Learning with Adults

A Reader

Peter Mayo (Ed.)

University of Malta, Malta

This anthology brings together some of the finest writers on different aspects of adult education and related areas to provide a complementary reader to the introductory text by Leona English and Peter Mayo Learning with Adults: A Critical Introduction. Areas tackled include Disability, Prisons, Third Age Universities, Lifelong Learning Policy, Learning Society, Poverty, LGBTQ, Sport, Women, Literacy, Transformative Learning, Community Arts, Aesthetics, Consumption, Migration, Libraries, Folk High Schools, Adult Education Policy, Subaltern Southern Social Movements, Social Creation, Community Radio, Social Film. Contexts focused on include Africa, Caribbean, Europe, Latin America, Asia (India), small island states. Over thirty authors involved including Zygmunt Bauman, Rosa Maria Torres, Oskar Negt, Antonia Darder, Jim Elmborg, D. W. Livingstone, Palle Rasmussen, Mae Shaw, Leona English, Asoke Bhattacharya, Cynthia L. Pemberton, Eileen Casey White, Daniel Schuguresky, Dip Kapoor, Peter Rude, John Myers, Joseph Giordmaina, Antonia De Vita, Alexis Kokkos, Marvin Formosa, Carmel Borg, Julita Preece, Patricia Cranton, Lyn Tett, Ali A. Abdi, Anna Maria Piussi, Behrang Foroughi, Taadi Ruth Modipa, Robert Hill, Edward Shizha, Kaela Jubas, Ursula Apitzsch, Didacus Jules and Peter Mayo.

... Learning with Adults: A Reader constitutes the most valuable practical and theoretical reflection on adult education I have seen in a long time.

Nelly P. Stromquist, Professor, International Education Policy, College of Education University of Maryland, College Park

... This book provides an opportunity at a very appropriate moment to discuss adult education issues during challenging times.

Paula Guimarães, University of Lisbon

... Read and savour delights and surprises.

Michael Welton, UBC and Athabasca University

This book satisfies everything one could desire of a reader on the subject.

Kenneth Wain, University of Malta

Cover picture by Alessio Surian

Learning with Adults
INTERNATIONAL ISSUES IN ADULT EDUCATION

Volume 13

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Scope:
This international book series attempts to do justice to adult education as an ever expanding field. It is intended to be internationally inclusive and attract writers and readers from different parts of the world. It also attempts to cover many of the areas that feature prominently in this amorphous field. It is a series that seeks to underline the global dimensions of adult education, covering a whole range of perspectives. In this regard, the series seeks to fill in an international void by providing a book series that complements the many journals, professional and academic, that exist in the area. The scope would be broad enough to comprise such issues as ‘Adult Education in specific regional contexts’, ‘Adult Education in the Arab world’, ‘Participatory Action Research and Adult Education’, ‘Adult Education and Participatory Citizenship’, ‘Adult Education and the World Social Forum’, ‘Adult Education and Disability’, ‘Adult Education and the Elderly’, ‘Adult Education in Prisons’, ‘Adult Education, Work and Livelihoods’, ‘Adult Education and Migration’, ‘The Education of Older Adults’, ‘Southern Perspectives on Adult Education’, ‘Adult Education and Progressive Social Movements’, ‘Popular Education in Latin America and Beyond’, ‘Eastern European perspectives on Adult Education’, ‘An anti-Racist Agenda in Adult Education’, ‘Postcolonial perspectives on Adult Education’, ‘Adult Education and Indigenous Movements’, ‘Adult Education and Small States’. There is also room for single country studies of Adult Education provided that a market for such a study is guaranteed.
Learning with Adults

A Reader

Edited by

Peter Mayo
University of Malta, Malta

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An extremely useful collection of articles on adult education. This book expands and elevates our understanding of this underestimated modality of education and its role in social change by bringing together multiple aspects – from culture, gender, identity, and policy to instruments and sites for knowledge transmission and production. *Learning with Adults: A Reader* constitutes the most valuable practical and theoretical reflection on adult education I have seen in a long time.

_Nelly P. Stromquist, Professor, International Education Policy, College of Education University of Maryland, College Park_

This book provides an opportunity at a very appropriate moment to discuss adult education issues during challenging times. It includes discussions on lifelong learning, the learning society, diversity of practices, learning in everyday life and policies. Therefore, the reader might find an engaged debate upon relevant subjects and an interesting problematization of contemporary dilemmas.

_Paula Guimarães, University of Lisbon_

This Adult Education Reader is unusual and remarkable. It is not usual to have renowned social theorists who are situated outside the field of adult learning included with many prominent adult learning theorists. Readers are invited to a large table filled with delectable goods from many cultures and contexts. Read and savour delights and surprises.

_Michael Welton, University of British Columbia and Athabasca University_

This is an important book Peter Mayo has put together with an impressive range of articles and with many of the more important names in adult education. It satisfies everything one could desire of a reader on the subject.

_Kenneth Wain, University of Malta_
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1. INTRODUCTION: THE MULTIVARIED NATURE OF ADULT EDUCATION PROVISION AND LEARNING

I write this introduction almost a year after the launch of Leona English and my co-authored book, Learning with Adults: A Critical Pedagogical Introduction for the same series in which we broached a variety of topics widely deemed pertinent to the fields of adult education and adult learning. Both Leona and I made a strong effort to combine our expertise, as well as draw on previous separate publications of ours, to furnish material for an introductory graduate text in adult education. Needless to say, despite the broad ranging book, our combined expertise has its limits and we could not possibly cover most of the issues one would expect to include in an introductory course. Readers of the book were told in the Introduction, that:

The volume broaches a variety of themes though we recognise important absences which deserve greater treatment elsewhere, including issues such as sexual orientation, transformative learning, literacy, consumer-rights education, and disability. The selection of themes was conditioned by the areas that fall within our combined expertise based on our previous writings, areas of ongoing research and teaching commitments, and our own adult education practice. (English & Mayo, p. 4)

It is this consideration that prompted me, as we finalized the text for our joint contribution, to suggest to the publishers, and specifically Peter de Leifde, the idea of an edited companion volume. We actually announced this in the Introduction to the 2012 volume. I have remained true to our word with the publication of this Reader which serves two purposes.

1. To provide chapters by relevant authorities on important areas not broached in the earlier volume. These included consumption, literacy, sexual orientation transformative learning, ICT (this topic was given adequate treatment in the context of different topics in the previous book, especially university continuing education, but I felt that it deserves a chapter unto itself) and disability, in addition to other topics including those of libraries, poverty, micro-states, social creation, the ‘learning society,’ social film, community arts, education in prisons, community radio, sport, aesthetic experience, Folk High Schools, larger supranational identities, among others. Furthermore, I also sought
to introduce a section focusing on policy and regional issues with special reference to Africa, Europe and specifically Southern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean.

2. To provide different perspectives on issues already dealt with in the earlier, 2012 volume, some in chapters focusing specifically on the theme itself, e.g. social movements or lifelong learning, and others in connection with different themes e.g. women and sport, citizenship and African adult education, workers’ education and the learning society.

As with the previous and now companion volume, I tried, in my selections of themes and chapters, to be as inclusive as possible but once again there are limits to the extent to which one can be successful here. Regions covered include Africa, Asia (a particular focus on India), the Caribbean, Europe and Latin America. It is impossible to include each of the world’s regions and perhaps one requires an entire book on its own providing regional foci. Readers will agree that the volume at hand is very large as it is and space restrictions became an important consideration. I feel however that we have a variety of perspectives, from North and South, to render the book reasonably inclusive.

Many of the authors are household names in the adult education literature. There are also a few relative newcomers to the field. There are others who have made their mark in other disciplines especially sociology and comparative education. As Leona and I stated in the introduction to the companion volume, adult education, while having its own literature, draws from a variety of fields. The selection of authors for this reader was deliberately carried out in a manner that illustrates this point. It is worth noting that sociology, a discipline that is strongly represented in this reader, perhaps reflecting my own personal bias as someone trained in sociology of education, lends itself to empirical research and theoretical ruminations on adult education and learning. We have managed to attract work by some of the finest exponents in this area. It is amazing, and perhaps surprising to some, to notice how such areas as adult learning and the larger all-embracing domain of lifelong learning feature in the work of major social theorists, some even combining their sociological work in universities and research institutes with engagement in the fields of workers’ education, trade union education and adult education in general. We are fortunate to have contributions from a few of these persons in this reader.

Furthermore, the Reader contains contributions from writers whose first language is not English. I sought to enrich this volume by providing space for issues that take us beyond the reductive Anglocentric (used in its widest possible context) perspective which dominates the mainstream adult education literature, especially that literature which finds itself (in journals from different disciplines) in the much celebrated International Social Science Citation Index. Even in its ‘europeanness,’ and possibly, but very arguably, its ‘eurocentrism,’ this literature can broaden boundaries for some readers.
INTRODUCTION

All this is meant to capture the variegated nature of adult education, an amorphous field with porous areas, the loosely defined boundaries being both a perceived strength and ‘weakness’ (for disciplinary purists) of the field.

For solely heuristic purposes, I have grouped the various contributions to the Reader according to the following rubrics:

- Lifelong Learning and the Learning Society
- Learning, Difference and Identity
- Sites and Instruments of Practice
- Learning in everyday life
- Policy and Regions.

The first section accommodates the broader chapters dealing with the theme of Lifelong Learning and the related issue of the Learning Society. It includes a discussion by Zygmunt Bauman focused on Europe and the European Union within the context of his notion of Liquid Modernity and another by D. W. Livingstone viewing lifelong learning within a broad and historical notion of the ‘learning society’ and critique of the ‘Knowledge economy’ a discussion worth viewing alongside that of other writers.\(^1\) We have a third contribution, this time from a Latin American perspective, by the prominent Ecuadorian policy analyst, Rosa Maria Torres. This is followed by the section on social difference including areas sorely missing from the previous volume, notably sexual orientation, tackled by activist and well known adult education writer and former editor of *Convergence* (the ICAE journal), Bob Hill, and disability, the latter, by Peter Rule and Tadi Ruth Modipa written from the perspective of people working in an African context. The chapter on sport can easily fit into the ‘Sites of Practice’ section but the contribution by Cynthia Lee Pemberton and Eileen Casey White stresses the identity perspective and focuses very much on women and gender construction.

Also connected with identities is the issue of social movements and, in this case, the contribution by Dip Kapoor on subaltern social movements. This chapter focuses on dispossessed people, the Adivasis and Dalits. The section also contains the contribution by prominent German sociologist, Oskar Negt, dealing with the construction of a ‘European identity,’ a recurring if controversial issue in Europe and across the European Union for quite some time now. Another prominent German sociologist from the University of Frankfurt, Ursula Apitzsch, deals with identity issues with respect to the situation of immigrant women in Germany. As with Pemberton and Casey White’s paper, the issue of women and adult education is here discussed with regard to another important social topic in adult education: Migration. Migration featured in the previous volume, in the chapter on Racism, while an entire chapter was devoted to Women and Adult Education.

Many of these chapters can easily fit Section 3 dealing with sites of practice, which testifies to the fluidity of these sections. I sought to provide discussions around more specific learning contexts here. One chapter, by Mae Shaw and Rosie Meade, concerns the community arts and community development settings.
Another, a contribution from Denmark by Palle Rasmussen, focuses on the Danish Folk High Schools, foregrounding Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig and Kristen Kold. Importance is also attached to the prison as an important site of learning, not only for a host of brilliant political figures such as Gramsci, Castro and Mandela but for inmates in general. We have a chapter by Joseph Giordmaina who has for years been active in the field in his native country, EU Prison Education projects and the European Prison Education Association (EPEA). This section also foregrounds work, by Jim Elmborg, concerning adult learning in that most important of adult learning spaces, the library (the multimedia library these days), which, in the words of Canadian sociologist, D. W. Livingstone, in this volume, constitutes a venue for the “increasing socialization of the forces of knowledge production.”

Prominent sites of learning include centres for cinefora such as those found in Kolkata, West Bengal, India, with their social purpose adult education provision as described and analysed by Asoke Bhattacharya. From film we move to the ever important medium of community radio with its potential to allow space for subaltern insurrectional voices contrasting with those deriving from the corporate media. In this chapter, well known critical pedagogue, Antonia Darder writes about community radio as a source of public pedagogy for adults, drawing on her own involvement in a project she helped set up. One cannot talk about sites and media and not mention the all pervasive nature of ICT in adult education, dealt with in the previous volume but given specific treatment here by Behrang Foroughi and Leona English from that important historical centre of Canadian Adult Education that is St Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia, Canada, which houses the Coady Institute. Then we also venture into the area of aesthetic education and experience to foster critical thinking. The piece in question by Alexis Kokkos, from the Hellenic Open University, draws on the Frankfurt School’s critical theory (Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse in particular), Dewey, Bourdieu, Freire and others. to show how the use of aesthetic experience in the learning context is connected to the process of engaging in a critical approach to challenging the status quo. Mention of Bourdieu brings to mind Marvin Formosa’s discussion around Universities of the Third Age and their class and status politics, also serving, in certain places, as a means of social distinction and a source of provision of positional goods.

The world of everyday living cannot be underestimated as a means to constantly unfurl before our eyes different sites of adult learning. Antonia De Vita and Anna Maria Piusi from the University of Verona highlight the many different projects involving ’social creation’ that constitute a groundswell of grassroots adult education in Northern Italy, especially the Veneto region. The authors discuss projects concerning consumption, the Roma people and the social solidarity economy, among other things. They, however, do not confine themselves to their immediate context and extend their reach to highlight projects in the same vein including those carried out by the Madres of the desaparecidos in Argentina. The consumption issue, broached by Piusi and De Vita, warrants sole treatment in a volume such as this. Kaela Jubas obliges, viewing this important issue from the lenses of critical theory,
feminism, Gramscian social theory and poststructuralism. I decided to include Lyn Tett’s chapter on literacy in this section because of the strong connection between this aspect of learning or lack of it and people’s quotidian experience, a connection strongly highlighted by the author. I also included Patricia Cranton’s chapter on transformative learning here because of her inclusion of the personal anecdotal experience of perspective transformation alongside an overview of the theory deriving from such key figures as Jack Mezirow.

The final section of the book brings together chapters which have a policy and/or regional focus. One policy issue, discussed by Julia Preece, concerns poverty. Three other policy discussions have a specific regional focus. These are Daniel Schugurensky and John Myers’ paper on the ‘Cinderella element’ in adult education policy making in Latin America, Carmel Borg and my paper on European adult education policy in adult education, viewed from a Southern European and Mediterranean vantage point, and finally Didacus Jules’ discussion of adult education policy making in small island states. Jules focuses specifically on the Caribbean. As someone who, like Didacus Jules and Carmel Borg, also hails from a micro-island state which poses specific challenges for adult education, I could not leave out this perspective. Jules has massive experience of educational policy making in the region, having also been the Coordinator of the Grenadian Literacy Campaign in the 80s. The other regionally focused work, which also connects with policy making in adult education but which extends its reach to discuss other issues, notably that of citizenship, is Edward Shizha and Ali A. Abdi’s chapter. It focuses on the struggles involved in adult education for citizenship in Africa, drawing insights from radical educators who adopt a Southern, decolonizing perspective, such as Freire and African thinkers such as Julius K. Nyerere and Jomo Kenyatta.

I would like to think that this volume provides the reader with a varied, comprehensive perspective of the field, without any assumptions on my part, as editor, of its being exhaustive. I finally would like to thank all authors for their contributions, for going out of their way to make the editorial changes and updates requested of them and for being so prompt in obtaining authorization to republish in cases when the chapter had appeared in a journal, book or edited volume. I also take this opportunity to thank the original publishers of the works involved for allowing republication, often with modifications, without any conditions attached save for acknowledgement of prior publication in their outlet.

NOTE


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PART I

LIFELONG LEARNING AND THE LEARNING SOCIETY
zygmunt bauman

2. LEARNING TO WALK ON QUICKSAND: LIFELONG LEARNING AND LIQUID LIFE

It took more than two millennia from the time the ancient Greek sages invented the notion of paideia for the idea of ‘lifelong education’ to turn from an oxymoron (a contradiction in terms) into a pleonasm (akin to a ‘buttery butter’ or ‘metallic iron’ …). That remarkable transformation occurred quite recently, in the last few decades, under the impact of the radically accelerated pace of change in the social setting in which both the principal actors of education the teachers and the learners alike – had to act.

The moment a bullet is fired from a ballistic weapon, its direction and the distance it will travel have already been decided by the shape and position of the gun and the amount of gunpowder in the shell; one can calculate with little or no error the spot where the missile will land, and one can choose that spot by shifting the barrel of the gun or changing the amount of gunpowder. These qualities of ballistic missiles made them ideal weapons for use in positional warfare-when the targets stayed dug into their trenches or bunkers and the missiles were the sole bodies on the move.

The same qualities make them useless, however, once targets that are invisible to the gunner start to move- particularly if they move faster than the missiles can fly, and even more so if they move erratically, in an unpredictable fashion that plays havoc with the preliminary calculation of the required trajectory. A smart, intelligent missile is needed then, a missile that can change its direction in mid-flight depending on changes in circumstances, that can immediately spot movements of the target, learn from them whatever can be learnt from them and extrapolate from the information gathered the exact spot where their trajectories will cross. Such smart missiles cannot suspend the gathering and processing of information as it travels, let alone finish them – its target never stops moving and changing direction and speed, so that plotting the place of encounter needs to be constantly updated and corrected.

We may say that smart missiles will follow a strategy of ‘instrumental rationality’ though in its liquidized, fluid version, so to speak; that is, dropping the assumption that the end will be given, steady and immovable for the duration and so only the means will need to be calculated and manipulated. Missiles that are even smarter won’t be confined to a preselected target at all but will choose targets as they go. What will guide them is rather the consideration of what the most is that they can
achieve given their technical capacities, and which of the potential targets around
are the ones they are best equipped to hit. This would be, we may say, a case of
‘instrumental rationality’ in reverse: targets are selected while the missile travels,
and it is the available means that decide which ‘end’ will eventually be selected. In
this case the ‘smartness’ of the flying missile and its effectiveness would benefit if
its equipment was of a rather ‘generalist’ or ‘uncommitted’ nature, unfocused on any
specific category of ends, not overly adjusted to the hitting of any particular kind of
target.

Smart missiles, unlike their ballistic elder cousins, learn as they go. So what
they need to be supplied with at the outset is the ability to learn, and learn fast. This
is obvious. What is less visible, however, though no less crucial than the skill of
learning quickly, is the ability to instantly forget what was learned before. Smart
missiles wouldn’t be smart if they were not able to ‘change their mind’ or revoke their
previous ‘decisions’ without a second thought and without regret … They must not
overly cherish the information they acquire and on no account should they develop
a habit of behaving in the way the information suggested. All the information they
acquire ages rapidly and if it is not promptly dismissed it may be misleading instead
of providing reliable guidance. What the ‘brains’ of smart missiles must never forget
is that the knowledge they acquire is eminently disposable, good only until further
notice and only temporarily useful, and that the warrant of success is not to overlook
the moment when acquired knowledge is of no more use and needs to be thrown
away, forgotten and replaced.

Philosophers of education of the solid modern era saw teachers as launchers of
ballistic missiles and instructed them how to ensure that their products would stay
strictly on the predesigned course determined by the original momentum. And no
wonder; at the early stages of the modern era ballistic missiles were the highest
achievement of human technical invention. They gave flawless service to anyone
wishing to conquer and master the world as it then was; as Hilaire Belloc confidently
declared, referring to the African natives, ‘Whatever happens, we have got The
Maxim Gun, and they have not’ (the Maxim gun, let’s recall, was a machine to
launch great numbers of bullets in a short time, and was effective only if there were
very many such bullets to hand).

As a matter of fact, though, that vision of the teacher’s task and the pupil’s
destiny was much older than the idea of the ‘ballistic missile’ and the modern era
that invented it – there is an ancient Chinese proverb that precedes the advent of
modernity by two millennia but is still quoted by the Commission of the European
Communities in support of its programme for ‘Lifelong Learning’ at the threshold
of the twenty-first century: ‘When planning for a year, plant corn. When planning
for a decade, plant trees. When planning for life, train and educate people.’ It is
only with the entry into liquid modern times that the ancient wisdom lost its
pragmatic value and people concerned with learning and the promotion of learning
known by the name of ‘education’ had to shift their attention from ballistic to smart
missiles.
More to the point, in the liquid modern setting, education and learning, to be of any use, must be continuous and indeed life long. No other kind of education and/or learning is conceivable; the ‘formation’ of selves or personalities is unthinkable in any fashion other than that of an ongoing and perpetually unfinished re-formation.

In a crisp and pithy rendition by Leszek Kolakowski, the freedom that transforms every step into a (potentially fateful) choice ‘is given to us along with our humanity, and is the foundation of that humanity, it gives uniqueness to our very existence’ (Kolakowski, 1999, p. 98). But it can be said that at no other time has the necessity to make choices been so deeply felt. At no other time have the acts of choosing been so poignantly self-conscious as they are now, conducted as they are under conditions of painful yet incurable uncertainty, under the constant threat of ‘being left behind’ and of being excluded from the game with any return barred because of a failure to rise to the new demands.

What separates the present-day agony of choice from the discomforts which have always tormented homo eligens, the ‘man choosing’, is the discovery or suspicion that there are no preordained rules or universally approved objectives that can be steadfastly followed whatever happens, thereby relieving the choosers from responsibility for any adverse consequences of their choices. Nothing prevents those reference points and guidelines that seem trustworthy today from being debunked and condemned tomorrow (and retrospectively!) as misleading or corrupt. Allegedly rock-solid companies are unmasked as figments of the accountants’ imagination. Whatever is ‘good for you’ today may be reclassified as your poison tomorrow. Apparently firm commitments and solemnly signed agreements may be overturned overnight. And promises, or most of them, seem to be made solely to be broken or denied, counting on the short span of public memory. There seems to be no stable, secure island among the tides.

So where does this leave the prospects and the tasks of education? Jacek Wojciechowski, the editor of a Polish periodical dedicated to the academic profession, observes that ‘once upon a time a university degree offered a safe conduct for practising the profession until retirement – but this is now history. Nowadays, knowledge needs to be constantly refreshed, even the professions need to be changed, otherwise all effort to earn a living will come to nothing.’ (Wojciechowski, 2004) In other words, the impetuous growth of new knowledge and no less rapid ageing of the old combine to produce human ignorance on a massive scale, and continuously replenish, perhaps even beef up, its supplies. Wojciechowski warns: where there is a problem that people struggle to resolve, the market will promptly come to their rescue. This comes at a price, of course. In this case, the problem is people’s ignorance – a stroke of good fortune for the sellers, bad luck for the buyers. For skilful school managers, this offers a not-to-be-missed opportunity to garner extra funds by patching together courses in the skills currently sought after, even if teachers with the skills needed to impart them are conspicuous mostly by their absence. This is a supplier’s market, prospective
clients being by definition in no position to judge the quality of the commodities on offer or to be choosy if they risk making a judgement. Knowledge that is inferior or useless, sometimes outdated or even downright misleading, is easily sold, and the more of it is bought, the less likely are the cheated to call the suppliers’ bluff. Wojciechowski suggests that the only ‘continuous education’ courses that should be experimentally, allowed to be offered by an institution with no proper credentials are courses in dentistry – on condition that the teachers register as patients in their graduates’ surgeries.

Preying on human ignorance and gullibility promises swift and secure returns, and there will always be some fortune-seekers around who are unable to resist such a promise. But even leaving aside the genuine, widespread and growing danger of dishonest trade, the speed with which the acquired skills are devalued and the demands of labour markets drift allows even impeccably honest dealers to contribute (even if this time by default rather than design) to the unsavoury social repercussions of the new and massive knowledge-dependence. As Lisa Thomas found recently, the commercialization of the mid-career education that has become indispensable is everywhere deepening the economic and social divisions between a highly educated and skilled labour elite and the rest of the labour force, as well as between skilled and unskilled labour, erecting new barriers to social mobility that are difficult to negotiate, and adding to the volume of unemployment and poverty. Once established, the divisions tend in addition to be self-perpetuating and self-enhancing.2

In the US, for instance, only 19 per cent of people on low incomes who need professional training are likely to complete the course, while 76 per cent in higher income groups probably will. In a relatively small country like Finland, it has recently been discovered that about half a million adults in employment need education but cannot afford it. It is becoming increasingly clear that, left to its own logic, the ‘teaching market’ will magnify rather than mitigate inequity and multiply its potentially catastrophic social consequences and side-effects. A political intervention is unavoidable if the bane is to be avoided.

This much has been assumed by the Commission of European Communities and confirmed in the communication already mentioned, ‘Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality’, issued on 21 November 2001 – though it is by no means certain that the social consequences of the ongoing commercialization of further education were the main worry prompting the initiative; the dominant motif re-emerging throughout the document is the suspicion that market-administered continuous education will not supply what the ‘economy’ truly needs and may therefore adversely affect the efficiency and competitiveness of the European Union and its member states.

The authors of the document are worried that the advent of the ‘knowledge society’ portends enormous risks alongside its potential benefits; it ‘threatens to bring about greater inequalities and social exclusion’, because only 60.3 per cent of people between 25 and 64 in the EU have attained at least upper secondary level
education, while almost 150 million people in the EU are without such a basic level of education and ‘face a higher risk of marginalization’. But the need to expand lifelong education/learning is argued, from the start of the document, in terms of the ‘competitive advantage’ that is ‘increasingly dependent on investment in human capital’, and on knowledge and competences becoming ‘a powerful engine for economic growth’. According to the Commission, the importance of and the need for lifelong learning consist in its role ‘in promoting a skilled, trained and adaptable workforce’. The task of achieving a ‘more inclusive, tolerant and democratic’ society marked by ‘greater civic participation, higher reported well-being and lower criminality’ enters the reasoning mostly as an afterthought and is represented as a side-effect: it is hoped it will be fulfilled as a natural consequence when more of the people who were inadequately trained thus far ‘enter the labour market’ thanks to improved training.

The document bears all the marks of a ‘committee product’, collating concerns whose heterogeneous origins and potentially conflict-prone relations can only be concealed by painstaking editorial work. But time and again the main concern and argumentum crucis around which the rest of the text is wrapped shows through clearly. Viviane Reding, then the European Commissioner for Education and Culture, stated in her preface to the ‘Communication’ that its purpose is to ‘adjust our educational systems to the requirements of the economy and the knowledge society’, while in the Cedefop / Euridice commentary, published a year later, one can read that the ‘identification of skills needed by the labour market’ needs to become a ‘highly significant aspect of curriculum provision’. As Kenneth Wain observes in a paper prepared for the National Consultation Conference on Lifelong Learning held in Malta in 2001, the document may suggest ‘that what is valued is only this kind of learning, vocational learning for the purposes of the economy and the job market’. (Wain, in Borg & Mayo, 2004, p.22) Similarly, Carmel Borg and Peter Mayo conclude their thorough analysis of the document’s message by pointing out that ‘the memorandum’s messages ought to be read against an economic backdrop characterised by a market-oriented definition of social viability. As educational change is becoming increasingly linked to the discourse of efficiency, competitiveness, cost effectiveness and accountability’ its declared aim is to impart to the ‘labour force’ the virtues of flexibility, mobility and ‘basic, employment-related skills’ (Borg & Mayo, 2004, p. 23).

The apprehensions are well founded. It is easy to trace a remarkable affinity between the approach taken by the European Commission and the overtly stated intentions and demands made by authors writing explicitly in the name of and for the benefit of business managers. The latter follow, with little variation, the pattern of reasoning exemplified by a highly popular and influential compendium of corporation thinking, according to which the purpose of education is ‘developing employees to enhance their current performance at work as well as to prepare them to perform in positions they may hold in the future’, while the aims of such development need to be at all times determined by ‘identification of needed skills and active management
of employee learning for the long-range future in relation to explicit corporate and business strategies’. (Fombrun, et al., 1984, p. 41, 159). Raili Moilanen, having analysed the contents of those papers submitted to the 3rd International Conference of Researching Work and Learning that represented the employers’ point of view, found out that ‘learning and development seem to be important for organizations mostly for the reasons of effectiveness and competitiveness’ while ‘the viewpoint of human being as such does not seem to be important’ (Moilanen, 2004, p. 38). One could hardly expect different findings…

Let me add that however doubtful the approach of the authors of the ‘Communication’ may appear to people concerned with the ethical and social consequences of the unquestioned priority accorded to economic (in the last account, profit-making) considerations (as Borg and Mayo point out, while the profit-making capacity of companies improves, ‘socio-economic inequalities and corresponding asymmetrical relations of power continue to intensify’), it also seems unsound in purely pragmatic terms.

Appeals to the guiding role of ‘Human Resources Development’ based on the ‘identification of skills needed by the labour market’ have been made with exemplary consistency in the past, and with a similarly monotonous regularity the managers of ‘human resources’ have failed to anticipate what the ‘labour market’ would ‘need’ when the currently trained ‘labour force’ completed their instruction and were presumably ready for employment. Future twists of market demand are not easily predictable, however artful the forecasters and methodologically refined their prognoses. Errors are, to be sure, a notorious and probably incurable ailment of all ‘scientific predictions’ of social trends, but in this case, when people’s life prospects are at stake, mistaken judgments are exceptionally damaging. Surrendering human efforts of self-assertion and self-improvement to essentially unpredictable and so known to be unreliable visions of the future needs of volatile and chaotic markets portends a lot of human suffering – of frustration, dashed hopes and wasted lives. Calculations of ‘human power’ claim an authority they do not possess, make promises that cannot hold up and as a result assume responsibilities they are unable to bear.

This is probably why programmes of ‘lifelong education’ tend to be recast, imperceptibly and with no explicit explanation, into exhortations to ‘lifelong learning’ – ‘subsidiarizing’ thereby the responsibility for skills selection and their acquisition, and for the consequences of wrong choices, to those on the receiving end of the notoriously fluid and fickle ‘labour markets’. Borg and Mayo are precisely on target when they conclude that ‘in these stringent neo-liberal times, the notion of self-directive learning lends itself to a discourse that allows the State to abdicate its responsibilities in providing the quality education to which every citizen is entitled in a democratic society.’ Let me point out that this is not the first nor the last function which the state would gladly remove from the realm of politics, and thereby from its responsibilities. Let me add as well that the shifting emphasis from ‘education’ to ‘learning’ chimes well with another tendency, common among contemporary managers: the inclination to ‘subsidiarize’ from their own on to their employees’
shoulders responsibility for all effects, but above all the negative ones, and more generally responsibility for ‘failing to rise to the challenge’.

Given the continuing convergence of two overwhelming trends that shape power relations and the strategy of domination in liquid modern times, the prospects for the twisted and erratic itinerary of market developments to be straightened up, and so for ‘Human Resources’ calculations to be made more realistic, are poor at best, and most probably nil. In a liquid modern setting ‘manufactured uncertainty’ is the paramount instrument of domination, while the policy of *precarisation*, to use Pierre Bourdieu’s term (a concept referring to the ploys that result in the situation of the subjects becoming more insecure and vulnerable and therefore even less predictable and controllable), is fast becoming the hard core of the domination strategy. ‘Planning for life’ and the market are at loggerheads, and once state politics surrenders to the guidance of the ‘economy,’ understood as the free play of market forces, the balance of power between the two switches decisively to the advantage of the second.

This does not augur well for the ‘empowering of citizens’; named by the European Commission as the primary objective of lifelong learning. By widespread consent, ‘empowerment’ (a term used in the current debates interchangeably with that of ‘enablement’) is achieved when people acquire the ability to control, or at least significantly influence the personal, political, economic and social forces by which their life trajectory would otherwise be buffeted; in other words, to be ‘empowered’ means to be able to make choices and act effectively on the choices made, and that in turn signifies the capacity to influence the range of available choices and the social settings in which choices are made and pursued. To put it bluntly, genuine ‘empowerment’ requires the acquisition not only of the skills needed to successfully play a game designed by others, but also of the powers to influence the game’s objectives, stakes and rules; not only the personal skills, but also the social powers.

‘Empowerment’ requires the building and rebuilding of inter human bonds, the will and the ability to engage with others in a continuous effort to make human cohabitation into a hospitable and friendly setting for the mutually enriching cooperation of men and women struggling for self-esteem, for the development of their potential and for the proper use of their abilities. In short, one of the decisive stakes of lifelong education aimed at ‘empowerment’ is the rebuilding of the now increasingly deserted public space where men and women may engage in a continuous translation between the individual and the common, the private and the communal interests, rights and duties.

‘In light of fragmentation and segmentation processes and increasing individual and social diversity,’ writes Dominique Simone Rychen, ‘strengthening social cohesion and developing a sense of social awareness and responsibility have become important societal and political goals.’ (Simone Rychen, 2004, p. 29). In the workplace, in the immediate neighbourhood and in the street, we mix daily with others who, as Rychen points out, ‘do not necessarily speak the same language (literally or metaphorically) or share the same memory or history’. Under such circumstances, the skills we need more than any others in order to offer the public
sphere a reasonable chance of resuscitation are the skills of interaction with others – of conducting a dialogue, of negotiation, of gaining mutual understanding and of managing or resolving conflicts inevitable in every instance of shared life.

Let me restate what was stated at the beginning: in the liquid modern setting, education and learning, to be of any use, must be continuous and indeed lifelong. I hope we can see now that one, though perhaps the decisive, reason why it must be continuous and lifelong is the nature of the task we confront on the shared road to ‘empowerment’ – a task which is exactly as education should be: continuous, never ending, lifelong.

This is indeed how education should be so that the men and women of the liquid modern world can pursue their life goals with at least a modicum of resourcefulness and self-confidence, and hope to succeed. But there is another reason, less often discussed, though more powerful than the one argued thus far: this is not to do with adapting human skills to the fast pace of the world’s change, but with making the fast changing world more hospitable to humanity.

That task also calls for continuous, lifelong education. As Henry A. Giroux and Susan Searls Giroux have recently reminded us –

Democracy is imperiled as individuals are unable to translate their privately suffered misery into broadly shared public concerns and collective action. Civic engagement now appears impotent and public values have become expendable as a result of the growing power of multinational corporations to shape the content of most mainstream media...For many people today, citizenship is about the act of buying and selling commodities (including political candidates) rather than broadening the scope of their freedoms and rights in order to expand the operations of a substantive democracy. (Giroux and Searls Giroux, 2004, p. 1)

The consumer is an enemy of the citizen...All over the ‘developed’ and affluent part of the planet signs abound of people turning their backs on politics, of growing political apathy and loss of interest in the running of the political process. But democratic politics cannot survive for long in the face of citizens’ passivity arising from political ignorance and indifference. Citizens’ freedoms are not properties acquired once and for all; such properties are not secure once they are locked in private safes. They are planted and rooted in the sociopolitical soil and it needs to be fertilized daily and will dry out and crumble if it is not attended to ‘day in day out’ by the informed actions of a knowledgeable and committed public. It is not only the technical skills that need to be continually refreshed, not only the job-focused education that needs to be lifelong. The same is required, and with still greater urgency, by education in citizenship.

Most people would agree today without much prompting that they need to refresh their professional knowledge and digest new technical information if they wish to avoid ‘being left behind’ and don’t wish to be thrown overboard from the fast accelerating ‘technological progress’. And yet a similar feeling of urgency is
conspicuously missing when it comes to catching up with the impetuous stream of political developments and the fast changing rules of the political game. The authors quoted above have collated some survey results testifying to the rapid widening of the gap that separates public opinion from the central facts of political life:

Soon after the invasion of Iraq, The New York Times released a survey indicating that 42 percent of the American public believed that Saddam Hussein was directly responsible for the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. CBS also released a news poll indicating that 55 percent of the public believed that Saddam Hussein directly supported the terrorist organization AI Qaeda. A Knight Ridder / Princeton Research poll found that ‘44 percent of respondents said they thought “most” or “some” of the September 11, 2001 hijackers were Iraqi citizens.’ A majority of Americans also believed already that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, and that such weapons had been found, that he was about to build a nuclear bomb, and that he would unleash it eventually on an unsuspecting American public. None of these claims had any basis in fact, as no evidence existed to even remotely confirm these assertions. A poll conducted by The Washington Post near the second anniversary of the September 11 tragedy indicated that 70 percent of Americans continued to believe that Iraq played a direct role in the planning of the attacks.3

In such a landscape of ignorance, it is easy to feel lost and hapless – and easier still to be lost and hapless without feeling it. As Pierre Bourdieu memorably remarked, the person who has no grip on the present wouldn’t dream of controlling the future— and most Americans must have only a misty view of what the present holds. This suspicion is amply confirmed by some incisive and insightful observers. ‘Many Americans’, Brian Knowlton of the International Herald Tribune notes, ‘said the hot-cold-hot nature of recent alerts had left them unsure just how urgently, and fear fully, they should react’.9

Ignorance leads to paralysis of the will. One does not know what is in store and has no way to count the risks. For authorities impatient with constraints imposed on power-holders by a buoyant and resilient democracy, this kind of impotence of the electorate produced by ignorance, and the widespread disbelief in the efficacy of dissent and an unwillingness to get politically involved are much needed and welcome sources of political capital: domination through deliberately cultivated ignorance and uncertainty is more reliable and comes cheaper than rule grounded in a thorough debate of the facts and a protracted effort to agree on the truth of the matter and on the least risky ways to proceed.

Political ignorance is self-perpetuating, and a rope that is plaited of ignorance and inaction comes in handy whenever the voice of democracy’ is to be stifled or its hands tied.

We need lifelong education to give us choice. But we need it even more to salvage the conditions that make choice available and within our power.
NOTES

1 This chapter appeared previously as Chapter 6 Learning to Walk on Quicksand in Zygmunt Bauman’s 2005 book *Liquid Life*, Polity Press. Permission to republish obtained from author and from Polity Press.
2 See www.staffs.ac.uk.journal/volume 6(1)editor.htm.
3 See ‘Hot-cold-hot:terror alert left America uncertain’, International Herald Tribune, 5 August.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper draws from various studies I have conducted on adult education and on lifelong learning in Latin America and other regions. Two such studies (written in English) serve here as main references (Torres, 2004; 2009).

Latin America and the Caribbean is a highly heterogeneous region, comprising two sub-regions (Latin America, the Caribbean) and 41 countries and territories with very different political, cultural, economic, social and educational realities. Some 600 languages are spoken; Spanish and Portuguese are the two most widespread official languages. Any regional generalization would be abusive, and space does not allow us to elaborate here more on each country. Also, the situation is very dynamic; trends may change considerably in a short period of time. In the current international context, and vis-à-vis the world and European crisis, Latin America appears strong and united, with economic and social indicators improving over the past few years. On the other hand, Mexico and Chile, the two Latin American countries that are members of OECD, are facing major turmoil, their education systems being exposed and under heavy social scrutiny and criticism.

In most Latin American countries, the term used is ‘Youth & Adult Education’ (henceforth YAE). The term “youth” was incorporated in the 1980s, acknowledging the increased presence of young people in adult education programmes as well as the need to address the specificity of youth in such programmes.

The information and analysis presented below refers basically to the twelve year period between CONFINTEA V (1997) and CONFINTEA VI (2009).

REACTIVATION OF YOUTH AND ADULT EDUCATION IN THE REGION IN THE PAST FEW YEARS

Between the late 1980s and the late 1990s, YAE practically disappeared in most countries, following World Bank recommendations to governments in “developing countries” in the sense of giving priority to primary education and to children as opposed to adults (The World Bank later also rectified its argument about the failure of adult literacy, which was ill-documented). The Education for All (henceforth EFA)
world initiative coordinated by UNESCO (1900-2000-2015) has followed the same trend: out of the six EFA goals, Goal 2 referred to primary education, has received the most attention while Goals 3 and 4 referred to youth and adult education, have received the least attention, as acknowledged every year by EFA Global Monitoring Reports (henceforth EFA GMR). In fact, the 2009 EFA GMR, coinciding with the year of CONFINTSEA VI, continued to ignore YAE, not considered of strategic importance to the achievement of EFA by 2015.

For various reasons, since the late 1990s there has been a visible reactivation of YAE in the region. CONFINTSEA V contributed to enhance social mobilization and networking around YAE, both before and right after the Hamburg conference. Later on, we have witnessed the emergence of new supranational and international actors engaged in YAE, notably the Cuban government and its ‘Yo Sí Puedo’ (Yes, I Can) literacy programme, and the Organization of IberoAmerican States (OEI) which organized the Ibero-American Plan for Youth and Adult Literacy and Basic Education (PIA) 2007–2015. (OEI, 2006)

Such reactivation is reflected among others in the following:

**Renewed emphasis on youth/adult literacy.** A new wave of ‘illiteracy eradication’ has taken over the region. Many countries resumed national literacy programmes or campaigns, even some countries with very low illiteracy rates (lower than 3%) such as Argentina and Uruguay. The exception is Cuba, declared a ‘territory free of illiteracy’ almost half a century ago (1961), as well as several countries in the English-speaking Caribbean where governmental focus on literacy is on the formal system. There are also sub-national and local programmes run by local governments, religious groups, NGOs, social organizations and movements, and teacher unions.

**Clearer institutionalization of YAE.** There are advances in legislation and policy in most countries. There is increased recognition of the right to (free) education as well as to linguistic and cultural diversity and to inter-culturality as a comprehensive approach to education. In Cuba and Mexico for a long time, and more recently in countries such as Chile, Venezuela, Bolivia or Paraguay, YAE becomes more institutionalized, pointing towards the building of a system or subsystem, rather than the usual and discontinued ad-hoc interventions.

**New actors and partnerships.** In most countries, there are government partnerships with NGOs, universities, religious groups and the private sector. In a few countries, partnerships have included teacher unions and strong social movements (e.g. in Argentina and Brazil). There are also several international actors engaged in YAE in the region. As indicated, the most active in recent times are the Spanish government/OEI and the Cuban government/IPLAC. Others include the Convenio Andrés Bello (Andrés Bello Agreement – CAB), an international inter-governmental organization focused on supranational integration (twelve countries), based in Bogota and linked
to OEI; and the Organization of American States (OAS), based in Washington, which coordinates the Summits of the Americas.

More and better information and knowledge on YAE. There is considerable growth in research and documentation at national, sub-regional and regional level in recent years. Of course, there are also major differences between countries in terms of quantity, quality, topics and approaches related to research. Big countries such as Brazil and Mexico and also Chile report many surveys and studies.

Advances in evaluation. Evaluation has become a central piece of school systems and reforms in the region since the 1990s, but its incorporation in YAE is rather recent. In Brazil, a Functional Literacy Indicator (INAF), based on actual evaluation of reading, writing and numeracy skills of the adult population (15–64 years of age), has been developed annually since 2001 by two private institutions. In Mexico, the National Institute for Adult Education (INEA) has its own evaluation system. In Chile, evaluation of student outcomes is under a National System for the Evaluation of Learning and Certification of Studies, which includes YAE. Both Mexico and Chile have adopted results-based schemes for paying the institutions and/or teaching staff hired for YAE programmes.

Linkages between education/training and work as a field of research, policy and action. The linkages between education, the economy and work have become a field of concern, policy and action, within the overall concern with poverty, unemployment and social exclusion. Social Economy gains increased attention as an alternative economic model that generates also alternative approaches to education and training linked to production, commercialization, barter and other income-generation activities by families, cooperatives, and organized communities.

Increased attention to ‘special groups’. Visible attention has been given in recent years to the disabled, migrants and prison inmates. The use of traditional and modern technologies has facilitated this task, especially with the disabled and with the migrant population. Prison education has been enhanced since 2006 in the framework of the EUROsociAL programme of the European Commission. Initiatives aimed at the blind, the visually challenged and hearing impaired have been developed in recent years in many countries. (UNESCO-OEI, 2008).

New technologies reaching the field. Radio has been a powerful ally of YAE for several decades and continues to be in many countries, especially in some of the poorest ones such as Haiti, Bolivia, and Paraguay. In the past few years, audiovisual media have become widespread mainly through the Cuba-assisted Yo Sí Puedo literacy and post-literacy programme operating in several countries since 2003. Computers and the Internet are also reaching YAE, particularly for the younger population. Tele-centers or info-centers (different from cybercafes, privately owned
and for-profit) are part of basic education programmes in several countries. In remote rural areas, energy plants or solar panels are being installed. In many places today it is easier to find a cybercafe or a tele-center than a library, a computer than a book.

SOME OLD AND NEW WEAKNESSES AND LIMITATIONS.
CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

The ‘Agenda for the Future’ approved at CONFINTEA V, its wide vision and ambitious proposals for adult learning, is not the one that has been implemented in this region since 1997. Neither is the 2000–2010 YAE Regional Framework for Action prepared as a follow up to CONFINTEA V. Advances coexist with old and new limitations related to governmental and non-governmental action as well as to international agencies intervening in the field.

Sectoral approaches and interventions. Despite advances in cross-sectoral policies and collaboration with other government actors, YAE continues to be perceived as pertaining to the ‘education sector’, unconnected with major economic, political and social issues. YAE is in fact a transversal issue, but invisible unless it falls directly under an education authority and refers somewhere explicitly to the term ‘adult’.

Continued low status of YAE. The traditional low status of YAE is related to: (a) age (vis a vis children), and (b) socio-economic status. Estimations of costs of programmes and plans rarely consider infrastructure, equipment or even remunerated work. In many cases, YAE continues to be considered a ‘special regime’ together with other areas that challenge conventional classifications, such as bilingual intercultural education, special education, and multigrade schools.

Activism and discontinuity of efforts. Activism has been a characteristic of YAE, often related to ‘one-shot’ and isolated activities lacking continuity, monitoring, systematization, evaluation and feedback. Countries engage from time to time and over and over again in ‘illiteracy eradication’ or ‘illiteracy reduction’ initiatives. So far, policies have been unable to deal with literacy/basic education in a sustained and integral manner, linking school and out-of-school, children’s and adults’ education as part of one single strategy towards education for all.

Big distances between policies and implementation. The right to free, quality education continues to be denied to a large portion of the population. National reports prepared for CONFINTEA VI say little about actual implementation. One key conclusion I drew from the field study on literacy and written culture by out-of-school youth and adults in nine countries of the region is that “policies in this field have become autonomous, with little or no contact with actual practice on the ground.”
High political, financial and administrative vulnerability of YAE. YAE continues to be highly vulnerable to national/local political and administrative changes as well as to changes in international priorities. This implies a permanent threat to the continuity of policies and programmes, and to the building of national capacities and accumulated practical experience. A key component of such vulnerability are the meager financial resources available for education in general and for YAE in particular. Few national reports and studies provide concrete information on YAE funding and costs. This is marked in the case of the private sector. In many countries, YAE budget represents less than 1% of educational spending. Brazil calculates that, budget-wise, an adult learner counts as 0.7% of a primary school child (Brazil CONFINTÉA VI report).

Funding comes from various sources: government, churches, the private sector, social movements, and international agencies. There is scarce information on the financial contribution of bilateral and multilateral agencies to YAE, its uses and impact. In most countries, government plays the major role, especially in basic education levels.

Government programmes generally do not charge fees and many of them provide access to free equipment and materials. Also, various countries have been adopting compensation policies or plans tied to studying.

Rise of for-profit spirit and market mechanisms. There is an important decline in volunteerism, social mobilization and political commitment traditionally linked to YAE. In many countries, NGOs are hired and paid by governments to implement programmes. On the other hand, the trend towards accreditation and certification (completion of primary/basic/secondary education) has attracted the for-profit private sector, introducing fees and other market mechanisms into the field.

Low attention to professionalization of adult educators. The low status, poor training and bad working conditions of adult educators is an old vicious circle in YAE. Training is generally poor and short, and its deficits are even more visible in the case of indigenous educators prepared for intercultural bilingual education programmes. Availability of audiovisual and digital technologies are contributing to further reduce the importance of professionalization and of initial and in-service training.

Requisites for adult educators have been “upgraded” in some countries, including a professional teaching title or completion of secondary education rather than primary education only; such requisites tend to loosen in rural areas and in literacy programmes, which continue to operate in most cases with community volunteers. The question that remains concerns the desired profile and education/training of adult educators, and whether possessing a teacher certificate ensures good teaching.

Weak dissemination, use and impact of research and evaluation results. Research, documentation and evaluation efforts lack sufficient and opportune dissemination.
We found differentiated circuits, one closer to academic circles and another one closer to bureaucratic and government structures. Overall, there is little evidence that research results are informing and influencing policy-making, training or teaching practice. They have not contributed to modifying long-entrenched ‘common sense’ in the field, including negative perceptions and terminologies linked to illiteracy (e.g. ‘scourge’, ‘plague’, ‘darkness’, ‘blindness’, ‘shackle’, ‘eradication’, etc.), the association between illiteracy and ignorance, between number of years of schooling and ‘functional literacy’, and between adult education, non-formal and remedial education. Also, most diagnoses and recommendations are based on literature reviews, with little connection to realities and little or no empirical research. (Caruso, et.al, 2008).

Age discrimination within YAE. There is a consistent trend towards (a) giving priority to the younger segments of the adult population, establishing age limits (40, 35, in some cases less), and (b) segmenting educational opportunities by age: literacy offered to older generations and other programmes offered to youth. Cuba is the only country that has the elderly as a priority group in terms of educational and cultural attention by government. Uruguay – known for its high percentage of third age population – is also expanding the age of learners within YAE.

Continued neglect of indigenous peoples. The YAE Regional Framework for Action (2000–2010) identified four priority groups: indigenous, peasants, youth and women. Youth and women have in fact been prioritized; indigenous and afro descendant groups have not. Racism is alive despite advances in national and international legislation, including the approval in 2007 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Brazil’s national illiteracy rate (2008) was 7.1%. Among indigenous peoples it stands at 18% and 16 % among black people (Brazil CONFINTIA VI report). In Mexico, the national illiteracy rate was 8.4%, and the illiteracy rate among indigenous groups was 36.1% (Mexico CONFINTIA VI report). Also, Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) continues to focus on rural areas. However, indigenous populations are also settled in urban areas, especially in large Latin American cities, following strong rural-urban migration patterns.

Continued neglect of rural areas. Formal and non-formal education continue to concentrate in urban and the periphery of urban areas, thus maintaining and even deepening the urban-rural educational gap. Probabilities that youth and adults in rural areas get no or incipient education are twice as big as in urban areas, and in some countries three times bigger (SITEAL). Peru has the highest urban-rural school gap. Peru’s CONFINTIA VI report acknowledged that practically all educational institutions doing adult education are located in cities. In Brazil, illiterates in urban areas are 9.7 million as against 4.7 million in rural areas; however, in percentile terms, rural areas have almost three times more illiterates – 26.3% against 8.7% in urban areas.
YOUTH AND ADULT EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Low coverage of programmes. YAE programmes are very limited for actual needs. Despite being a prioritized age group, by 2007 less than 10% of 20–29 year olds who had not completed secondary education attended some educational programme. In large countries such as Brazil and Mexico, all efforts seem small and advances slow. According to Brazil’s CONFINTEA VI report, only 10% of the demand was served in 2008. Chile calculated that it would take 20 years to reach the 4 million people who have not completed basic education (Chile CONFINTEA VI report).

Quality and learning remain distant issues. Quantitative indicators (enrolment and retention, number of groups organized, materials or equipments distributed, etc.) predominate as indicators of achievement and success. A minimum number of participants is often established as a requisite to start a programme or a center, thus often leading to cheating (e.g. manipulating the statistics, completing the list with family members, friends or persons who are not part of the target population, etc.). In literacy programmes, goals continue to be set in terms of ‘eradicating’ or ‘reducing’ illiteracy rates, rather than in terms of learning and effective use of reading and writing. Only in very few cases have adult literacy programmes and campaigns been thoroughly evaluated. One such example is Ecuador’s National Literacy Campaign ‘Monsignor Leonidas Proaño’ (1988–1990).

Continued weaknesses of technical and vocational education/training programmes. There is skepticism in relation to the effectiveness of these programmes; several international organizations have commissioned studies and impact evaluations of the programmes they support. The “solution” of keeping or ‘re-inserting’ adolescents and youth in schools (often against their will) – the same unchanged schools that expelled them in the first place – is also debatable. An IIEP study of 52 programmes in fourteen Latin American countries concluded that education/training programmes intended to prepare young people for work (a) take a simplistic view of youth inclusion in the labor market, (b) reach only a small portion of the potential population, (c) adopt a narrow approach focused on specific training, and (d) do not take sufficiently into account the importance of formal education, the competitiveness of the labor market and the scarcity of decent jobs (Jacinto, 2007, 2008).

“Best practices” selected without clear criteria. Many practices selected as ‘good’ or ‘best’ practices in education and in YAE in particular are outdated, are based on documents, experts’ opinions or self-evaluation by their own actors, and lack evidence of their implementation, results and actual perceptions by participating learners. Few of them would pass the test of the four As – availability, accessibility, adaptability and acceptability. On the other hand, many relevant experiences remain un-systematized and unknown because of chronic lack of time and of resources in the field, their commitment to action and their many urgencies. Also, it is important to remember that ‘innovative’ does not necessarily mean ‘effective,’ or generalizable.
Innovations are specific, generally local and small-scale, and cannot be easily replicated or expanded on a massive scale.

MAJOR COORDINATION PROBLEMS AMONG NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

Decentralization processes and diversification of educational provision have increased coordination and articulation problems amongst the diverse national actors: government across sectors and at the various levels, governmental and non-governmental bodies, profit and non-profit private sector, NGOs, universities, churches, etc. The same is true for the various international actors working in YAE, and in the literacy field in particular. Each of them has its own plans, objectives, goals, timeframes, diagnoses, approaches, methodologies, reporting and financing mechanisms. See table below for the case of literacy.

Table 1. Regional and International Adult Literacy Goals (1980–2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MPE</th>
<th>EFA I-Jomtien</th>
<th>EFA II–Dakar</th>
<th>UNLD</th>
<th>PIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major Project for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>Education for All</td>
<td>Education for All</td>
<td>United Nations Literacy Decade</td>
<td>Ibero-American Plan for Youth and Adult Literacy and Basic Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO-OREALC</td>
<td>UNESCO-UNICEF-UNDP-World Bank</td>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>OEI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eradicate illiteracy by 2000</td>
<td>Reduce illiteracy by half by 2000</td>
<td>Reduce illiteracy by half by 2015</td>
<td>Reduce illiteracy by half by 2012</td>
<td>Eradicate illiteracy by 2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Elaborated by R.M. Torres

LIFELONG LEARNING (LLL) IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

The paradigm shift proposed worldwide – from education to learning, and from adult education to adult learning – has not been appropriated in this region. Although CONFINTEA V had strong regional resonance, the term learning was never introduced in its follow up. Youth and Adult Education (YAE) was the term used in the Regional Framework for Action following CONFINTEA V.

The Lifelong Learning (LLL) concept that emerged in the North, closely related to economic growth, competitiveness and employability, is understood and utilized in most diverse ways worldwide. Generally: (a) LLL continues to be used interchangeably with Lifelong Education, without differentiating education and
learning’; and (b) LLL is associated with adults rather than to the entire lifespan – ‘from the cradle to the grave’.

All this is reflected in Latin America and the Caribbean. LLL is mentioned in many legal and policy/programme documents, with the same biases and inconsistencies that are found internationally. LLL appears often as a separate line of action or goal rather than as an embracing category. In Jamaica’s Ministry of Education’s structure, for example, LLL has been added as a sixth section, next to the other five sections on early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary and special education.

From the documents and websites reviewed, the LLL terminology appears to be more widespread and more embedded in recent policies and plans in the English-speaking Caribbean countries than in Latin American ones. In the Caribbean, LLL seems to follow the frameworks adopted in Europe. In Jamaica, for example, the LLL policy, devised in 2005, was decided by the Human Employment and Resource Training-HEART Trust /National Training Agency-NTA, the institutions that coordinate workforce development in Jamaica. (Warrican, 2008).

Even new initiatives such as the Metas Educativas 2021 (2021 Education Goals) coordinated by OEI do not refer to Lifelong Learning but to Lifelong Education, and is considered a separate goal rather than a goal including all others.

Table 2. OEI: Metas Educativas 2021 (2021 Education Goals) 2012–2021

| 1. Participation of society in educational action. |
| 2. Achieve educational equality and overcome discrimination. |
| 3. Increase supply for early childhood education. |
| 4. Universalize primary education and lower secondary education, and expand access to upper secondary education. |
| 5. Improve the quality of education and of the school curriculum. |
| 6. Facilitate the connection between education and employment through technical-professional education. |
| 7. Offer every person lifelong education opportunities. |
| 8. Strengthen the teaching profession. |
| 9. Expand the Ibero-American Knowledge space and strengthen scientific research. |
| 10. Invest more and better. |
| 11. Evaluate the functioning of education systems and the 2021 Education Goals project. |

Source: http://www.oei.es/metase2021/libro.htm Translation from Spanish: Rosa María Torres

A FEW CONCLUSIONS

Some conclusions can be drawn:

• Given the big gap between rhetoric/policies/laws and practice, the inclusion of YAE in recent policies, reforms and legislative frameworks on paper should not lead to assumptions about effective implementation.
• Quantitative gains – small as they are – are usually shadowed by quality and equity problems.
• Priority given to youth has ended up marginalizing adults and the elderly, just as priority given to women ended up marginalizing men in several countries and programmes.
• The acknowledgement of the importance of literacy has traditionally placed it at the heart of YA efforts, and is currently being overemphasized in many countries with too many programmes running in parallel and poor targeting of efforts.
• Literacy achievements are rarely sustained and complemented with policies and strategies aimed at making reading and writing accessible to the population, paying attention to their specific needs, languages and cultures.
• Many vocational and technical training programmes continue to ignore the complex issues involved in the transition between education and work (not only employment), and of the world of work these days.
• The important impulse towards completion of primary/secondary education and accreditation of studies needs to be accompanied by the necessary efforts to ensure effective, meaningful and useful learning.
• Many hands involved often do not generate genuine ‘partnerships’ but rather enhanced lack of coordination, competitiveness, duplication of efforts and misuse of resources.
• Experience indicates that decentralization and outsourcing do not necessarily bring with them the advantages promised.
• Expansion of ICTs for YAE purposes is counterbalanced with improvisation, poor use of such technologies, poor criteria to decide on the best one or the best combination to use in each specific case, and – most importantly – neglect of the essential interpersonal pedagogical relationship.
• Cost-efficiency applied to YAE is often understood as ‘cheaper and quicker’, thus leading to an amplified vicious circle of low quality and poor results.

CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

A common language. The terminological labyrinth is an old concern in the field of education and especially of YAE worldwide. Glossaries have been proposed and produced over the past few decades, but the terminological/conceptual confusion persists and becomes more acute as new terms emerge. Once again, during the CONFINTÉA VI process, and specifically in the case of Latin America and the Caribbean, it was agreed that a common language is essential if we want to communicate better and also give more scientific consistency to the field.

Lack of evidence and lack of financial resources: two myths to be revisited. Two myths must be revisited with regard to YAE and for education in general: in order to receive more attention (a) more evidence and (b) more financial resources are needed. In fact, there is plenty of research evidence, for several decades now,
regarding the multiple benefits of investing in YAE, for learners themselves, for their families and communities, and for citizenship-building and national democracy. Abundant research shows that YAE has positive effects on the self-esteem and life opportunities of men and women as well as on their children’s wellbeing with respect to child mortality, child birth, rearing practices, access to school and learning outcomes, etc. It is clear that lack of attention to YAE is not related to insufficient data, evidence or conceptual clarity, as argued in the 2009 EFA Global Monitoring Report. There is more than enough knowledge available on YAE – theoretical and empirical, regional and international – to indicate what needs to be done and to be done well. The main shortcoming concerns action, not information and knowledge.

On the other hand, the financial deficit is only a manifestation of a political deficit, namely the lack of political will to make education a priority and to invest in the poor on the basis of quality and equity. Addressing the political deficit is the real priority. Also, as evaluations in the field of school education reiterate, there is no direct and necessary connection between more financial resources and better education. What is needed is not only more – usually highlighted – but better use of available resources, precisely because they are scarce. Parameters of what is ‘good spending’ and ‘good international co-operation’ in YAE must be established.

Internationally, in 2005, the Global Campaign for Education proposed “at least 3% of the education budget” allocated to adult literacy in order to attain the EFA goal of reducing illiteracy by half by 2015. Regionally, the Final Document of the Mexico CONFINTEA VI Regional Conference (Sep. 2008) requested 3% for YAE in general, and not only for literacy. Many countries have set financial benchmarks for the education sector in their constitutions, laws and/or policies. Most of them aim at reaching, over several years, 6% of the GNP allocated to education. It is thus clear that the fight for higher financial resources devoted to YAE must be associated with the fight for more and sustained financial resources and attention dedicated to education as a whole.

**Time for action and for investing in people.** Lots of money are spent on research that has little relevance and impact on actual decision-making and on costly events and publications that reach only a few. They are spent on reiterated diagnoses that repeat the same problems and the same information. It is time to revise the allocation of scarce financial resources at all levels, from governments and international agencies to organizations of civil society. It is time for action, for making sure that policies and laws are effectively implemented, and that what is already known is translated into practice. It is time for investing in the people, in the capacities and qualities of those engaged in YAE at all levels, not only facilitators on the ground, but also those in planning, organizing and managerial positions.

**Holistic approach.** Whatever the advances or inertias, they must be attributed not solely to education in general and to YAE in particular but also and primarily to the political, social and economic contexts in which education occurs. YAE deals
with the most disadvantageous situations and with the most vulnerable segments of society, those most affected by poverty, exclusion, and subordination in many aspects: political, economic, social, cultural, linguistic. How much more or better could be done under the concrete circumstances, in each case, remains an open question with at least one clear answer: unless there are important economic and social changes in the overall conditions of the population served by YAE, YAE will not be able to fulfill its mission. It is time to rethink the equation: education by itself cannot fight poverty and exclusion, unless specific and intended economic and social policies – not just compensatory programmes – are in place to deal with them in a radical manner. YAE is not an independent variable.

Recuperate the transformative role of education and of YAE specifically. The role of education is not to ensure enrolment, retention, completion and accreditation. The ultimate mission is to enhance personal and social change, to ensure relevant learning, awareness raising, critical and creative thinking, informed and committed action, citizenship building. YAE’s historical critical and transformative nature has been lost and must be recuperated, challenging conformity and mere social adaptation promoted by current times and ideologies dominating the world. Learners must be educated as citizens, not only as people in need of certain basic skills, but also in need of knowing their rights and duties so as to be better able to fight for them.

From literacy to lifelong learning. “From literacy to lifelong learning” was the title chosen for the CONFINTEA VI regional preparatory conference held in Mexico (Sep. 2008). In other words, the challenge to move from the usual narrow understandings of adult education as equivalent to adult literacy, from adult education to adult learning and to lifelong learning, anywhere and anytime: in the family, in the community, at work, through the media, through art, social participation and through the active exercise of citizenship. The right to education today is no longer the right to basic literacy, to access school or to complete a number of years of schooling, but the right to learn and to learn throughout life, from early childhood to late adulthood.

NOTES


2 About the current situation of the region, see: ECLAC’s Social Panorama of Latin America 2011 “Poverty and Indigence Levels Are the Lowest in 20 Years in Latin America” “Good tidings from the south: Less poor, and less unequal”, The Economist, 3 Dec. 2011.

3 Lifelong Learning is Aprendizaje a lo largo de toda la vida in Spanish. Most translators continue to use education and learning in an undifferentiated manner. The Delors Report entitled “Learning, the Treasure within” was translated into Spanish as “La educación encierra un tesoro”. The 1st World Forum on Lifelong Learning (Paris, October 2008) was translated as Foro Mundial para la Educación y la Formación a lo largo de la vida and into French as Forum Mondial pour l’Education et la Formation Tout au Long de la Vie.
Also, “the fact that no clear quantitative targets were established at Dakar, apart from the main literacy
target, may have contributed to a lack of urgency. In addition, the language of the commitment is
ambiguous. Some read goal 3 as calling for universal access to learning and life-skills programmes,
but others, including the drafters of the Dakar Framework, understand no such intent.” (EFA GMR

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