

## **International Adult Education**

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**2096 words**

Adult education has always been an international practice. There are records in the city of Toronto in Canada of a first meeting of the Mechanics Institute in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Mechanics Institute being an English working men's adult education body created in 1815. The Women's Institute, a women's adult education organization in England and in many parts of the Commonwealth was created in Ontario in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Oscar Olsson, the 'father' of the Swedish study circle movement borrowed many ideas from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Chautauqua adult education movement in New York State in the USA. The rise of the modern practice of adult education in western European countries is linked to the reform movements arising in response to the rapacious nature of early industrial capitalism. The invention of industrial capitalism in Europe began a process of previously unheard of wealth creation for the small class of owners and investors. And with the creativity, the invention, the excitement of the mechanical age came an unprecedented call for workers. The rural areas of England and Germany and later elsewhere were depleted with entire villages disappearing into the larger cities. Not only were young men drawn to the factories, but women and even children.

It was not long however before those working in the early factories began to call for changes to the smoke and dust-filled work places, long hours, and brutal conditions for women and children. Working people and their allies slowly began the collective struggle for shorter working hours, fewer working days, better working conditions and a legal age limit for hiring young people. The systematic study of the lives of working people which are associated with the early work of Marx in Germany and Engels in England supported the aspirations of workers with analytical precision. The rise of organized labour movements as well as the temperance movements was associated with the rise in expectations by women for the vote and by working women and men for the right to learn. The adult education movements of Education Populaire in late 19<sup>th</sup> century France or the Worker's Education Association of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in England and Sweden were more formal responses to social demand for learning by adults, but there were many more local formal and informal ways in which adults began to seek out learning. Ideas, inspiration and practices were shared across borders and languages as a matter of normal practice.

The countries of the majority world have similarly contributed to and benefited from international sharing in the field of adult education. Countries which were part of European empires were influenced by the adult education practices in the metropolitan countries. The *animation social* of 1960s Senegal had antecedents in both France and Quebec. The Oxford Extra-Mural Delegacy of England set up university-based adult education centres in most of the British colonial universities. But just as colonial hegemony was being held in place through shared administrative and institutional structures, the newly emerging educated leaders of India, of Africa and elsewhere were sharing dreams of Independence with their counterparts whom they met while studying in the metropolitan countries or locally in evening classes on ideas of democracy. Julius Nyerere, founding President of Tanzania visited Ruskin College, the workers education

college at Oxford in 1964 and used it as a model for Kivukoni College, the political education training centre for the Independence movement in his country. The use of non-violence as both a political and an educational tool by Gandhi and his followers in India spread around the world to those who would struggle for freedom everywhere. The cry for widespread accessible education for all became a plank in the pre and post independence movements of most of the countries of the majority world. Literacy and the right to learn were early rallying cries for adult educators everywhere.

### Adult Education in an age of globalization

At the global level, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has similarities with the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe before the social reforms and legislation. Capital is King. Global capital is Emperor. The gaps between the rich and the poor at a global level have grown to unprecedented levels. Both high intensity and low intensity warfare has spread to many parts of the globe. Entire species of plants and animals are disappearing at an alarming rate. Even when the effects of global industrial life on the biosphere are known, such as the case with global warming, the most powerful corporate interests are able to block large scale ameliorative measures. Global capitalism renamed as globalization is in its primitive most savage stage. And when global capital is politically aligned as in the United States of America with imperial claims, global capitalism takes on an ugly and violent face (Welton, 2003). The reforming qualities of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century labour, health and political reforms have yet to curb the excess of global capital. The resistance to global capitalism takes many forms; the rise of what some call “global civil society”(Hall, 2001), the proliferation of global social movements (Edwards and Gaventa, 2001); and the rise of extremist anti-western organizations (Mojab, 2000). Adult education, like all other forms of human activity exists as contested terrain at the local, national and international levels. It is a world which is simultaneously, “coming apart and coming together” (Serrano, 1999). Adult education is called upon for many contradictory purposes including: facilitating the global utopia; making the best of the situation; supporting transformation towards a more humane world (Hall, 2000).

### Historic International Conferences

The international adult education movement has achieved its highest levels of visibility through a series of international or world conferences. The first such international event took place in Oxford, England in 1929 organized by the now defunct World Association for Adult Education. During the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century two organizations have taken the lead in the organizing of these events: UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization made up of the governments of member states and the ICAE, the International Council for Adult Education, the most influential non-governmental organization. Together they have organized 11 international conferences and world assemblies of adult education. UNESCO International Conferences have taken place in 1949 (Elsinsore, Denmark), 1960 (Montreal, Canada), 1972 (Tokyo, Japan), 1985 (Paris), 1997 (Hamburg). The World Assemblies of Adult Education have taken place in 1976 (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania), 1982 (Marly-le-roi, France), 1985 (Buenos Aires, Argentina), 1994 (Cairo,

Egypt), 2001 (Ocho Rios, Jamaica). In addition adult educators have been active in raising the call for adult learning within the many high level United Nations conferences during the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries including: UN Womens Conference (1985, Nairobi, Kenya and 1995, Beijing, China); Environment (1972, Stockholm and 1992 Rio de Janeiro); Social Development (1991?, Copenhagen, Denmark); Population (1992, Cairo, Egypt); Racism and Discrimination (2002, Durban, South Africa).

Adult educators have played a strong role, particularly the women in adult education, both as organizers and as contributors in the various global events associated with the anti-globalisation or alternative development movements. These include all of the four World Social Forum events which have taken place in Porto Alegre, Brazil and one in Mumbai, India in 2004.

### International organizations

The UNESCO Institute of Education (UIE) in Hamburg, Germany is the focal point for United Nations adult education policy developments ([www.UNESCO.org/education/uie](http://www.UNESCO.org/education/uie)). The UIE was the organizer of the largest adult education conference in history, the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education which produced the widely quoted Hamburg Declaration (UNESCO, 1997). The UIE publishes the *International Review of Education* and a broad range of studies on adult and lifelong learning. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), often called the rich-nations club, has taken the lead over the years in research and promulgation of a variety of recurrent and lifelong learning policy studies. It regularly conducts national reviews of adult education policies amongst its members (OECD, 1996). The lead non-governmental organization in the field is the International Council for Adult Education. With member associations in 100 countries and a Secretariat in Montevideo, Uruguay, the ICAE publishes the journal *Convergence*, collaborates with the UIE in the promotion of the exciting and successful United Nations Adult Learning Weeks activities (UIE, 2002), and facilitates dialogue and discussion at the international level among civil society and social movement partners (GEO-ICAE, 2003). The Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association based in Bonn, Germany provides financial support for a wide range of adult education associations in the majority world and in the former Eastern European countries ([www.iiz-dvv.de](http://www.iiz-dvv.de)). It publishes the journal *Adult Education and Development*, a twice yearly journal for adult education in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The *International Journal of Lifelong Learning* is a bi-monthly peer-reviewed academic publication which provides an important international forum ([www.tandf.co.uk](http://www.tandf.co.uk)). The Latin American Council for Adult Education (CEAAL) (web site), the Asia and South Pacific Bureau for Adult Education (ASPBAE) (web site), and the European Adult Education Association (EAA) (web site) are active and effective regional bodies. The National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) of England and Wales plays a leadership role in support of Adult Literacy Week activities, publishes the journal *Studies in the Education of Adults*, as well as an extensive list of books (web site).

### Trends in International Adult Education

**1. Two track international policy environment.** The wealthy industrialized nations have seen a dramatic growth in the development of wide-ranging and creative policies of

lifelong learning (Belanger and Federighi, 2000), while the poor majority-world countries have seen their aspirations shaped along the lines of the UNESCO and World Bank policies of Education for All (Torres, 2003). The EFA policy framework calls for a lowest common denominator approach to universal access for girls and boys at primary education levels and a commitment to adult basic literacy by the year 2015. (UNESCO,2000)

**2. Emergence of new agents of adult learning.** Adult education is not limited primarily to organized state supported formal provision. The business world provides learning opportunities for its employees which range from direct job related skills to access to courses for individual creativity and growth (Belanger and Federighi, 2000:60). The shift from an emphasis on cure to prevention in health has led to a dramatic increase in health related adult learning and shows signs of increasing further (Belanger and Federighi, 2000:58). Social movements themselves are increasingly being understood as rich learning environments where new knowledge is created and shared in both formal and informal ways (Hall, 2004).

**3. Disappearance of adult education from major International Agendas.** In spite of the fact that the Hamburg Conference in 1997 had more than 1600 participants from over 122 countries, adult education has fallen off the agenda of at least two of the most important educational policy statements, the Education for All Goals set in Dakar, Senegal in 2000 and the Millenium Development Goals(MDGs) set forward in the UN Millenium Declaration. There is no direct reference to adult education in either the Education for All Goals or the MDGs (Buchert, 2003).

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