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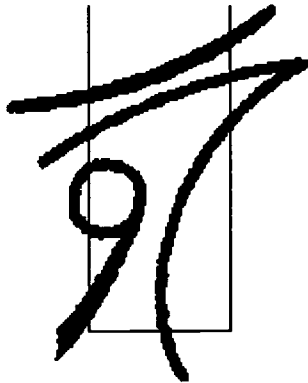DESCRIPTORS   Adult Education; *Adult Literacy; Community Education;
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ABSTRACT
         A review of past trends in adult literacy in developing
countries shows that the following factors have been crucial to achieving
large-scale literacy results: the state as the prime mover; political will or
national commitment; a favorable development context; continuous mobilization
activities; a broad conception of literacy; broad collaborative involvement;
central coordination; postliteracy and other follow-up efforts; and dual
strategy combining universal primary education and adult literacy. Despite
the arguments against large-scale adult literacy campaigns by nongovernmental
organizations and international agencies, well-resourced, well-planned
initiatives have taken place in Latin America, Africa, and India. Learner-
and community-based approaches are becoming more popular; however, the World
Bank's policies regarding adult literacy have had a detrimental effect on
efforts to link adult and child literacy through intergenerational
approaches. Although the need for literacy teaching is greatest in developing
countries, literacy remains a concern in industrialized countries. The
literacy of tomorrow should not be a static condition inasmuch as the level
of literacy required to function in everyday life is constantly shifting
upward. The challenge is to provide citizens with lifelong access to literacy
and learning-rich environments. Meeting this challenge requires removing the
word "remedial" from the literacy vocabulary and coordinating hitherto
separate fields of education. (MN)

A series of 29 booklets
documenting workshops
held at the Fifth
International Conference
on Adult Education

CONFINTEA
HAMBURG
1997

3g Literacy for tomorrow

Literacy for tomorrow

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UNESCO

Theme 3: Ensuring universal rights to literacy and basic education
Booklets under this theme:
3a Literacy in the world and its major regions
3b Literacy and learning strategies
3c Literacy, education and social development
3d Literacy research, evaluation and statistics
3e Literacy in multilingual/intercultural settings
3f Literacy and technology
3g Literacy for tomorrow

Foreword

In July 1997 the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education was held in Hamburg, organised by UNESCO and in particular the UNESCO Institute for Education, the agency's specialist centre on adult learning policy and research. Approximately 1500 delegates attended from all regions of the world, with representatives of 140 member states and some 400 NGOs. In addition to the work of the commissions and plenary which debated the official documents of the Conference The Hamburg Declaration and The Agenda for the Future, there were 33 workshops organised around the themes and sub-themes of the Conference.

As part of its CONFINTEA follow-up strategy, the UNESCO Institute for Education has produced this series of 29 booklets based on the presentations and discussions held during the Conference. The recordings of all the workshops were transcribed and synthesized over one year, edited, and then formatted and designed. A tremendous amount of work has gone into this process. Linda King, coordinator of the monitoring and information strategy for CONFINTEA, was responsible for overseeing the whole process. Madhu Singh, senior research specialist at UIE, undertook the mammoth task of writing almost all the booklets based on an analysis of the sessions. She was helped in the later stages by Gonzalo Retamal, Uta Papen and Linda King. Christopher McIntosh was technical editor, Matthew Partridge designed the layout and Janna Lowrey was both transcriber and translator.

The booklets are intended to draw out the central issues and concerns of each of the CONFINTEA workshops. They are the memory of an event that marked an important watershed in the field of adult learning. We hope that they will be of use both to those who were able to attend CONFINTEA V and those who were not. We look forward to your comments, feedback and continuing collaboration with the UNESCO Institute for Education.

Paul Bélanger,
Director, UNESCO Institute for Education, Hamburg
and Secretary General of CONFINTEA

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Literacy for tomorrow

Introduction

A world-wide debate on literacy has been taking place for almost half a century. This debate covers many questions and issues. The very definition of literacy involves a number of conflicting interpretations. There are questions about ownership and gender perspective. There are interrelated operational issues. There is the problem of balancing demand and provision. There are different learning styles to be taken into account. And there are questions of the social uses of literacy and the choice of language. The creation of a conducive environment, what is sometimes called the ecology of learning, is also of crucial importance. The overriding question is how to promote literacy on a large scale and how to create literate societies.

These issues were debated and discussed at the workshop "Literacy for tomorrow" held at the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V), in Hamburg in 1997. Agneta Lind, Swedish Development Agency (SIDA) chaired the panel discussions, which featured: Rosa Maria Torres, Kellog Foundation, Latin America; James Page, Literacy Secretariat, Canada; James Kanyesigye, ACTIONAID, REFLECT, Uganda; and Denzil Saldhana, National Literacy Mission, India. Various themes were dealt with in the workshop: analysis of past trends in adult literacy in developing countries; the link between and adult and child literacy; implementing large-scale literacy programmes; literacy and the empowerment of learners; and the rising requirements of literacy. Each theme was introduced by one of the panel and commented on by two other speakers.

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Large-scale adult literacy

A review of past trends in adult literacy in developing countries shows that, from the point of view of achieving large-scale literacy results, the following factors have been crucial:

- the state as the prime mover, but not the sole actor;
- political will or national commitment;
- a favourable development context;
- continuous mobilisation activities;
- a broad conception of literacy;
- a broad collaborative involvement;
- central co-ordination of all major stakeholders and actors ;
- post-literacy and other follow-up efforts, such as the development of literate environments;
- a dual strategy, combining universal primary education and adult literacy.

Other key issues needing careful planning and consideration in each context were:

- timing and duration of instruction;
- the choice of language of literacy instruction;
- mobilisation and support at local level;
- motivation and training of teachers, including in-service training and a network of pedagogical and organisational support services;
- a curriculum adapted to a realistic learning process, avoiding too many themes or topics;
- methods within the reach of the teachers;
- treating adult learners with respect and patience;
- the allocation of sufficient resources to minimise problems such as irregular attendance, drop-out among teachers and learners, relapse into illiteracy etc.

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A number of arguments have been made against large-scale adult literacy campaigns by NGOs and international agencies. One argument is that literacy should be directly linked with income-generation, other development activities or practical skill training. It has also been argued that literacy is often an imposition of the modern world which damages traditional culture. A further objection is that centrally designed programmes and materials are inefficient and irrelevant.

Nevertheless a few exceptional cases of well-resourced and planned large-scale national adult literacy initiatives have taken place, notably in Equador, India, Namibia, Ghana, Egypt, Eritrea. In all cases, the state has been the prime mover, but with the organised involvement and collaboration of multiple partners. Some lessons from these experiences are:

- Literacy campaigns are quite possible to organise without departing radically from the formal structures. In India and Ecuador the formal education sector was the major partner, contributing volunteers from among teachers and students, and back-up from local education committees and central administration.
  The impact was reciprocal and revitalising and boosted the formal system of education for children.
- In Namibia, literacy teachers have had to be paid, trained and guided through regular in-service support. Follow-up stages needed to be prepared from the beginning. A second mother tongue stage was followed by a basic English stage. Systematic and continuous monitoring and evaluation was built-in.
- The Ecuador campaign showed that human rights was a highly relevant overriding theme and motivating factor.
- The experiences of both Namibia and India show very large internal regional differences in motivation, participation and results. There were better results in rural regions with a history of social and political activism, than in urban areas and deprived rural areas without such a history.

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The Namibian Literacy Programme (NLP)

The majority of participants are women, often above 35. More men than women drop out. A neglected gender issue is the need to motivate illiterate men, who for reasons of status are often reluctant to join literacy classes. The individual empowering impact of partici- pation in adult literacy classes has been strongly mani- fested and well documented. In the programme, the powerful inter-active links between literacy for adults and for children have been highlighted and recognised as a critical issue. It was found that external funding was crucial to begin with, but internal resource mobilisation and state budget allocations are necessary for the sustainability of a large-scale adult literacy programme such as this one.

It can be easily said that the features disclosed by the analysis of current innovative and successful literacy programmes are recurrent in most of them and will prevail in the next century. The making of literate societies is more complex and requires a conjunction of different societal and institutional interventions.

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Learner and community-based approaches

The view supported by the World Bank that the state should limit its services to formal education is still having an impact on adult literacy provision. NGOs and civil society are thus coming to the forefront on account of their capacity to adapt to local circumstances and initiate decentralised programmes. Although adult literacy has not been very high on the agenda of most NGOs in the past, NGO programmes in the field of adult literacy are increasingly filling the void created by large-scale state programmes. A few of these NGO programmes have been well documented. The example of REFLECT in Uganda is an illustration of the current trend.

REFLECT (Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques) was piloted in Uganda, Bangladesh and El Salvador from 1993 to 1996 by ACTIONAID, and funded by DFID (Britain's Department for International Development, formerly ODA) and the World Bank.

In October 1993, a two year action research project aimed at developing a new approach to adult literacy was started. The new method was to draw on the visualisation techniques developed by practitioners of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) who established that non-literate communities can construct elaborate local maps, calendars and matrices. In other words, they can construct their own learning materials.

It was in the field, in Bundibugyo, Uganda, that the REFLECT literacy method began to take shape. The pilot project situated 400 km from Kampala, the capital city, was a long-term integrated rural development programme. Physical isolation is one of the most striking characteristics of the district, which is divided into Ntoroko and Bwamba counties. The literacy rate in Uganda is officially 55 per cent. The three main language groups are Bantu, Nilotic and Central Sudanic. The official languages are Ugandan, and English.

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The REFLECT approach and impact

Introducing the new literacy programmes involved the need for an interactive, practical and participatory literacy methodology to empower people to take control of their own development. In designing the manuals, reading, writing and numeracy work were woven around maps and matrices dealing with key themes such as gender inequity, isolation, prevention of illness, agri-culture, savings and credit. The language used was the main local language, and one most widely demanded by the learners - Lubwisi, a previously unwritten language. However, the project team also felt that the learners in each circle should retain the final choice over language and they might want to chose other local languages. A manual was produced in the main local language, with an index of words in the two other local languages – Lukonjo and Rutoro. Facilitators had to transfer graphics from ground to paper. Facilitators' initial training consisted of experience in participatory rural appraisal techniques, followed by practice with the units. Groups of facilitators exchanged experiences. Support from ACTIONAID consisted of a manual, a set of cards with visual images, a blackboard and some large pieces of manila paper for each facilitator. Learners received an exercise book and a pencil. Reading materials have also been provided.

   As regards the learning outcomes, in all the sample classes visited, evaluators looked carefully at the maps ▶

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▶ and calendars drawn from each unit and asked learners to interpret their work. Learners were able to interpret the graphics sequentially and with clarity. They could look objectively at the advantages and disadvantages of specific aspects of their environment, and represent these in a visual code. Before taking any actions, a collective view or decision was made. The people could read and write using annotations to the graphics and thus generate their own form of language. In the discussion, they were able to use the graphics to illustrate particular points, irrespective of their level of literacy. They could mark months in a calendar and count off different categories of people in a household. It was found that the participants showed more interest in graphic construction and discussion than in literacy and numeracy skills. However, the average learner after one year can read a paragraph aloud and understand it, write a letter on a familiar topic such as a request for a loan, and calculate.

As regards the issue of creating a literate environment, surveys of learner- and community-based approaches have shown that people were creatively using their skills to read the Bible as well as labels, signs, directions and instructions, often in other languages. However, considering that the language of literacy was not previously written, the main reading activities were in the literacy class itself. The future provision of reading materials presents a serious challenge.

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If literacy skills are to be consolidated into literate habits in local communities, much depends on the creation of a literate environment. The use of local notice boards can help in this regard. Notices of meetings and other events can be posted. People should be encouraged to write letters for both personal and official purposes, to participate in the preparation of local project proposals and to writing down oral histories. Organisations working in the field should print the local histories written by learners in a newsletter, translate texts on health, agriculture, politics and law into local languages. Maintaining the momentum and the demand for literacy will depend on people's attitudes towards literacy and how they define it. Most significantly it also depends on pride in the language of literacy. It is not only literacy, but the local language, previously unwritten, which needs to be promoted. Government agencies need to start to recognise local languages and accept their use in the first three years of primary school.

With regard to empowerment, literacy learners have gained in self confidence and in the respect that they command from others. They have acquired new knowledge and skills in problem-solving which serve them in their daily lives. They have strengthened their skills in planning and projection, thus contributing to more effective management of scarce local resources. Discussions in literacy circles have led directly to collective action at community level. There are also indications of a change in gender roles in cases where circles have addressed health issues. The wider impact on children's education is particularly notable in Uganda.

Methodology must learn from the mistakes and successes of the pilot projects and should in future lead to more successful future projects. Methodology needs to be adapted according to the local situation. The process should be seen as more important than the product and the process of literacy is something that primarily concerns the community. It is the community, not the teacher, who produces the maps and matrices.

A key point is the need for adequately educated facilitators. A basic literacy level is necessary for the facilitators to be able to use the innovative approach effectively, to read the manual, prepare lessons and benefit fully from the training. Every effort should be made to simplify the manuals and cards. Regular contact between facilitators is essential in order for them to review their experiences. The facilitators must determine the agenda of their own training themselves. There is a need to have a mix and a balance in the focus of themes, so that everyone covers a range of core themes.

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Intergenerational approaches to literacy

The link between adult and child has been rather weak. Adult literacy and child literacy have developed as specific and complementary fields. In fact two quite different specialisations have been shaped around initial basic education and adult lifelong learning.

Important though non-formal programmes are, the formal education system is the most important and widespread means of initial education. Learning to read and write is central to future success or failure. Therefore, ensuring the school's capacity for effective literacy teaching and learning must be a priority. An important way of improving the literacy of children is through the involvement of parents. It is parents who decide whether children should go to school and it is they who provide the support and the appropriate environment needed to learn. Finally, parents are best able to demand quality and accountability from the school.

Thus the effort to raise the quality of school education, especially primary education, can only be made in conjunction with a corresponding effort in the area of adult basic education. This implies that adult educators must consider children's education and formal schooling as an integral part of their work. They must recognise that dealing with illiteracy means dealing not only with the remedial side of the problem, but also, most importantly, with its prevention.

Accepting this two-track approach to literacy means accepting that the term literacy applies to both children and adults and includes both school and out-of-school education. This implies building bridges between the two rather than increasing the gap between them.

While literacy for children through formal primary education, and to some extent through non-formal primary education, was boosted by the 1990 Education for All (EFA) conference in Jomtien, Thailand, the same cannot be said for adult literacy programmes. The conference failed to acknowledge that adult basic education is a key factor in improving the quality of formal primary school education. In addition, in the context of economic crisis, growing national debt, structural adjustment programmes and deteriorating social services, there is a danger that governments may become even less interested in adult literacy than before. In the context of the educational policies of the World Bank adult literacy has been more or less removed from the area

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of state responsibility, the latter concentrating mainly on formal school education. All this has had a detrimental effect on efforts to link adult and child literacy.

Levels of literacy

Although the need for literacy teaching is greater in the developing countries, the issue is also of concern in the industrialised countries. In many industrialised countries, literacy has long been a key element in the development of education and training policies. It is becoming increasingly important in the development of policies relating to youth, language, employment, rural development, social development, administration of justice, crime prevention and health.

There is an increasing appreciation of the interconnection between literacy and adult learning on the one hand, and the health and well-being of individuals and society on the other. Governments promote the positive benefits of literacy rather than the negative consequences of illiteracy. The reason for doing this is to "de-stigmatise" the issue in order to be able to reach out successfully to the adults who have less than adequate literacy skills, to motivate them and encourage them to get involved in literacy and learning. The question asked is not: "Can you read or write," but: "How well can you read or write?" Literacy is defined as the ability to understand and to use different types of information in life's daily activities at work and in the community.

This approach is backed up by a substantial amount of research. The International Literacy Survey (IALS), led by Statistics Canada in co-operation with the UNESCO Institute for Education and the OECD, assessed three forms of literacy:

1 prose literacy, which means understanding different kinds of text, such as editorial pieces, news stories and poems;

2 document literacy, which tests the respondent's ability to locate and use information from documents such as timetables;

3 quantitative literacy, involving simple calculation and comprehension of numbers embedded in texts.

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Levels of literacy skills in Canada

To take Canada as a fairly typical example of a country covered by the International Literacy Survey, people at level one have great difficulty in reading, have few basic skills available to interpret and work with texts, and are generally not aware that they have a problem. Some 22 per cent of adult Canadians are at level one.

Those at level two have less limited skills. They can read, but not very well and can deal only with material that is very simple and clearly laid out. They often do not recognise that they have limitations. About 26 per cent of adult Canadians are at this level.

People at level three read competently, but they might have problems with more complex tasks. Level three is considered by literacy specialists to be the minimum desired level and represents 32 per cent of Canadian adults. Levels four and five are the highest on the scale. These are people with a very high level of literacy skills and make up 20 to 25 per cent of the Canadian adult population.

This survey shows that over 40 per cent of Canadian adults do not have the required literacy level 3 to participate fully in daily activities. As citizens they risk being marginalised and relegated to the fringes of social and cultural life. As workers they have difficulty in being part of the new economy.

Literacy should be an integral part of a person's life experience. It should be both lifelong and "lifewide", that is to say, it should be present in all aspects of life – the home, the community and the workplace.

Literacy is important for different reasons depending on the stage of life. For pre-school children, literacy is a critical formative skill, and holds the key to vocabulary building. For young people in school and colleges, literacy is important for development skills; higher-level literacy is required for the acquisition of analytical skills. For mature adults, literacy is important for a variety of life skills and workplace skills. In retirement, literacy is also important. Seniors require levels of literacy to handle the complex demands of life with dignity, assurance and self-reliance.

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The literacy of tomorrow

The literacy of tomorrow should not be a static condition. The level of literacy required to function in everyday life is constantly shifting upward. Furthermore, basic skills like learning to write and read require constant use in order to be maintained.

The key policy question is how to help all citizens to develop, maintain and continuously advance their literacy skills in order to live and learn in a knowledge-based and information-intensive society. The challenge is to enable all citizens to have lifelong access to literacy and learning-rich environments and meeting this challenge successfully will require that the word "remedial" be removed from literacy vocabulary. Such a term would have little meaning in a culture and an environment that allowed people to progress and learn throughout life. A shift is needed from the industrial age paradigm of learning as an activity which ends on the completion of school or college and which is separated from work, family and community. There is also a need for coordination between hitherto separate fields of education. Pre-school learning, literacy practice, the formal educational system and adult learning must become components of a comprehensive and integrative learning system. Progress towards a more literate nation should be made through a collaborative strategy involving individuals, communities, social and cultural agencies, employers and governments at all levels.

This notion of convergence means sharing research and policy agenda, and enhancing the communication between the academic and the practitioner. It also means the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, in addition to formal education.

The workshop issued the following conclusions and recommendations:

- Literacy for tomorrow has to build upon the experience of the past half century.
- A commitment must be made to literacy as a human right.
- The discourse of the market should not be allowed to undermine the concept of literacy as a social good.
- Appropriate resource allocations must be made for adult literacy promotion in all societies without expectation of merely economic returns. Cultural and political consequences must be taken into account as well.

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- Sustainable mass mobilisation will depend on local initiatives. This must be taken into account in the development of methodologies.
- Political leaders and social activists must actively undertake mobilisation efforts on a regular basis and not expect such efforts to arise spontaneously.
- Institutional arrangements for the delivery of literacy and adult learning must receive due attention and should be established from the global to the local level.
- It should be ensured that relevant institutions at various levels are participatory, allowing all parties involved to make their voices heard and have their interests taken into account.
- An intergenerational approach should be adopted, linking child and adult literacy, and built on organic relations much more strongly.
- In the crucial field of methodologies, there is a very disturbing standardisation. There is need to have a serious methodological debate and draw on best practices from a wide range of programmes. It should be recognised that methodology per se is not the whole answer. Teachers and adult educators must understand the principles of learning before developing methodologies.
- Voluntary as well as salaried agents should be harnessed in the promotion of literacy work, depending upon the social and economic context.
- Due effort should be made to enable new literates to use their newly-acquired literacy skills in their life and work.
- Resource allocations to adult literacy and adult learning have been too often denied on the grounds that no hard data were available on the social returns from adult literacy. Recent research points to the fact that the social impact of adult literacy on communities is considerable.
- New research on the social impact and cost-effectiveness of adult literacy should be both replicated for greater reliability and validity and should be widely disseminated for use by policy makers in governments, in development banks and other agencies.
- A culture of literacy and a literate environment need to be developed.

The CONFINTEA logo, designed by Michael Smitheram
of Australia, represents the lines on the palm of a hand.
These lines are universal and yet different for each
subject. They celebrate cultural diversity and the joy
of learning.

Theme 3

Ensuring universal rights to literacy and basic education

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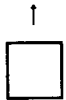| The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents
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