Other	400 000
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>1 350 000</b>	<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>1 475 000</b>

Sources: MEQ and Canada, Statistics Canada. *Adult Education and Training Survey (AETS)*, 1997.

In all advanced industrialized countries, participation in adult education is continually growing (see Table 2). The level of participation has continually increased since the 1970s: from 20% in 1975 to over 50% today in Germany and Sweden. Under the influence of the same growth factors in adult education, Québec is expected to do a significant amount of catching up, resulting in a sizable increase in participation over the next few years.

It should be noted that these statistics on organized training activities only represent the tip of the iceberg: they do not reflect an equally important reality that is less visible, i.e. informal learning and self-training that typify adults' lives today, both at work and outside work.

**Table 2**  
**Participation in adult education in industrialized countries**

Québec (1997)	21%
Canada (1997)	28%
Germany (1995)	50%
Sweden (1995)	53%

Sources: Canada, Statistics Canada, AETS; *Infratest*, Germany.

### ***The complementarity between education in the youth and adult sectors***

Participation in adult education greatly depends on prior education and training. As illustrated in Table 3, individuals who have received more prolonged periods of training during their youth are more likely to participate in education and training activities throughout their adult life. Consequently, a government policy on adult education and training cannot be effective in the long term unless it is supported by a policy of democratization of education in the youth sector.

**Table 3**  
**Participation in adult education in industrialized countries, according to prior training**

Prior training (in %)	Canada	U.S.	Sweden
Elementary	16	11	29
Secondary	27	22	47
Completed Secondary	35	32	53
College	53	56	67
University	60	62	70

Sources: Canada, Statistics Canada. CANADA, 1997; U.S. and SWEDEN, 1995.

The adult education participation rate in Canada thus varies from 16% among individuals with lower education to 60% among groups of adults who have received more long-term training. The same is true in the United States and Sweden. The impact of accessibility measures has been considerable in Sweden, where individuals with lower education participate in organized training twice as often as in Canada and three times as often as in the United States.

While participation in adult education depends on prior training, the educational success of young people likewise depends on their educational environment, i.e. their living environment and, more immediately, their parents' participation. Parents' education levels have an influence on their children's education. Thus, in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, basic education programs for adults who are parents can contribute to their children's success in school.

Basic education for adults has become a priority since it can accelerate the traditionally lengthy development of literate societies. In other words, to raise the general level of education of a population through education in the youth sector alone—as has been done up until now—would take a period of 30 years, i.e. the span of a generation. This length of time is much too long to meet today’s urgent economic and social needs. We need to raise the basic competency level of the adult population in Québec over the course of the next five or six years. Furthermore, 90% of the labour force of 2010 has already left school today, in 2002. To concentrate basic education only among the younger generation will, therefore, neither solve the problem, nor help to develop a competent population. For these reasons, basic education policies can no longer be limited to educating the next generation. The different policies for young people and adults now tend to be implemented simultaneously. They have become intergenerational.

Simultaneously, yes, but differently as well.

### ***The specific nature of adult education***

As the Québec government policy stipulates, adult education and continuing education and training require a specific strategy, specific approaches and a specific learning regulation.

Here are five areas that are particular to adult education, as compared with education in the youth sector:

#### **1. Expression of the demand for education and training**

First, there is the expression of the demand. For schools and parents alike, it is practically a given that children attend elementary school. This is also true to a large extent for secondary school and college: it is the normal process among a population group. The same cannot be said about adults, who, unlike young people, are widely dispersed. They do not meet any compulsory standard or follow a “normal” educational path. Basic adult education target groups are not organized: there are hundreds of thousands of men and women who are isolated from one another and who, unlike young people, do not meet any general

expectation. What's more, in this noncompulsory education sector, motivation is a key factor. In short, as opposed to education in the youth sector, where the context and living conditions are much different, a basic education policy in the adult education sector must include from the very outset a major focus on expression of the demand for education and training.

## **2. Learning contexts**

The learning contexts of adults are as different as those of young people. This is especially true with respect to the external participation conditions, i.e. balancing training time with work time and family responsibilities. The immediate learning contexts are also much different. They require an adult-centred approach. The accumulation of experience and informal learning and self-teaching calls for learning that reflects the needs felt in community and work life. Experiential learning must also be recognized. Success will be facilitated by focusing on prior informal learning and ensuring the assimilation of knowledge through concomitant and subsequent informal learning. The consequences of interrupting organized training for many years must also be taken into account.

## **3. Educational solutions**

Educational solutions in adult education and continuing education and training are also different from those in the youth sector. They tend to be more concerned with adults' specific aspirations for immediate, concrete applications as well as the economic and social requirements expected of them following their training. These concerns call for a different reception and support strategy, flexibility in schedules, program suitability to adults' "knowledge" and "experience," a separate school regulation, an appropriate educational approach, an educational environment that respects adults' lifestyles, etc. This is a threefold challenge: firstly, to reach the adult target group by communicating

and conveying a positive image through the activities offered and via the training institutions; secondly, to provide training that is meaningful to adults; and, lastly, to provide training that leads to a recognized diploma. This “difference and equivalence” paradox requires a new design of continuing education as well as the training of “specialists” in this field of educational intervention.

#### **4. Relationship to social participation**

A fourth aspect of the specificity of adult education is adults’ relationship to social participation. Adults are directly involved in both the world of work and community life and they assume responsibilities in their private life. There is a direct connection between training and action. The search for meaning in the learning acquired is not an abstract process that is put off until the end of a training period that may last for several years. The expected results are more focused on improving the immediate capacity for action in the workplace, the community and the learner’s personal life. The application of learning must be immediate.

#### **5. Funding for individuals and institutions**

The specific nature of adult education is also apparent in the fifth aspect: providing funding to individuals and training institutions. Increasing adults’ participation in organized training will not be possible unless they are granted financial assistance, which may take various forms: reimbursement of direct costs, loans for part-time studies, living allowances, paid educational leave, reimbursement of transportation and day-care expenses, etc. The funding of institutions for activities intended for adults is also different from that allocated for education in the youth sector. It involves open or closed resource envelopes, negotiations with local employment centres (CLEs) and businesses, etc.

### ***The situation of 16- to 20-year-olds***

Over the past few years, a new age group has appeared in the general adult education programs: 16- to 20-year-olds. The increased participation of this group in these programs can be considered from several angles. First, it is undeniable that, thanks to this second chance, the percentage of young people under 20 who obtain a Secondary School Diploma (SSD) or a Diploma of Vocational Studies (DVS) has increased significantly. As Table 4 indicates, the percentage of young people who have a Secondary School Diploma thus increases from 70% to 82%, which represents a significant rise.

**Table 4**  
**16- to 20-year-olds**  
**Educational path of a cohort of 100 young people (1996-1997)**

End of elementary school	100%
End of secondary school	91%
Secondary V diploma	
- (under 20 years old)	70%
- (20 years old and older)	82%
	<i>(an increase of 12%)</i>

Source: MEQ. Ministry statistics.

The large gap between boys and girls is illustrated in Table 5. While the program for 16- to 20-year-olds allows a great number of girls and boys to obtain a Secondary School Diploma, the percentage gap between girls and boys is more than double (23% compared with 10%). The December 2001 report on this topic by the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation is helpful in explaining the impact of the boy/girl ratio on the current demand for basic education for this age group.

**Table 5**  
**Percentage of students who leave secondary school without a diploma**

	Youth Sector	Never
Boys	38%	23%
Girls	24%	10%
Total	31%	16%

Source: Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, December 2001.

While the educational program meets the specific needs of the 16- to 20-year-old group, this group has different characteristics from those of other adults. By re-examining the five aspects mentioned earlier, it becomes clear that there are major differences in the possibilities and the mechanisms for expressing the demand for training and recruitment, just as there are in learning contexts, social participation and enrollment and funding methods. This poses the problem of using the same educational solution for a group of learners whose educational demands differ according to their age group. Furthermore, unlike the more problematic recruitment of older adults who have lost contact with school, immediate, on-site recruitment of 16- to 20-year-olds inevitably produces a biased selection. The new basic school regulation for adults allows the two types of demands to be met. But how can learning contexts guaranteeing the appropriate conditions for school success for those over 20 be developed? And how can we avoid the trap of taking the easy way out while meeting the two types of needs and averting the risk of generating figures that represent a deceptively low demand for training among those over 20?

### **Expression of the demand for education and training: a strategic factor in the development of adult education**

Although it is more difficult to express, the demand for education and training in the adult sector must not be neglected.

### ***A great demand***

It should be kept in mind that basic education in the youth sector is a relatively recent phenomenon for francophones in Québec (see Table 6). Since the end of the 1950s, the percentage of young people dropping out of school before grade seven fell from 63% in 1958 to 1% in 2000, one of the spectacular results of the Quiet Revolution.

**Table 6**

**Increasing literacy of the younger generations, a recent phenomenon**

1926	94% of francophone Quebecers had only six years of schooling
1958	63% of francophone Quebecers had only six years of schooling
2000	1% of francophone Quebecers had only six years of schooling

Yet, in spite of this progress, nearly one adult in five today has not completed grade nine.

**Table 7**

**Percentage of the population 15 years of age or older  
with less than nine years of schooling**

	1971	1981	1991	1996
Québec	41	27	21	18
Ontario	28	18	12	10

The training demand in Québec is thus high—nearly two times higher than in Ontario (see Table 7), and the differences among the regions are significant (see Table 8).

**Table 8**  
**Percentage of the population 15 years of age or older with less than nine years of schooling, by region**

<b>Average in Québec 18</b>	
<b>Over 25</b>	Gaspésie
<b>From 21 to 25</b>	Abitibi, Bas-Saint-Laurent, Côte-Nord, Chaudière-Appalaches, Bois-Francs, Centre-du-Québec
<b>From 18 to 21</b>	Estrie, Lanaudière, Mauricie
<b>Less than 18</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Québec (15)</li> <li>- Montérégie (16.3)</li> <li>- Montréal (17.7)</li> <li>- Laurentides (17.5)</li> <li>- Laval (17.2)</li> <li>- Saguenay (17.2)</li> </ul>

Another way to assess the extent of the training needs is to refer to the 1994 study on literacy by Statistics Canada. According to that study, 17% of adults in Canada have very low competency levels in reading and mathematics, and only 60% reach what is considered the minimum level by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In short, the data show that the basic competency level of one adult in five is too low to actively participate in the knowledge-based society in which we now live.

**Table 9**  
**Distribution of the adult population**  
**according to literacy levels**

		Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Canada	(prose)	16.6	25.6	35.1	22.7
	(math)	16.9	26.1	34.8	22.2
Netherlands	(prose)	10.5	30.1	44.1	15.3
	(math)	10.3	25.5	44.3	19.9
Sweden	(prose)	7.5	20.3	39.7	32.4
	(math)	6.6	18.6	39.0	35.8
Poland	(prose)	42.6	34.5	19.8	3.1
	(math)	39.1	30.1	23.9	6.8

Source: Canada, Statistics Canada. *Statistics Canada 1995. Literacy, Economy and Society: Results of the First International Adult Literacy Survey.*

One last indicator: the increasing gap between Québec and Canada with respect to participation in adult education (see Table 10).

**Table 10**  
**Gap between Canada and Québec**

Year	Canada	Québec	Gap
1984	17%	16%	- 1
1989	19%	17%	- 2
1991	29%	27%	- 2
1993	30%	26%	- 4
1997	28%	21%	- 7

Source: Canada, Statistics Canada. 2001.

The rise in demand for adult basic education is a trend that has been growing for more than a century. There has been a continual increase in the requirements for communication and the ability to take action at work, in the community and in private life. The ongoing transformation of work, social participation and the demands for a quality life entail a constant increase in the competency levels sought by and required of adults. The matter of adult basic education in post-industrialized countries is much more than a question of catching

up; it is a question of continually raising the level of basic general education of the population concerned.

### ***An unexpressed demand or a demand that is difficult to express***

Nevertheless, this demand for general education is still either not clearly expressed or largely unexpressed. Adults are widely dispersed and isolated, making it hard to reach them. As well, they have difficulty finding and receiving information that applies to their situation and their previous experiences may not make them inclined to look for or be receptive to messages dealing with education.

For adults, the decision to pursue training is not an easy one (see Chart 1). First of all, they must be quite certain that the training has something to offer them, that it can be part of a solution. They must also be convinced that they can succeed at this training. Hence the importance of creating relatively favourable contexts in which the various adult target groups live, disseminating public announcements and personalized messages likely to reach these populations, and demonstrating the usefulness and feasibility of their participation in these programs. This approach to the *expression of the demand* is necessary for adults to entertain the possibility of improving their condition and overcoming the negative images they have of themselves and their capacity to learn—images they may have internalized when they experienced educational difficulties in the past.

#### **Chart 1**

##### **The decision to pursue training**

- 1.** The individual views the training as a way to improve the quality of his or her life.
- 2.** The individual believes that he or she can pursue and succeed at the planned training.
- 3.** High probability of expressing a training demand and participating in training

Not only is it difficult to express this demand, it is also multidimensional (Chart 2). In fact, the demand for education and training is always influenced by two competing factors: the requirements of society or organizations and the aspirations and expectations of individuals. These factors come into play at all levels: provincial, regional and local, and even in the classroom.

**Chart 2**

**Expression and negotiation of the demand for education and training**



Clearly, the expression of the demand for education and training and the mobilization of potential participants are much different in the youth and adult sectors. While the former is based on routine practice, the process that leads to training in the latter turns out to be essential. Strategies and approaches prior to the organization of training are essential conditions for success.

***First, the policy on the expression of the demand for education and training***

This active expression of the demand for education and training requires specific conditions and mechanisms. For example:

- Favourable living conditions: active participation, conveying the capacity of initiatives
- Improvement and enhancement of the educational environments
- Recognition of training as a voluntary action on the individual's part
- Accessible information, reception and support services

- Policy on the recognition of nonformal prior learning
- Awareness campaigns (e.g. Adult Education Week)
- Positive public image of needs and possible basic education paths

***Integration of basic education into the specific situation of each individual***

Our lives are changing (see Table 9). First of all, people are living longer, while work time is decreasing: we spend only 10% of our lives at work compared with 33% a century and a half ago. The time not devoted to work is becoming much greater today, which makes it possible to engage in other activities, including training. By extrapolating from Statistics Canada’s 1997 data (*Adult Education and Training Survey*), it is possible to estimate the total duration of participation in organized training throughout our adult lives at a minimum of 4 000 hours<sup>1</sup> (40 years of active life and 15 years of retirement). In short, from 1850 to 2000, the average duration of formal education increased tenfold, whereas training during adulthood, virtually nonexistent in Québec during the 19th century, now plays an important role in our lives.

**Table 11**  
**Organization of time between 1850 and 2000**

	1850	2000
Life expectancy	45 years	80 years
Length of life	400 000 hrs	700 000 hrs
Hours at work	136 000 hrs	70 000 hrs
Duration of initial training	2 000 hrs	20 000 hrs
Free time	60 000 hrs	260 000 hrs
Training during adulthood	0	4 000 hrs

Even more important than the change in the organization of time, there is a change in the actual paths: variety of sequences, diversity of paces, desynchronization of life stages (entry into the job market,

<sup>1</sup> For a majority of the population that has more than 11 years of schooling.

establishment of a household unit, retirement, etc.), and future uncertainty, both in terms of one's personal and work life.

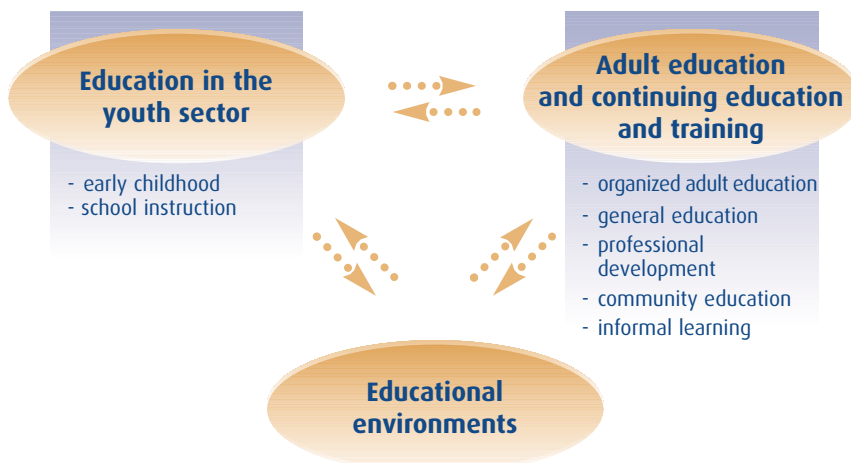
These changes create new educational demands and allow for lifelong learning. What's more, this individualization of life paths leads to different ways in which learners participate in the same program and find meaning. Among the same group of individuals participating in a given training program, the same series of activities are integrated in a specific way according to their educational life paths.

While training is common to all in a formal program, at the same time, it is inevitably received and experienced in a highly personal way by each of the individual participants. The difficulty of reconciling the official common objectives with the singularity and plurality of adults' educational paths and even adults' diverse motivations will always be a challenge. The dilemma is to recognize both the plurality of educational experience and the official requirements imposed upon each individual and on which he or she must be evaluated. Educational success encompasses this last aspect, but, to achieve it, the first aspect must be addressed. In this dynamic, individual expectations and societal demands interact in a somewhat formal exchange that takes place at all levels. Individuals always experience common-core basic education in a unique way, and it is through the recognition of this characteristic that generalizations can be made.

### ***The role of basic education in building an active educational society***

To the extent that public education institutions offer a variety of training opportunities to adults throughout Québec, they create positive educational environments that strengthen and give impetus to education. Similarly, while adult general education is perceived as being a part of educational life, it is not intended to be seen as a step backward or as a pause in order to catch up, but rather as an important period in one's path, a step preceded and followed by other formal and informal learning. *Educational life has already begun and is continuing.*

**Chart 3**  
**Overall organization of education throughout life**



Any initiative in adult education has a cumulative and communicative effect, i.e. a synergy, on the demand for education and training, which is continually increasing. This is true both in terms of the individual, in the educational life of each individual, and in terms of the network of trainers, in the development of an active educational society.

The transition underway in the education systems toward the organization of lifelong learning involves and demands a new vision linking the three pillars of the new education scene in Québec (see Chart 3): education in the youth sector, adult education and continuing education and training, and the educational environments.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Paul Bélanger and Ettore Gelpi, "Lifelong Education," in *International Review of Education*, special issue (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995) and Paul Bélanger and Paulo Federighi, *Unlocking People's Creative Forces: A Transnational Study of Adult Learning Policies* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000).





*learning*  
throughout life