

**A Review and Critique of The 2008 United States
*National Report on the Development and State of the Art
of Adult Learning and Education (ALE)***

by

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(UNESCO Prizes for *Reflect*, 2008, p. 8)

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Abstract

This study is a review and a critique of the 2008 U.S. *National Report on the Development and State of the Art of Adult Learning and Education* (ALE) prepared by the U.S. Commission for UNESCO and the U.S. Department of Education as a preparatory document for CONFINTEA VI, the 6th International Conference on Adult Education. The study focuses on three arenas: the Participatory Process employed to gather data for the U.S. *National Report*, the report's Content, and the Education Policies underpinning it. Key to the review and critique are the recommendations that both the Regional Conference (U.S., Canada, Europe, and Israel) in Budapest, Hungary, December 3-5, 2008, and CONFINTEA VI (Belém, Brazil), May 2009, move beyond the limitations found in the U.S. *National Report*. Process. The U.S. National Commission neglected the participatory process designed by UNESCO to make the writing of the *National Report* itself an exercise in collaboration and adult learning. Instead of employing participatory mechanisms to build consensus and to craft a comprehensive policy document, the *U.S. National Report* borrowed from three existing reports previously prepared by and for national agencies. Non-government organizations' responses were attached as the fourth of four stand-alone, unintegrated "chapters." Content. The U.S. *National Report* addresses few of the requisite content arenas. The subject matter of the U.S. *National Report* is determined to be inadequate. Adult education, a bright and vibrant field in the United States, is reduced to two sub-fields, adult basic education and English language acquisition for non-native speakers. Policy. The public policy that is implicit in the U.S. *National Report* is an economic, neoliberal policy designed to remediate defective low-wage workers; other human values are displaced in favor of an ideology of workforce education.

Executive Summary

This study is a review and a critique of the 2008 U.S. *National Report on the Development and State of the Art of Adult Learning and Education (ALE)* prepared by the U.S. Commission for UNESCO and the U.S. Department of Education as a preparatory document for CONFINTEA VI, the 6th International Conference on Adult Education. The present study focuses on three arenas: the Participatory Process employed to gather data for the U.S. *National Report*, the report's Content, and the Education Policies underpinning it. Key to our review and critique are the recommendations that both the Regional Conference (U.S., Canada, Europe, and Israel) in Budapest, Hungary, December 3-5, 2008, and CONFINTEA VI (Belém, Brazil), May 2009, move beyond the limitations found in the U.S. *National Report*:

- to include the need for actions that enable and empower adults to organize civil society and engage in their own problem-solving
- to strengthen competencies for adults to participate in the policy process
- to identify problems, find an array of solutions, and work together for social transformation
- to acquire decision-making and problem solving skills for critical social interaction
- to support labor education rather than corporatist mechanisms that control learning outcomes and measure learning based on job performance or literacy levels that will reap disproportionate gains for some and limited rewards for others
- to situate adult learning and education for personal and social intervention
- to send a message of hope that people can have control over the factors that influence key aspects of their own lives
- to negotiate the conditions of their learning
- to handle conflicts in a diverse and diversifying country and world, and
- to challenge the rationale behind resource allocations for adult learning and education

The U.S. *National Report* never asks why people are illiterate, innumerate, poor, underemployed or unemployed, unschooled, and lacking skill sets. It never interrogates why people are differentially paid for equal work, disenfranchised, marginalized, and oppressed. It never explores the place of sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, discrimination based on differences in ability, language, and religion, and the relationships to adult learning and education.

Background to the Study

The 33rd General Session of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), held in Paris, France, from 9-14 October, 2005, elected to convene the sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) in 2009. This action sustained the pattern of holding a global adult education conference every twelve years that began in 1949. Previous conferences included those in

1960, 1972, 1985, and the last one in July 1997, in Hamburg, Germany (CONFINTEA V). The 1997 meeting led to the adoption of two significant documents: *The Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning* and *The Agenda for the Future*, which recognized adult learning and education as key tools to address current social and development challenges world-wide (*Final Report*, 1997). CONFINTEA VI was scheduled for May, 2009, in Belém, Brazil.

The aim of CONFINTEA VI is to renew international momentum for adult learning and education (ALE) by highlighting the crucial roles that they play in achieving *Education for All* (EFA) and the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs), in the building of knowledge economies and learning societies, as well as other major international policy frameworks in relation to education and development, in particular the *Literacy Initiative for Empowerment* (LIFE), the *United Nations Literacy Decade* (UNLD), and the *United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development* (DESD).

In order to prepare for CONFINTEA VI, each UNESCO Member State was requested to write a national report on: (a) the developments in adult learning and education since 1997 (CONFINTEA V), (b) the current state of the art of adult learning and development, and (c) future challenges for adult learning and education.

The *National Reports* ought to have been constructed from input provided by stakeholders. They are to be used at national conferences, and for the regional preparatory conferences that will convene prior to CONFINTEA VI. The reports are to be the basis for the CONFINTEA VI Working Document, and are to supply critical data for a Global Report on adult learning and education. Assessing the state of the art of adult learning and education in all member countries has the potential for nation states to review and to renew their vision of ALE, and to provide an excellent opportunity to assess the progress of the field.

Three Arenas Explored: the Participatory Process, Content, and Education Policy

In late 2007, UNESCO, through its Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), issued guidelines for *National Reports*. The U.S. National Commission for UNESCO posted a call for participation on their webpage (<http://www.state.gov/p/io/unesco/>), with an extremely narrow window for responses. It should be noted that most adult educators do not consult the U.S. Department of State websites for information in the field. The call for comments appeared in late March 2008 and closed 17 April 2008. The purpose was to survey NGOs and others in the private sector to contribute to the report writing process. In Spring, 2008, the United States (U.S.) *National Report on the Development and State of the Art of Adult Learning and Education* (*National Report*, 2008) was released. This present study is a review and critique of the U.S. *National Report* in three arenas: Participatory Process, Content, and Policy.

Participatory Process. It is fair to say that, unreservedly, the U.S. National Commission neglected the participatory process designed by UNESCO to make the writing of the *National Report* itself an exercise in collaboration and adult learning. Instead of employing participatory mechanisms to build consensus and to craft a comprehensive policy document, the *U.S. National Report* borrowed from three existing reports previously prepared by and for national agencies. Non-government organizations' responses were attached as the fourth of four stand-alone, unintegrated "chapters." The Commission, to our knowledge did not establish, as UNESCO guidelines recommended, a National Committee (which was to be comprised of representatives of key stakeholders), and did not have their findings validated through a national conference. There was no national dialog. The participatory process envisioned by UNESCO was virtually ignored by the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO.

Content. Information sought by the U.S. National Commission (<http://www.state.gov/p/io/unesco/c25589.htm>), in the very brief public comment period, included: how responding organizations/programs defined adult education and adult learning and managed and coordinated adult learning activities. The Commission ostensibly wanted to take a snapshot of all areas of learning that U.S. organizations and programs addressed and how they aligned their strategies with policies in other sectors (health, economic, labor, rural development, etc.). Other goals included gathering data on gender equality, active citizenship, cultural diversity and poverty reduction, and the creation of knowledge economies and the building of learning societies. Respondents were to specify the primary target group of their organizations and programs, and to identify the measures undertaken to mobilize learners and increase public participation. Requests were made for relevant details about the costs and funding of organizations and programs, including the level of support from the private and corporate sector. Information on relevant certifications and national awards established by U.S. organizations and programs was to be gathered. The call requested information on surveys and studies conducted by U.S. organizations on learner motivation, non-participation, and groups that are difficult to reach. The call requested organizations to specify any quality provision methods used in adult learning programs and to outline innovations and examples of good practice in adult learning that have developed in the last 10 years. Finally, groups were asked to describe expected outcomes from CONFINTEA VI, and invited to submit other relevant comments on adult learning.

Interestingly, the U.S. *National Report* addresses nearly none of these content arenas. Simply stated: the subject matter of the U.S. *National Report* is woefully inadequate. Adult education, a bright and vibrant field in the United States, is reduced to two sub-fields, adult basic education and English language acquisition for non-native speakers. The field of ALE is truncated and stripped of its theoretical underpinnings and professional discourses and practices. Readers of the U.S. *National Report* are left with a dim view of adult education in the U.S. ALE is relegated to an under-funded activity of remedial second-chances to citizens whose language skills are deficient or who have never graduated from high school. While basic education and language education are important parts of ALE, they are only two parts of a larger picture that the report neglects to construct.

Policy. The public policy that is implicit in the U.S. *National Report* is an economisticⁱⁱ, neoliberalⁱⁱⁱ policy designed to remediate defective low-wage workers; other human values are displaced in favor of an ideology of workforce education. The values sought or measured are those related to economic outcomes. The U.S. *National Report* reinforces the U.S. government's official, narrow definition of adult education, issued as an Executive Order by President George W. Bush, that is,

teaching or instruction below the postsecondary level, for individuals who are 16 years of age or older, designed to provide: (i) mastery of basic education skills needed to function effectively in society; (ii) a secondary school diploma or its equivalent; or (iii) the ability to speak, read, or write the English language” found in Presidential Executive Order 13445. (*Executive Order: Strengthening Adult Education*, 2007, Sec 2[b])

The most recent U.S. government document on adult education (*Bridges to opportunities: Federal adult education programs for the 21st century. Report to the President on Executive Order 13445*, 2008), continues to sustain this deplorable definition of ALE.

Adult educators recognize that our field is “a form of social intervention that often begins with a problem to be solved” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 75), however, the U.S. *National Report* proposes no action models or policy options for the vast array of problems now faced by people in the U.S. The U.S. *National Report* is devoid of adult learning and education for personal and social participation, or for organizations to deliver interventions, which are key elements in the practice of adult education (Finger & Asún, 2001; Heaney, 1996; Youngman, 2000). There are no recommendations regarding how adults can organize civil society or engage in their own problem-solving. Adult education is not positioned so that it assists learners in strengthening competencies to participate in political or policy processes, to identify problems, find and debate an array of solutions, and work together for social transformation.

Literacy, a major thrust of the U.S. *National Report*, is not for acquisition of decision-making or problem solving skills, or for critical social interaction and interventions, but rather it is for job performance and economistic measures that will reap disproportionate gains for some and little for others. That is, the monied classes will potentially prosper further if more low-wage workers have improved literacy skills. Learners, of course, profit some, but the primary result of the type of ALE program planning is a larger pool of workers with the basic literacy to hold minimum-wage jobs. The report contains no prospects or messages of hope that people can gain control over the factors that influence their own lives through adult education.

Readers of the U.S. *National Report* will not come to understand how ALE policies are formed, how various interests are negotiated, conflicts handled, consensus arrived at, or the rationale behind allocation of resources. There is no integration of economic policies with social mechanisms and processes that can mitigate the

sociocultural determinants of the problems that adult learning and education have the power to address.

In far too many ways, the U.S. *National Report* is a failure to deliver the information requested by UNESCO. There are numerous causes, we believe, for this failure. These reasons are due, in part, to problems with the process employed to gather information and to compose the report, its content, and U.S. adult education policy processes under the administration of President George W. Bush. It has failed to create a national dialog, to engage a suite of stakeholders, and to encompass an expansive view of ALE beyond an economic discourse. It was poorly and imperfectly developed and contains a very limited vision of ALE.

The misfortune of the U.S. *National Report* is that it never escapes the hegemony of economistic formal and non-formal education. It fails to incorporate popular education; social, economic and political justice; equality of gender relations; the universal right to learn; living in harmony with the environment; respect for human rights; social justice; and recognition of cultural diversity, peace and the active involvement of women and men in decisions affecting their lives. The report never abandons an individualistic vision of learning and fails to envision the social construction of knowledge in learning communities which promote inter-cultural, inter-generational, and inter-sectoral relationships. Literacy is of course necessary, but is not a sufficient point of departure, and does not allow all people to continue and to supplement their learning throughout life and thus exercise their rights as citizens (See *Regional Literacy*, 2008).

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Introduction

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), held its 33rd General Session in Paris, France, from 9-14 October, 2005. At this time, the organization received a proposal to convene the sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) in 2009, which was approved. This action sustained the momentum of convening a global adult education conference every twelve years that began in 1949. Previous conferences included those in 1960, 1972, 1985, and most recently in July, 1997, in Hamburg, Germany (CONFINTEA V). The 1997 meeting led to the adoption of two significant documents: *The Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning* and *The Agenda for the Future*, which recognized adult learning and education as key tools to address current social and development challenges world-wide (*Final Report*, 1997). CONFINTEA VI is scheduled to occur in May, 2009, in Belém, Brazil with the overall title, “Living and Learning for a Viable Future – The Power of Adult Learning.”

The aim of CONFINTEA VI is to renew international momentum for adult learning and education (ALE) by highlighting the crucial role that they play in achieving the *Education for All (EFA)* and *Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)*, in building of knowledge economies and learning societies, as well as other major international policy frameworks in relation to education and development, in particular the *Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE)*, the *United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD)*, and the *United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD)*.

For this purpose, UNESCO Member States were requested to prepare a national report on:

- The developments in adult learning and education since 1997 (CONFINTEA V)
- The current state of the art of adult learning and development
- Future challenges for adult learning and education

The *National Reports* were to constitute a major input for the all-stakeholder national conferences and for the regional preparatory conferences. They will be the basis for the CONFINTEA VI Working Document, and will supply critical data for a Global Report on Adult Learning and Education.

Assessing the state of the art of adult learning and education in countries will also provide an excellent opportunity to measure the progress of the national *EFA* agendas, and will help to fill the information gaps, in particular with regard to:

- Goal 3 - Ensuring the learning needs of all young people and adults through appropriate learning and life skills programmes
- Goal 4 - Achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy
- Goal 5 - Achieving gender equality in education
- Goal 6 - Improving the quality of education

The *National Reports* were intended to generate information that could be used to extend the data base on policies, research findings and effective practices in literacy, non-formal education, adult and lifelong learning, which is currently developed by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Education, Hamburg, Germany (UIL). This was not done for the U.S. *National Report* (2008). In fact, within the scope of research, the report fails to be an adequate review of ALE. Chapters contain no peer-reviewed journal articles to substantiate claims; and counted among the citations are numerous reports prepared by for-profit organizations.

Given the dispersed nature of adult learning and education, consistent and comparable data of good quality are often lacking. An assessment of the overall situation, therefore, requires information and data from a range of resources. When preparing *National Reports*, countries were requested to take into account the full variety of sources and to form a concerted effort of governmental (including ministries of education, labour, health, agriculture, gender, culture, sports and leisure, social welfare, finance and economy, and foreign affairs), non-governmental, public and private actors, trade unions, social partners and bilateral and multilateral development agencies. This was not done for the U.S. *National Report* (2008).

UNESCO prompted member states to use the writing on the *National Report* as an exercise to create a national dialog involving all stakeholders (various ministries providing adult education, corporate and unions, NGOs and Civil Society Organizations, private providers, UN agencies, bilateral and multilateral development agencies etc.). UNESCO strongly encouraged countries to do this with the help of a National Committee

with representatives of all stakeholders, and to have the findings validated through a national conference. This was not done for the U.S. *National Report* (2008).

Reflections on the U.S. Response to the UNESCO Guidelines for the Preparation of National Reports

The following structure was proposed to assist countries in presenting their national situation:

I. General Overview

The *National Reports*—preparatory documents for CONFINTEA VI—were to provide contextual information on the country authoring them, including total number and percentage of the adult population in relation to the total population by qualification levels, gender, employment/self-employment situation, distribution between rural/urban areas, and different language and ethnic groups.

The U.S. *National Report* presents some data about the distribution of participation in types and levels of adult education. This data does not include information about rural/urban discrepancies as the guidelines suggested, nor does the report tend to include information from the vast array of ethnic and language minority groups in the U.S. While the section on literacy includes attention to the number of people speaking a language other than English at home, the report does not tend to investigate what these languages are or the individuals' level of proficiency in their first (native) tongues. The U.S. *National Report* (Chapter 2, p. 37, diagram) indicates that 44% of the people enrolled in adult education are Spanish-speaking adult English language learners. The needs of this substantial group are not discussed sufficiently to identify population-specific issues related to access of ALE opportunities.

Almost as often as the report offers data on adult education, it devotes time to explaining the difficulty of gathering data about participation, outcomes, and the impact of adult education in the United States. When the report discusses the research that contributes to policy, emphasis is placed on accountability standards, or “improving program performance through the development and use of quality accountability data,” “standards-based education” and “research-based reading instruction” (Chapter 1, p. viii). The emphasis on “increased accountability and use of research-based practices in all aspects of adult education” (Chapter 1, p. xiii) is drawn directly from policies articulated in the *No Child Left Behind Act* (*NCLB, 2001/2008; No Child Left Behind Act, 2001*) of K-12 education, despite the difficulty substantiating these goals and the questionable benefits of doing so.

It should be noted that educational policy at all levels has been driven since 2001 by the *No Child Left Behind Act*. Through *No Child Left Behind*, accountability in education has come to be redefined as focusing educational objectives on testing and reporting as a way to justify funds received for educational programs. Although the name of the legislation implies a concern for educational equity, the effects of the legislation

have been to disproportionately overburden poor school districts with high-stakes performance measures. While many people in the field recognize accountability as a positive element in education, accountability under *No Child Left Behind* has taken on connotations that work against social justice and equity and instead are increasingly placing education in the hands of market forces and allowing government funding to be redirected towards the private sector of education.

The U.S. is a vast nation. In the report, geography is mentioned only to provide context but it is not discussed in any length. The document presents vague assertions without any supporting details or nuanced analysis regarding the breadth of ALE activities in the states. For example, Texas is presented as a geographically large region which organizes ALE into extensive districts (Chapter 1, p. 22), but no information is provided for readers to discern whether other large states, such as Alaska and California, organize ALE in similar or dissimilar ways, or whether the authors are referring only to geographic size of program areas or the numbers of participants.

There is no discussion of the history of racial and gender discrimination that has contributed to education disparities, nor is there a discussion on civil rights legislation and its impact on ALE (e.g., Title VI and amendments to the landmark *Civil Rights Act* of 1964).

History receives even less treatment. Only legislative history is included (see below), and that is limited to the history of a few laws that mandate neoliberal policies. There is no discussion of the history of adult education before the federal mandates to manage ALE to produce more competent low-wage workers.

II. Detail was to be provided regarding the following:

1. National policy, legislation, and financing of ALE

The U.S. *National Report* addresses legislation and financing to some extent, although much of the discussion of legislation is unclear because, as the report notes, the Adult Education Act was repealed by the *Workforce Investment Act*, and although the original legislation included “many provisions that are still in effect today” (Chapter 1, p. 11), the report fails to specify what those provisions are or what the continuities and differences are between the two pieces of legislation. Much of the discussion about the funding of ALE funnels responsibility down the levels of government rather than providing accurate and detailed information. The report repeatedly cites the decentralized structure of education in the United States and the concentration of decision-making power at the state and local levels (Chapter 1, pp. 7, 22). This tactic of deferring responsibility to the state and local levels is certainly true to the structure of ALE in the United States, and serves as a testament to the fact that the U.S. should have had a more organized and concerted effort to gather local and state data to be synthesized for the report, and provide meaningful information about the financing and enacting of adult education policy.

The policy framework is implicit, not explicit, and grounded entirely in neoliberal discourse. Adult education is posited primarily as remedial in nature. Adult learners are

presented as personal failures who require further training before they can be meaningfully employed.

Consumers of ALE opportunities are conceptualized as passive recipients of program planning, in a sort of father-knows-best educational model. Educators appear as experts who deliver content, and recipients as passive participants who either succeed or fail to receive the knowledge imparted.

Ultimately, the U.S. *National Report* fails to meaningfully articulate an explicit, comprehensive national policy toward adult learning and education.

The U.S. *National Report* is silent on an administrative framework for ALE. This is understandable, since primary ALE delivery is via state and local actors and NGOs, and none of these were consulted at any length in drafting this report (see Participatory Process, above). Since the authors of the report were not involved directly in program delivery and did not communicate with those who are, review of the administrative framework of ALE in the United States is missing.

The review of the financing of ALE is likewise cursory, largely for the same reason: while the federal government funds some adult education, the great majority of financing is provided or administered as flow-through grants to state, local, and non-governmental actors or independently by civil society organizations. Absent their input, the U.S. *National Report* is naturally deficient in presenting detailed, meaningful information on ALE financing frameworks.

The U.S. *National Report* attempts to use human capital theory, but it utilizes an impoverished understanding of that theory. Although investment in human capital is important to productivity, Schultz (2000) gives a break down of what investing in human capital should include:

- (1) health facilities and services, broadly conceived to include all expenditures that affect the life expectancy, strength and stamina, and the vigor and vitality of a people;
- (2) on-the-job training, including old-style apprenticeship organized by firms;
- (3) formally organized education at the elementary, secondary, and higher levels;
- (4) study programs for adults that are not organized by firms, including extension programs...;
- (5) migration of individuals and families to adjust to change. (p. 52)

In this report, three out of five criteria are neglected—only secondary credentials and literacy/language programs of study are included.

In addition, Schultz (2000) points out that the brunt of adult education costs rest on individuals. The U.S. *National Report* speaks of *The Higher Education Act* authorizing funding for post-secondary education to populations that would otherwise be unable to access higher education. However, no information is given on the relative costs

that individuals typically incur. To be useful for a proper analysis of barriers facing adult learners, this report should include data on participant costs.

2. Quality of adult learning and education: provision of ALE and institutional frameworks; participation in ALE; monitoring & evaluating programmes and assessing learning outcomes; and adult educators/facilitators' status and training

It appears that presently the language of educational program quality, monitoring, evaluation, and assessment cannot be interpreted by representatives of the United States government, except through the lens of the *No Child Left Behind Act*. The language of quality and accountability is pervasive in U.S. education, and while the usefulness of its application under *No Child Left Behind* has been criticized in recent years, it continues to dominate the language of policy. The U.S. *National Report* addresses these points commensurate with behaviours under the Bush administration and the U.S. Congress—in language that illustrates the legacy of *No Child Left Behind* and the market-based framework for how educational outcomes should be judged. To its credit, the U.S. *National Report* begins to note the widespread criticisms of this approach—“On the negative side, some adult educators have expressed concern about the risk of overemphasizing employment and economic outcomes and demands on adult education resources” (Chapter 1, p. 16). Within the report, however, further criticism, of which there is no small amount in the current educational literature, is absent.

3. Research studies in the field of adult learning and innovations and examples of good practice

Some examples of research studies are included in the report, but their representative quality, the selection process, and their relevance to the field as a whole is questionable. For instance, the report claims that “current research includes six 5-year projects funded through the Adult Literacy Research Network”—thus, all six studies were literacy studies using experimental designs (Chapter 1, p. 40). No results are presented, as the results are expected in 2008-2009.

Determining “best practices” is a process of interviewing key actors within organizations “to learn the reasons for their success” (Reynolds, Sambrook, & Stewart, 1993, p. 19). There is no evidence that any of the authors of the U.S. *National Report* consulted with high-performing ALE providers or organizations to determine the best practices those educators employ. No best practices are highlighted in the report.

4. Adult Literacy

Adult literacy was covered in the U.S. *National Report*—perhaps to a fault. Since the report cites English language instruction as 46% of adult basic education (ABE) in 2006-2007 (Chapter 1, p. 5), it can be expected to be a main focus of the report, yet the nature of the discussion of literacy is inadequate to the report's putative function. While the report is heavily focused on literacy as an end in itself, serving the assimilationist goal of an English-speaking population, literacy must be addressed more as a platform for

adults who want to acquire additional skills and knowledge. Furthermore, social justice language should be used to at least some degree when discussing access to programs and the many forms of adult literacy education. The way in which English language learners themselves were discussed in the report could be interpreted as demeaning, for instance, the report asserted that “some studies indicate that immigrants have a positive effect on the overall economy of the United States,” a statement that has no relation to adults’ literacy skills and betrays a purely neoliberal interest in its clear discomfort for immigrant people as consumers of financial resources (Chapter 2, p. 13).

The report uses neoliberal language to suggest that literacy is an individual responsibility, with the desired outcome that people will not require public assistance, rather than a human right with the purpose of equalizing access to knowledge.

We read that literacy programs “assist adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency” (*Introduction to the report*, “Impacts”).

Finally, the report’s discussion of literacy also defers U.S. responsibility for assisting in adequate adult literacy instruction to the rest of the world, claiming that “with increasing immigration of people between countries, along with large numbers of adults who lack the educational credentials and basic literacy skills needed to compete in a global marketplace, more needs to be done

by world policymakers” (*Introduction to the report*, “Conclusion,” no page number provided). While worldwide cooperation in addressing the needs of adult education is one of the reasons for participation in CONFINTEA, the statement in effect suggests that the rest of the world do more to educate the immigrants entering the United States and arrogantly assumes that the “basic literacy skills” gained around the world will in fact be English language skills.

5. Expectations of CONFINTEA VI and Future Perspectives of ALE

Few long term goals are provided other than appeals for future data collection. The second page (not numbered) of the U.S. *National Report* recites the nation’s desire to be leaders in ALE, however, the perspective presented is partial and biased toward economic development. Future perspectives on ALE are proposed: we will need to have more tests, more measurement of outcomes, and more services for Latino immigrants. Despite the fact that our literacy education is dominated by concerns about immigrant populations (and our concern for economic outcomes and motivations are based on a global economy) the report seems remarkably detached from and dismissive of the idea of an international community that we can learn from.

The report is largely silent regarding CONFINTEA VI and future perspectives on adult learning and education.

The U.S. *National Report on the Development and State of the Art Of Adult Learning and Education: A Reading*

The document produced by the United States government in preparation for CONFINTEA VI, May 2009 is the *U.S. National Report on the Development and State of the Art of Adult Learning and Education (National Report, 2008)*. The *U.S. National Report* was written by the United States Department of Education, the United States Department of State (and utilized private third party contracts). The former is a federal agency that implements the educational laws of Congress; the latter's mission, centered in foreign policy, is to "advance freedom for the benefit of the American people and the international community by helping to build and sustain a more democratic, secure, and prosperous world composed of well-governed states that respond to the needs of their people, reduce widespread poverty, and act responsibly within the international system" (*Mission, 2007*).

The report was cobbled together from pre-existing reports previously designed for other purposes. This is in contradiction to adult education practice and UNESCO guidelines—that is, the agencies responsible for the report failed to engage in participatory consultations with stakeholders. The document is an amalgam of disjointed parts that are not consecutively paginated or segued. The questions must be asked, "Does this signal the U.S. government's commitment to ALE?" "Does it mean that ALE is something unworthy of attention or resources"?

Nevertheless, there are policies present in the report. They are ones that serve the neoliberal agenda of the current administration. Beneath the inadequate response in preparing the report is a dangerous agenda—the reduction of ALE to basic literacy workforce preparation. This substantiates the claim by Torres (1990) that it is "the state that defines adult education and is the principal beneficiary of its effective implementation" (p. x). By so defining ALE, the *U.S. National Report* ignores and marginalizes the legions of adult educators who work for social transformation and a more equal and just nation.

Participatory Process. Sometimes the journey is as important as the destination—that is, the process of creating the product is as important as the end-product itself. Arguably, that should have been the case with the *U.S. National Report*; UNESCO encouraged member states to use writing a *National Report* as an exercise to create a national dialog involving all ALE stakeholders (various state, federal and local ministries providing adult education, corporate and unions, NGOs and Civil Society Organizations, private providers, UN agencies, bilateral and multilateral development agencies etc.). UNESCO encouraged a process that, through multilateral communications among stakeholders, could have allowed various ALE providers to learn from one another. The consensus emerging from such communications would have been informed by practice and enriched by the experiences of diverse organizations and individuals.

The U.S. *National Report* did not involve stakeholders, as recommended by UNESCO. Indeed, the United States violated both the letter and the spirit of the UNESCO guidelines in preparing its report. UNESCO encouraged convening a National Committee with representatives of all stakeholders, and to have the findings validated through a national conference. This, the United States did not do. There is no evidence that significant dialog occurred during the drafting of the incomplete report. The recommendation for a collaborative report was designed to itself to be an adult learning project on a national scale, which did not occur. There was little, if any collaboration.

Content.

The content does not properly reflect the richness and diversity of adult learning and education the U.S.

The content of the U.S. *National Report* is deficient because it follows narrow, economic definitions used for ALE—adult learning appears only in remedial settings, and there is no discussion of the breadth and depth of adult learning in the myriad contexts where it occurs. Missing are allusions to adult education for community development; adult education for human resource development and training within organizations;

adult education for social transformation and change; informal and non-formal adult education; religious adult education; adult education for the elderly; environmental education; consumer education; labor education; and various sorts of anti-racist education and education for tolerance and inclusion. There is no mention of adult education's professional training programs in colleges and university, and no attention paid to the many journals which surround and inform adult education practice. Adult health education was mentioned only briefly, in a country that is the only wealthy, industrialized nation that does not have universal health care (Battista & McCabe, 1999; *Insuring America's health*, 2004). And, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, Americans without health insurance coverage in 2007 numbered about 15.3% of the population, or 45.7 million people (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2008).

The narrow presentation of ALE content is also the result of the filter imposed by the report upon ALE, which is defined only as a field of practice. No adult education theoretical underpinnings are presented, resulting in a de-theorization or a repudiation of theory. The only theory present is the nascent theory of neoliberalism, the implicit belief that all human values can be commodified, manipulated, and controlled within governing systems. The radical, transformative, and empowering theoretical underpinnings which inform much U.S. adult education practice are completely ignored in the report.

The Major Public Policy Embedded in the U.S. National Report. The primary policy behind the U.S. *National Report* is based on command-and-control. First, adult education is defined as something that is remedial. The programs discussed are designed to assist lower-functioning workers to increase their skills so that they may be properly employed at the low-paying, entry level jobs reserved for high school graduates. Once ALE is so-defined, the policy behind the report becomes patent: it is about the production of a certain type of person, a worker who can read and write enough to hold a low-wage positions. To that end, management and metric strategies from business and industry can

be deployed, as if education were somehow an assembly line. Like robots assembling cars, adult educators themselves must be monitored to assure maximum productivity: adult education providers are asked to solve the problems of poverty and illiteracy while simultaneously being subjected to the neoliberal gaze in such “management” techniques as “desk monitoring” (Chapter 1, *National Report*, p. 20). Even though the adult educators in question are mostly part-time employees, even though there is an acknowledged lack of training opportunities and few incentives for them to continue into advanced training (Chapter 1 of *Report*, p. 42), these instructors are expected to be accountable for measurable results.

By ignoring the legions of adult educators who work for positive social change, to empower learners to enrich their lives, and to facilitate a more equal and just U.S., the narrow policy in the report ghettoizes adult education.

This policy is incremental, not transformative. It appears to be primarily concerned with money and outcomes, and not human beings. It is systems-centered rather than student- (or instructor-) centered. Adult basic education and adult literacy programs are very important parts of the adult education landscapes, but these are not the only sorts of programs offered to adults in the U.S. The report focuses only on one part of adult education, and it does so through a very narrow, econometric policy lens.

The *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 is heralded in this report as “landmark legislation” and the cornerstone to educational policy in the U.S. today. However, many educators view it as an under-funded, evaluate-and-punish system that proposes a single solution to complex educational problems through unfair decisions requiring unproven, often illogical means of assessment and accountability. *NCLB* substantiates Papadopoulos’ (2002) claim that, “governments find it easy to endorse concepts and principles of drastic educational change [but] their practical application becomes thwarted by lack of new resources and the corporatist behaviour of the established system, buttressed by vested interests, including political ideologies” (p. 37). This act attempts to regulate educational policy by “imposing on states a set of standards, benchmarks of yearly progress established for specific objectives, and [imposed] sanctions on failing schools (Cookson, 2007, p. 370). While arguably this was “a significant step from being more than a federal bully pulpit and a perch for fading politicians to a genuine ministry of education” (p. 370), the results have gained heavy bi-partisan criticism.

Despite the complicated and involved history presented above, the U.S. *National Report* (2008), comprised of four chapters, lists four pieces of U.S. legislation that prescribe definite courses of action (policies) related to adult education: (a) *No Child Left Behind Act*, (b) *Higher Education Act*, (c) *Adult Education and Family Literacy Act*, and (d) *Title II of the Workforce Investment Act*.

Examining the Four Chapters of the U.S. National Report

The first chapter in the U.S. *National Report* is purely descriptive, offers no analysis, and relegates ALE to the production of passive recipients.

Chapter One. National Report on Adult Basic Education and Literacy (NRABEL). NRABEL focuses on Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE), and English Literacy (EL). The first page attributes authorship to a private contractor, with a caveat restricting attribution of content to the third party author. Specifically, it says that “the views contained herein are solely those of the author and do not

necessarily reflect the position of [the Office of Vocational and Adult Education] or the Department of Education,” (pg. iii). That Chapter One of the U.S. *National Report* explicitly disavows full participation and ratification recommended by UNESCO belies any claim by the U.S. government to have sincerely engaged in the procedures requested of it.

NRABEL claims that “statistics on current participation in federally funded adult education programs document low participation rates,” (pp. 48-49), but rather than addressing how participation rates can be improved, goes on to suggest that increased accountability will be the focus of policy. While the report notes that these requirements for increased accountability are a challenge for the already strained resources of adult education and that “the research base about effective practices is limited in comparison to current knowledge about K-12 instruction” (p. 49) on which accountability policies are based, it does not present effective suggestions for addressing these significant concerns.

UNESCO repeatedly recommends attention to minority groups in reporting on ALE policy and implementation. While the U.S. report cites that Hispanic people are the largest group enrolled in ALE (43%)—not even a minority but a plurality population with respect to ALE enrollment—it does little to reflect how this population’s needs are taken to account *except* the need to gain English language proficiency and literacy skills and potentially civic education for citizenship purposes.

Local agencies are depicted as a homogenous black wedge on the data representations (pie-diagram)—leaving the reader to ask, “What is going on inside this big piece of the pie”? The report continuously uses vague language to allocate authority on ALE away from the federal level, to the states and then to the local agencies. However, if this is the case, state and local specifics must be taken into account—not spoken of as vague unknowables.

The report recognizes that staff development is one of the most critical needs in the field today (pp. 41-42) but devotes most of its attention providing explanations for why adult educators cannot be better trained. This is an area that needs more attention to the programs being done and future goals for improvement.

A multiplicity of Federal Agencies that might have participated in the report are listed (pp. 25-26), but their contributions are not evident. For example, while education

for all inmates in federal prisons is the responsibility of the U.S. government, details about prison programs are missing. This is a noteworthy omission since for the first time in U.S. history, more than one in 99 U.S. adults is behind bars (*Pew Report*, 2008).

Prisoners number almost 1.6 million people.

Incarceration rates for African Americans is one in 15 (for black men between the ages of 20 and 34, the rate is one in nine), and for Hispanic adults the rate is one in 36. The Pew Center report also exposed that one in 355 white women between the ages of 35 and 39 are behind bars, however, one in 100 black women are. Despite

these staggering numbers, the U.S. *National Report* is silent on prison education, and commentary on the disproportionate incarceration of people of color. Additionally, there is no substantiation that the list of NGOs (*Key National Adult Education Organizations*, pp. 27-28) were consulted.

The multitude of federal agencies that might have participated in the report, and NGOs listed in it, were not consulted.

Chapter Two. Education for Adult English Language Learners in the United States (EAELLUS). EAELLUS offers that the most recent data (2004-2005) show 44% of all participants enrolled in state-administered adult education programs attend English as a second language (ESL) classes (*Education for Adult English Language Learners*, 2008). They are pooled from legal immigrants, refugees, asylees, and undocumented immigrants. Many foreign-born adults play a significant role in the U.S. workforce. Between 1990 and 2002 their ranks swelled 76%, with more than half holding low-income jobs (p. 11). The report, however, admits that “qualified instructors and resources to support effective instruction are limited” (p. 3). Policies allow for ESL opportunities to be provided through faith-based organizations, volunteer organizations, libraries, museums, private language schools, and the academy. In addition to language instruction, they engage participants in providing access to information and skills for survival as parents, employees, consumers, and lifelong learners.

Burt and Mathews-Aydinli (2007) focus on work place, vocational and adult ESL classes. In the end, they name the purpose of federally funded adult learning and education, based on a survey conducted by the National Association of Manufacturers: more than 80% of the responding employers reported that they were experiencing at least a moderate shortage of qualified workers. Ninety percent reported a shortage of skilled production workers. With the rapid growth of immigrants, “it is important to equip them with the language and skills they need to be successful in these manufacturing jobs....” (para. 42). Using the economic argument, federal programs are concerned mostly with the uninterrogated notion that people with higher education and better literacy skills earn more and will probably be employed longer than those without these advantages. While post-secondary participation in education may enhance earnings, “the vast majority of this evidence is based on ...having a baccalaureate degree. Very little research focuses on...sub-baccalaureate programs and even fewer studies address the economic returns to vocational programs” (Silverberg, Warner, Fong, & Goodwin, et al., 2004, p. 175).

A number of pages in this section are devoted to publishing the research findings, some of which aren't even about adults—such as the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth Pathways Project (p. 32). Other data does not contain meaningful information about ALE—for instance, the claim that “K-12 teachers received 25-33 hours of professional development in the 1999-2000 school year. Few adult educators receive 25-33 hours of professional development in one calendar year” (p. 38). The report seems to be attempting to show that the U.S. has considerably more and better information available in ALE than is the case given that “funding for major research efforts in adult education, including adult ESL, has not been extensive to date, and research dissemination efforts of the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (*NCSALL*) ended on March 31, 2007, with the end of the center’s federal funding” (p. 26). There is a disconnect that needs to be addressed in the U.S. between lofty goals for accountability, the perceived usefulness of such accountability, and the ability of the government to fund a comprehensive assessment battery in ALE. This misalignment of goals with resources is something that should be reflected upon in a comprehensive and forward-looking document like a national report, but was sadly not in the one submitted by the U.S.

The report also presents data that has important implications for social justice issues in education—for instance, in 1999, 44.9% of male, foreign-born full-time workers earned less than \$25,000 compared with 24.2% of U.S.-born male workers. (p. 11). This illustrates a huge discrepancy between the opportunities to earn for foreign-born and US-born workers. These data could be used to formulate goals for CONFINTEA VI, but they are not. Plenty of limitations are listed (p. 50), but little discussion about what to do about them or how to move forward. Revealingly, the report cites businesses as defining the skills adult learners need to have to succeed (p. 57). The report notes that “learner assessment is a priority in adult education” (p. 42). The types of assessments listed (pp. 45-46) provide the most easily digestible benefits for businesses, despite the many assessment issues the report mentions, such as limited connections between test constructs and learning theories, poorly defined test purposes, and a limited consideration of logistical factors that may impede implementation or invalidate results (p. 50).

The report presents data that have important implications for social justice issues in education, but never explores them.

The report places an hourly wage value on English language skills. Examining the data provided clearly indicates that learning English serves more than an economic purpose. This was done, perhaps, to ensure that learners are assimilated in the culture since the hourly wage increase for refugees along a continuum—from “spoke English well or fluently” (\$9.07/hr), “did not speak English well” (8.89/hr), to “did not speak English at all” (\$7.95)—mean that extremely fluent refugees make a meager \$1.12/hr more than those who speak no English at all.

Even when differences in success (whether in completion or earnings) among special populations or between men and women are pointed out, the report makes no recommendations regarding how to address these differences, and in fact, barely hints that these findings indicate a problem of any kind.

Throughout this chapter, the tone of the report was defensive of the existing legislation, workforce market, and data. For instance, it recognizes that One-Stop Career Centers could be helpful, although they have not demonstrated any positive effect on learners in most communities (p. 161). There is room for criticism of the current state of vocational education in several places that is obviously underdeveloped—for example, the report notes that the “sequencing of services places greater emphasis on job placement, in contrast to the past emphasis on increasing an individual’s human capital through job training,” (p. 160) a statement that shows a shift in thinking about the primary purposes of adult education and whom it should serve. For instance, the

report notes that being the first in a family to attend college is closely associated with significant barriers to postsecondary enrollment and success (p. 142). The report should go on to ask how we can minimize or remove those barriers. The report also claims that research indicates a relationship between nontraditional enrollment patterns and lower earnings, but fails to ask how the differences in earnings can be minimized to help learners benefit from their education. In another passage at the end of the chapter, the report emphasizes earnings differences between men and women at various levels of credential completion and suggests the data show that “female students need a credential to benefit” from higher education, as opposed to men, who may see a benefit in earnings without receiving a credential (p. 178-179). The report presents this information in a functionalist way that avoids asking critical questions about why gender discrepancy exists or what could be done to ensure women are credentialized. This same data could easily take a different direction in terms of social justice and access to education, credentials, and earnings.

The main focus of the chapter is whether postsecondary vocational education provides economic benefits to participants at various levels of completion. It discusses legislation from two areas—the *Workforce Investment Act* and the *Perkins Act*—several times mentioning how inconvenient it is that they are not streamlined, how much of a burden this places on institutions, and how challenging it is for federal policy (pp. 159-164). The report gives little or no attention, however, to how these challenges are translated to the student and whether these concerns in ALE differentially affect different populations of those seeking adult education. The report even suggests that it is not the role of the ALE to ask such questions—instead noting that “most postsecondary institutions assist existing special population students rather than conduct outreach because they view access as best provided through student aid,” effectively limiting the participation of special populations to that which is provided by the status quo (p. 152).

Chapter Three. National Assessment of Vocational Education (NAVE). NAVE is the third chapter, by Silverberg, Warner, Fong, and Goodwin (2004). *NAVE* is a Congressionally-mandated evaluation with supplemental reports that occasionally touch on special subpopulations such as older students, racial-ethnic minorities, and

academically or economically disadvantaged students. The focus is on vocational education in the U.S. Findings in 2004 indicated an increase in earnings for males, but not females, who take a year of vocational course work, pointing to the gendered nature of employee compensation. No solutions to this disparity are offered.

Does the U.S. Commission not care about the voices and visions of U.S. adult educators and learners?

Chapter Four. Addendum to the Official Report. Submissions Received in Response to a Questionnaire Posted on the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO's Website. This chapter offers remarks made during a very attenuated comment period, in a pro forma, frail attempt at public participation. The National Commission reports that responders included the American

Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE), the Institute of World Affairs, Center for International Education, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, The Continuing Education Association of New York, Goshen College-Division of Adult and External Studies, and Austin Peay State University (a four-year public, masters level university)-Center for Extended and Distance Education. This is an unbelievably thin assortment of the full array of ALE providers and venues in the U.S. Such limited participation represents, in part, the failure of the U.S. government to consider the U.S. *National Report* a serious exercise and the voices within U.S. ALE as worthy of the U.S. National Commission's efforts.

Interestingly, AAACE's mission is nominally reflected in the organization's input to the U.S. *National Report*. The association advocates technology use, building a global knowledge society based on increased movement toward a knowledge economy, and to act as a catalyst to focus on the country's unsung heroes. In its Mission Statement, AAACE reports that it is dedicated to "advocating [for] relevant public policy and social change initiatives" (*AAACE: Who We Are*, 2008). In fact, at an adult education conference in Salt Lake City^{iv} in 1990, AAACE was "charged, and found guilty, by the program organizers of dereliction of duty in failing to honor its founding commitment to educate adults to participate in democratic social action" (Cunningham, 2001, p. 64). In 1991, Jack Mezirow presented a five-page policy report on social justice within AAACE, but it turned up "dead on arrival," and a committee member is alleged to have said that the report was "buried by the staff at AAACE in Washington" (p. 64). The mission of AAACE was succumbing to the "learning for earning discourse, with little resistance from the organization's leadership. This leadership was Washington, DC elites who were hired to lobby, effectively removing participatory membership. In regard to AAACE Cunningham asks and answers, "Can't we mobilize and educate our membership on policy initiatives? Of course we could, if we thought participation and critically informed membership were key to our politics" (p. 66). But, as Cunningham quips, "no hegemony is complete" (p. 71) and so AAACE has had some bright spots, however, few are participatory and policy related. It leaves serious intellectuals to wonder, since policy begins with dialog, where are the professional organizations? In this regard, AAACE was involved in the U.S. *National Report* process through issuing a call for input from its members. AAACE members were sent an e-mail asking for feedback to specific

questions that were posed by the U.S. National Commission. These were then incorporated into AAACE’s report and the report distributed to all members for feedback.

Indeed, a very limited number of adult education stakeholders provide a glimpse of the types of input that could have been received if the report had been drafted in a participatory fashion, as envisioned by UNESCO. Austin Peay State University focused on the value of workforce development with an emphasis on developing the U.S. workforce as a viable competitor in the international community. Goshen College appears as a provider of degree completion programs for working adults. This snippet from an ALE provider presents an important contrast, as Goshen offers ALE within formal educational channels, since it is a private religious degree-granting institution of higher education. The Continuing Education Association of New York provided a list of more than thirty types of ALE programming its members offer. And the Institute for World Affairs of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee touted its non-formal world affairs education program. Unlike the response in the U.S. *National Report*, some of these organizations meaningfully replied to the questions propounded by UNESCO—outlining, for examples, areas of adult learning, primary target groups, and costs and funding.

The few groups that commented had varying interpretations of what is meant by quality provision methods, how learning can be evaluated, and what constitute innovative practices. Recognition of these different perspectives, as well as recognition of the diversity of the field, are key in contrasting with the limited perspectives, definitions, and goals presented in the document.

What Constitutes Contemporary U.S. Federal Notions of Adult Learning and Education?

The current administration defines adult education in very limited ways: “teaching or instruction below the postsecondary level, for individuals who are 16 years of age or older, designed to provide: (i) mastery of basic education skills needed to function effectively in society; (ii) a secondary school diploma or its equivalent; or (iii) the ability to speak, read, or write the English language.”

A brief analysis of adult education policy in the U.S. is provided in Appendix I, *The United States Federal Government and Adult Learning and Education: Policies For People or For Profits? A Brief History*, found at the end of this report. It is provided as background information to assist readers to better comprehend how the U.S. federal government has arrived at its current understanding of ALE. Readers are encouraged to review this essential history.

The U.S. *National Report* reinforces the government’s contemporary, official, narrow definition of adult education that is, “teaching or instruction below the postsecondary level, for individuals who are 16 years of age or older, designed to provide: (i) mastery of basic education skills needed to function effectively in society; (ii) a secondary school diploma or its equivalent; or (iii) the ability to speak, read, or write the English language found in Presidential

Executive Order 13445” (*Executive Order: Strengthening Adult Education*, 2007, Sec 2[b]).

This Executive Order by President George W. Bush also proposed that the Secretary of Education would establish within the Department of Education, for administrative purposes only, an “Interagency Adult Education Working Group” (Working Group) whose membership included: the Secretary of Education (Chair), the Secretary of the Treasury, the Attorney General, and the Secretaries of the Interior, Labor, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Veterans Affairs—and other officers or full-time or permanent part-time employees of the United States, as determined by the Chair, with the concurrence of the head of the agency concerned. The goals of the Working Group were to: (a) identify Federal programs that (i) focus primarily on improving the basic education skills of adults, (ii) have the goal of transitioning adults from basic literacy to postsecondary education, training, or employment, or (iii) constitute programs of adult education; (b) as appropriate, review the programs identified under subsection (a) above and submit to the heads of the agencies administering those programs recommendations to: (i) promote the transition of adults from such programs to postsecondary education, training, or employment, (ii) increase the effectiveness, efficiency, and availability of such programs, (iii) minimize unnecessary duplication among such programs, (iv) measure and evaluate the performance of such programs, and (v) undertake and disseminate the results of research related to such programs; (c) identify gaps in the research about effective ways to teach adult education for postsecondary readiness, recommend areas for further research to improve adult education programs and services, and identify promising practices in disseminating valid existing and future research findings; (d) obtain information and advice as appropriate, in a manner that seeks individual advice and does not involve collective judgment or consensus advice or deliberation, concerning adult education from: (i) State, local, territorial, and tribal officials, and (ii) representatives of entities or other individuals; (e) at the request of the head of an agency, unless the Chair declines the request, promptly review and provide advice on a proposed action by that agency relating to adult education; and (f) report to the President, through the Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy, on its work, and on the implementation of any recommendations arising from its work, at such times and in such formats as the Chair may specify, with the first such report to be submitted no later than 9 months after 27 September 2007, the date of the Executive Order.

The final product of the Working Group was issued on July 17, 2008, (*Bridges to opportunities: Federal adult education programs for the 21st century. Report to the President on Executive Order 13445*), composed by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. This was three months after the U.S. *National Report* for CONFINTEA VI was released.

In summary, the Working Group found that, to advance federal education programs for U.S. adults who need to improve their basic literacy skills, the responsibilities rest in 11 adult literacy programs across five agencies. The Working Group made six recommendations intended to ensure that federal programs serving adults

will be utilized in a manner that increases their effectiveness, efficiency and availability, and for literacy skills of adults to be strengthened, thereby improving their opportunities for transitions to postsecondary education and employment. The report stresses the need for better coordination across federal agencies so as to ensure a maximum return on the \$US 5.7 billion in federal investments (FY 2007) in adult education and research, and so that adults can more readily take advantage of services offered by the different federally funded programs. U.S. *National Report*, therefore, preceded the views of the most recent U.S. government document on adult education (*Bridges to opportunities: federal adult education programs for the 21st Century. Report to the President on Executive Order 13445*, 2008).

Adult Education and Social Intervention: Vital but Absent in the Report

Adult educators recognize that our field is “a form of social intervention that often begins with a problem to be solved” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 75), however, the U.S. *National Report* proposes no social action models. There are no recommendations regarding how adults can organize civil society and engage in their own problem-solving. Adult education is not positioned so that it assists learners in strengthening competencies to participate in the policy process, to identify problems, find an array of solutions, and work together for social transformation. The U.S. *National Report* is devoid of adult learning and education for personal social intervention or for organizations to deliver interventions, which are key elements of our practice (Finger & Asún, 2001; Heaney, 1996; Youngman, 2000). There is no prospect or message of hope that people can have control over the factors that influence key aspects of their own lives. Readers will not learn how ALE policy is formed, how various interests are negotiated, conflicts handled, or the rationale behind resource allocation. There is no integration of economic policies with social mechanisms and processes that can mitigate the sociocultural determinants of the problems that adult learning and education have the power to address. In far too many ways, the U.S. *National Report* is a failure to deliver the information requested by UNESCO. There are numerous reasons, we believe, for this. These reasons are due to problems with the process employed to gather information and to write the report, its content, and U.S. adult education policy processes under the administration of President George W. Bush.

The literacy upon which the report largely focuses is not for acquisition of decision-making or problem solving skills, or for critical social interaction, but rather is for job performance and economic measures that will reap disproportionate gains for some and little for others.

The U.S. National Report: A Final Analysis

The *U.S. National Report* was produced to represent the state of adult education and learning in the United States, but presents just one aspect of a field that encompasses a historically broad range of interests, initiatives, and experiences. While the document attempts to fit ALE into a narrow definition that conforms to the same standards- and accountability-based model that has become the hallmark of American K-12 education under *No Child Left Behind*, the vast majority of real adult education does not fit into this imagined structure. As the comments illustrate, there are many different ideas of how programs should be judged and evaluated, many different ideas for what constitutes best practices and innovations in the field, and even many different definitions of what adult education is. These alternative perspectives cannot be ignored when they inconveniently do not fit an imposed idea of adult education as that which prepares adult learners for the English-speaking workforce in the most inexpensive way possible.

The report lacks strategies and policies for transformation and development in the spheres of personal, professional, political, economic, social, and cultural life in the U.S.

According to UNESCO, the *U.S. National Report* was to take into account a full variety of sources and form a concerted effort of governmental (including ministries of education, labour, health, agriculture, gender, culture, sports and leisure, social welfare, finance and economy, and foreign affairs), non-governmental, public and private actors, trade unions, social partners and bilateral and multilateral development agencies. There is no indication that the U.S. Commission actually attempted this. Learners are denied “voice” even though adult

educators recognize that “much of the social consensus depends presently on non-formal education within civil society” (Cunningham, 2000, p. 576). It lacks outreach to marginalized groups, despite language that offers hope to the contrary, to encourage and support learning throughout life. The report lacks a strategy to increase the numbers of adults involved in informal learning and training activities. It lacks ideas and mechanisms that encourage adults to express their learning needs. The report lacks any strategy to develop cooperation among partners in all learning environments at both governmental and non-governmental levels. And, it is not participatory since no obvious stakeholders were consulted outside of a mechanically presented list of potential ALE providers.

Emphasis is placed on postsecondary education, adult vocational training, and adult literacy/English as a second language. It is unambiguously stated that it is in these three areas that the U.S. Congress has made its major investments in adult learning by funding to ensure that adult learners obtain what is needed for employment, and for parents to be full partners in the education of their children.

Present in the report is language about the critical importance of education for a career path.

The report acknowledges that “there is substantial need for adult education in the United States of America” with emphasis on adult literacy levels. The report states that,

With increasing immigration of people between countries, along with large numbers of adults who lack the educational credentials and basic literacy skills needed to compete in the global marketplace, more needs to be done by policymakers....United States policymakers recognize the need for adult education....(no page number cited)

Adult learning and education is positioned as a commodity rather than a public good.

In the end, the programs mentioned in the U.S. *National Report* never seek to ask, nor attempt to answer questions about why people are illiterate, innumerate, poor, underemployed or unemployed, unschooled, lacking skill sets, are differentially paid for equal work, disenfranchised, marginalized, and oppressed. It never explores the place of sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, discrimination based on differently-abled, language, etc., and their relationship to education that is touted as the panacea for social ills. It dares not ask why 4 million workers are displaced from their jobs each year, but rather focuses on reskilling them. It is driven by conservative, neoliberal politics. Cunningham (1998) pointedly shows that policies on the right and those who are politically strong are driven by fundamentalism, the business community, entrepreneurship, and capital (e.g., immigration reform, right to life, English-only education, vouchers in the privatization of public education). She is equally critical of the privileged left and their liberal agenda (e.g., the environment, AIDS, women’s reproductive rights) that is often the primary concern of middle-class white people who also miss the opportunity for a participatory, culturally pluralistic democratic society. Her critical comments can be applied to the national report.

Williamson (1990), in the classic work, *What Washington Means by Policy Reform*, details the policy shift from humanism, and the guarantee of equal rights and entitlements, to neoliberalism, centered on individual initiative and private enterprise in the U.S. Beginning in the 1970s, an increased accumulation of capital was met by unemployment, inflation (or as it was termed euphemistically, stagflation), and numerous economic crises. As a result, the discourse of liberalism shifted to new forms of hegemonic corporate and business behaviour, and the establishment of market freedoms. This came to be known as neoliberalism. A primary feature was the transfer of economic control from the nation-state to the private sphere. Notions of social democracy were eventually overpowered by the neoliberal discourse. This discourse is best understood by the policy proposals known as the Washington Consensus.

Ten policy proposals, the Washington Consensus, set the stage for conservative actions of Washington’s international economic organizations (including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund). Points that gained consensus approval include elimination of regulations that hinder the “market” or restrict competition (deregulation), maximizing property rights, profits over people despite the rubric to redirect public expenditure priorities toward fields offering both high economic returns, and the potential

to improve income distribution, such as education and primary healthcare. Economic dimensions supercede sociocultural ones. This readily translated into legislation and educational policy, for example, in the U.S. *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001/2008; No Child Left Behind Act, 2001)*.

According to Livingstone (1999), neoliberal ideology, such as is found in the U.S. *National Report*, has made false claims. Neoliberal economies have produced a diminished number of meaningful employment possibilities, creating a major social problem that is not being addressed by legislation or policy. An education-jobs gap is fundamentally due to escalating shareholder greed, and profit-centered capitalism rather than failures in the education system as shown by the current 2008 financial crisis (See Edwards & Kane, 2008; and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_SyxyPpDqn8). Thus, current government policies only add to the problem as they assume that education will produce greater employability. ALE, too, will not “fix” the problem without a profound critique of resource distribution. Consistently, the Bush administration has delivered to Congress budgets with record deficits that virtually freeze or shrink spending that meets domestic social needs (including education) while simultaneously proposing record military spending. One example is the sixth veto of President Bush’s presidency that rejected a health-labor bill, a \$600 billion measure to fund education, job training and health programs. Opposition could not muster enough votes to override the veto.

We are witnessing events never seen before in U.S. history. For example,

for the first time... a President’s budget request has topped \$3 trillion [in 2008]. President Bush’s FY2009 budget [reflected] highly skewed priorities in favor of wealthy Americans, while ignoring the needs of our most vulnerable children. While calling for large increases in military spending...the President significantly [proposed reducing] funding for multiple programs providing vital services to children and families especially those with low incomes including programs in health, mental health, education, and juvenile justice. (*A legacy of failure*, 2008, para 1)

Proposed education allowances included freezing the U.S. Department of Education’s budget at the previous year’s level. Despite proposed increases in grants for higher education for low income students, “rapidly rising costs of post-secondary education and a projected inflation rate...[means that] this increase...is inadequate to meet the educational support needs of low-income students” (*Underfunding of America’s education system*, 2008, para. 2).

As we pen these lines, the U.S. economy is in the worst turmoil since the Great Depression, spilling into the global markets, as a result of many factors, including deregulation, and corporate avarice.

The U.S. current U.S. economic crisis will result in a historic \$700 billion to \$1 trillion (plus) financial rescue plan to bailout primarily financial institutions at taxpayer expense. In September 2008, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a \$630 billion spending bill that included a record Pentagon budget of \$488 billion.

Earlier in 2008, Congress provided \$70 billion for U.S. operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, citing that more would be needed by mid-2009. The national missile defense program has cost the US more than \$110 billion. A program initiated by President Ronald Reagan 25 years ago is today the Pentagon's single biggest procurement program. This, coupled with a \$3 trillion dollar total debt to execute a war in Iraq (Stiglitz & Bilme, 2008) and additional immense resources for Afghanistan, have taken their toll of funding for education in general, and adult and continuing education specifically.

Conclusions

Participatory Process.

The U.S. *National Report* failed to engage in a participatory process as intended by UNESCO and that is undoubtedly necessary for creating a meaningful document about adult education and learning in a system that the report repeatedly acknowledges is highly decentralized.

The U.S. *National Report* represents a failure of the government to mobilize the national imagination on ALE, a failure in international relations, and a failure of public trust. In the first respect, this narrow, poorly drafted text was pieced together from three pre-existing reports, with a hodge-podge appendix of comments from a handful of stakeholders, who responded to the call for participation outlined on the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO website. The national imagination was not mobilized because there is no evidence that any organization with progressive, innovative, successful programs was consulted. That is, none of the creative, dynamic, enthusiastic program planners in state, federal, local, non-governmental, non-formal, informal, and progressive settings were actively brought into the drafting process. There were no regional meetings, no national meetings, no consultations, and so, no consensus-building.

In the second respect, this report is yet another failure of international relations for the administration of George W. Bush. Rather than participate through the UNESCO guidelines designed for the process, the United States government decided to either neglect the recommendations, or, for ideological reasons decided to present a narrow, stunted vision of adult education in its *National Report*. This tactic is not new to the administration, e.g., the former U.S. Surgeon General, Richard Carmona has testified how political pressure by politicized, special interest groups and the U.S. government to distort science impeded his office's efforts to educate the public about: stem cell research, sex education, emergency contraception, global climate change, prison mental health services, and secondhand smoke from tobacco (Dunham, 2007). Under the Bush administration there have been systematic political efforts to misrepresent scientific findings and research, which impact educational programs and efforts (*Scientific integrity. Freedom to speak?*, 2008).

Our federal government was asked to allocate resources toward building a complex, nuanced, and comprehensive portrait of adult learning and education in the United States. Per the UNESCO guidelines, the process itself was designed to be participatory, informative, and empowering for adult educators and learners. Our government, perhaps preoccupied with its two wars or the collapsing economy that resulted from a lack of oversight of our financial institutions, has once again neglected the American people by refusing to participate in an international conversation designed to position adult education, not as a commodity, but as a public good. We are all poorer for this failure.

In the final respect, the report is a failure of the public trust.

Content & Policy.

The content of the U.S. *National Report* reveals the extent to which the process itself was off-target for goals of CONFINTEA VI.

The content of the U.S. report is only drawn from previously written documents, rather than the product of a concerted investigation into adult learning and education for the purposes of preparing a vision for CONFINTEA VI.

Because the report attempts to fit content generated for other purposes into the UNESCO guidelines for *National Reports*, the document falls short of adequately addressing the suggested topics and instead provides some insight into what the existing policy discussion of ALE is missing.

Recommendations

Our recommendations are for U.S. representatives and policymakers to recognize the limitations of the neoliberal lens that frames the report and its tendency to reduce all issues to financial rather than human or social terms, to similarly recognize the limitations of the U.S. focus on *No Child Left Behind* as a framework for all discussions of quality and evaluation, and finally to acknowledge the need for the United States to broaden its focus to more realistically understand the intersections of U.S. and global policies and goals and to take international collaboration at CONFINTEA VI much more seriously than the poor quality of the U.S. *National Report* indicates.

We recommend that both the Regional Conference (U.S., Canada, Europe, and Israel) in Budapest, Hungary, December 3-5, 2008, and CONFINTEA VI (Belém, Brazil), May 2009, move beyond the findings of the U.S. *National Report* related to ALE:

- to include the need for actions that enable and empower adults to organize civil society and engage in their own problem-solving
- to strengthen competencies for adults to participate in the policy process

- to identify problems, find an array of solutions, and work together for social transformation
- to acquire decision-making and problem solving skills for critical social interaction
- to support labor education rather than corporatist mechanisms that control learning outcomes and measure learning based on job performance or literacy levels that will reap disproportionate gains for some and little rewards for others
- to situate adult learning and education for personal and social intervention
- to send a message of hope that people can have control over the factors that influence key aspects of their own lives
- to negotiate the conditions of their learning
- to handle conflicts in a diverse and diversifying country and world, and
- to challenge the rationale behind resource allocations for ALE

The tragedy of the U.S. *National Report* is that it never escapes the hegemony of economic formal and non-formal education.

The U.S. *National Report* fails to incorporate popular education; social, economic, and political justice; equality of gender relations; the universal right to learn; living in harmony with the environment; respect for human rights; social justice; and recognition of cultural diversity, peace, and the active involvement of women and men in decisions affecting their lives. The report never abandons an individualistic vision of learning and

fails to envision the social construction of knowledge in learning communities which promote inter-cultural, inter-generational, and inter-sectoral relationships. Literacy is of course necessary, but is not a sufficient point of departure, and does not allow all people to continue and supplement their learning throughout life, and thus exercise their rights as citizens (See *Regional Literacy*, 2008).

We recommend that the visionaries who will gather in Budapest and Belém not repeat these omissions.

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Appendix I. The United States Federal Government and Adult Learning and Education: Policies For People or For Profits? A Brief History

In 1996, Cunningham reported that “until 1930 there was only a handful of federal funded programs for adult education, many only temporary, [however] the disinterest in the federal funding of adult education has disappeared” (p. 182). She points to the growing demand for adults to learn for numerous reasons including “for their own survival as much as well being, in a modern society as it is now constructed around market forces” (p. 182). She problematizes the situation by asking how the social demand is legitimated, i.e., whose social needs will determine what educational programs will be offered and funded, and perhaps most importantly, for what purpose? We must ask, “Where is the culturally responsive ALE”? More recently, Anyon (2005) shows “how job, wage, housing, tax, and transportation policies maintain minority poverty...and thereby create environments that overwhelm the potential of educational policy to create systemic, sustained improvements in schools” (p. 66). Minimum wage policies and the educational counterparts that sustain them, for example, result in full-time pay below the poverty line. Anyon’s argument is that we need not only better schools but the reform of public and social policy “to eliminate poverty-wage work and housing segregation” (p. 66). These “should be part of the educational policy panoply...for these have consequences...at least as profound as curriculum, pedagogy and testing” (p. 66).

The U.S. Constitution “assigns education as a responsibility of the state” (Cunningham, 1997, p. 175). Only under conditions determined to be national priorities does the federal government develop national educational policies, and even then, money to carry these out is typically distributed to the states. In general, there is little policy coherence at the federal level relative to adult learning and education. Thus, with the exception of adult education in the military, federal prisons, for indigenous peoples (Native Americans) and the District of Columbia, “the states implement policy within their educational or political systems, which vary from state to state” (p. 175). The ability of adult educators to effect policy related to ALE at both the federal and state levels is a contested area.

In the U.S., adult education “has a history almost as old as the country itself” (Cunningham, 1997, p. 167). “The nature and extent of Federal attention to the needs of adult learners has varied over this period, but, from its earliest days, the government provided funds to establish, encourage, and expand programs to assist adults” (*History of the Adult Education Act*, 1998, para. 2). Purposes have included to overcome educational deficiencies which would “hinder productive and responsible participation in the life and growth of the nation” (para. 2). At times this adult education was rooted in public policy processes—either from the bottom up (grassroots initiated, citizen-organized, privately funded in the voluntary sector) or from the top down (beginning with one of the branches of government). At other times, it fell in the hands of the private domain. This history is complicated and convoluted, and includes phases such as civil society agents as primary providers, rapid institutionalization with an emerging university-trained corps of professionals, and in the 1960’s, social disruption that was consequential for adult

education policy—and that demonstrated the power of adult learning to effect social change.

By the 1960s, the U.S. government acknowledged grave problems that poverty and adult literacy generated; federal programs were implemented to end poverty “and increase the role of the Federal government toward the improvement of education” (*History of the Adult Education Act*, 1998, para. 4). Cunningham offers that the social upheavals of the 1960s “forced policy makers to rethink the role of education as social intervention” (p. 167) which resulted in massive policy changes around civil rights, poverty, and educational mandates regarding preparatory grades, through higher, adult, and continuing education.

A legislative and policy history, including amendments and new priorities for carrying out the *Adult Education Act (AEA)*, is found as the *History of the Adult Education Act* (1998). The *AEA* originated in the *Economic Opportunity Act* of 1964, and dispersed funds to the states for adult basic education programs offered in a variety of settings such as local education agencies, community colleges, community-based organizations, work places, and correctional institutions (Crandall & Imel, 1991). With the passage of the *Economic Opportunity Act (EOA)*, Title II B of Public Law 88-452 created the first *Adult Basic Education (ABE)* program as a state grant. This legislation established state-Federal partnerships to remediate the situation for adults who had not completed secondary education. “At times, Federal efforts have been disjointed; sometimes they overlapped with other similar programs. But, throughout the past [period], there have been continuous programs focused on increasing adult literacy skills through the *Adult Education Act*” (*History of the Adult Education Act*, 1998, para. 4). Highlights include the 1966 establishment of the National Advisory Council on Adult Education (under Title III of the amendment to the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act [ESEA]*). Simultaneous with passage of the first adult education act, but independent of it, the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) system was established. Creating *AEA* and the launching of a national education information network “meant that at the same time monies to support adult education research and delivery systems became available, there was a mechanism in place to collect and disseminate the results of these activities” (Imel, 1991). The 25-year collaboration between the *Adult Education Act (AEA)* and the ERIC system is detailed by Imel (1991). In 1968, private non-profit agencies were added as eligible local grant recipients for funds (as an amendment to the *ESEA*).

Special emphasis was given in 1970 to adult basic education and the statement of purpose was expanded to include adults who had attained age 16 and had not graduated from high school (as an amendment to the *ESEA*). In 1972 thought was given to the deplorable conditions in education for Native Americans, so improvement of educational opportunities was legislated. An example of educational needs of one tribe (the Navajo), included “giving more power to Bureau of Indian Affairs school boards, hiring more teachers [and counselors], providing more programs in special education, providing extensive funding for college students, and increasing offerings in adult education” (Iverson, 2002, p. 255). By 1974, amendments to the *ESEA* made provisions for bilingual

adult education and the National Advisory Council on Adult Education expanded to include limited English-speaking members.

The *AEA* was amended numerous times (Taylor, 1983), expanding “the scope of the act to include adult school completion, a competency-based approach to assessment and programming, and workplace literacy programs” (Imel, 1991, para. 4). Thus, the year 1981 saw the first discretionary program to support *English as a Second Language (ESL)* programs, passed as an amendment to the *AEA*. In 1988, legislation created workforce literacy grants as well as the English literacy grant program. In 1991, a major change occurred when *The National Literacy Act (NLA)* was signed into law. It was incorporated in the *AEA* in 1992, and bolstered evaluation requirements that had been previously strengthened in 1988. By 1991 indicators of program quality were instituted, a National Institute for Literacy established along with state literacy resource centers and national workforce demonstration projects enacted, and literacy programs for prisoners established.

Beder and Dilworth (1994) have used the National Literacy Act (NLA) of 1991 as a point of reference to explore the dynamics “between federal and state adult education policy formulation and execution” (p. 25). The act’s initial intent was to better integrate the delivery of literacy-centered services to eliminate illiteracy in the U.S. The act was a compromise of positions brought to the table by a range of stakeholders, with the National Coalition for Literacy central to the negotiations. After passage of the act, Beder and Dilworth’s research surveyed the policy apparatus for adult education in five states. Preliminary findings included: (a) “the [Act] had less impact than many of those who were involved in its passage envisioned” (p. 27), (b) regarding strategic policy in the states, there was either none, or “it [was] haphazard and held hostage by the forces that controlled it” (p. 27), (c) In the main, “adult education [was] the victim of bureaucratic marginality...[and] adult education policy [was] frequently smothered and engulfed by considerations specific to K-12” (p. 27), (d) personological means, or cooperative networks were used to “[work] around bureaucratic barriers and zones of indifference” (p. 27), (e) resources were lacking to serve the public interest, (f) some states put more dollars into infrastructure than staff development, (g) some state administrators reported frustration with the lack of federal support for adult education, (h) with only one exception, state advisory councils had “little impact in gaining either support or policy focus regarding adult education” (p. 28), and (i) in some instances, state literacy resource centers gained improved infrastructure and collaboration within a region. In conclusion, Beder and Dilworth (1994) found that states had 3 policy concerns: ways to influence higher level policy making systems, acquisition of resources, and structuring delivery systems to provide higher quality service. State policy had a far greater influence than federal policy on delivery of adult literacy education.

The year 1998 was an even greater year of change than 1991 when the *Adult Education Act* was repealed and replaced by the *Workforce Investment Act (WIA)*. The state-administered grant program authorized under the *Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA)*, enacted as Title II of the *Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998*, is the major source of federal support for adult basic education and literacy education

programs. It made adult education part of a one-stop career center system that includes many federally funded job training programs.

When *AEFLA* was authorized, Congress made accountability for results a central focus of the new law, setting out new performance accountability requirements for states and local programs that measure program effectiveness on the basis of student academic achievement and employment-related outcomes. To define and implement the accountability requirements of *AEFLA*, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) established the *National Reporting System* (*NRS*, 2005). The *NRS* is the accountability mechanism for federally funded adult basic education, adult secondary education, and ESL in the U.S. "The Congressional Report is an annual report to Congress on the status of the state administered grant program authorized under the...*AEFLA*. It includes data on the performance of adult education nationally and by state under the *NRS*" (2005).

What is key here is the government notion that what is supposed to work at the K-12 level will be transferable to adult education, however, its own consultant remarks,

Requirements for increased accountability and effectiveness create special challenges for adult education. The multiplicity of program goals makes it difficult for the program to document its effectiveness, and the research base about effective practices is limited in comparison to current knowledge about K – 12 instruction. (p. xiv)

Certain state programs and activities, including adult education and literacy programs, are designated by the *Workforce Investment Act* as one-stop partners. "Continuous improvement of the one-stop system, development of the incentive grant application, development of linkages to assure coordination and nonduplication among one-stop programs and activities, and review of local plans" (*Policy archive*, 1998, para. 4) are in the hands of State Workforce Investment Boards. Adult education services must be operated in combination with other training activities and fees would be set for services; local programs may have to establish tuition charges.

The *AEFLA*, enacted as Title II of the *WIA of 1998*, is the principal source of federal support for adult basic skills programs. The purpose of the program, as defined in *AEFLA*, is to assist adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency, to assist adults who are parents to obtain the educational skills necessary to become full partners in the educational development of their children, and assist adults in the completion of a secondary school education—all for the purpose of enhancing adults' ability to be more productive members of society and the workforce. The *WIA* set the stage for seismic changes at state and local levels. Gradual impacts of neoliberalism and globalization, begun in the 1980s had firmly taken over federal policy related to adult learning and education.

A retrospective view of the highlights of this history parallels social and cultural events. ALE during the liberal 1960s and 1970s focused on the connection between

poverty and literacy, equal economic opportunity, and funding that allowed the linkage of educational research with delivery systems, an interest in Native Americans and bilingual adults. In the 1980s, neoliberal economic and cultural policies gained strength, policies became weighted toward competencies, assessment, evidence-based programming, workplace literacy. “Reaganomics” was based on key principles that included, reducing growth in government spending reducing taxes on income from labor and capital, and reducing government regulations. These had dramatic impacts on ALE. By the 1990s, the move to an instrumental approach for education was solidified with prescriptive evaluations of programs and indicators of program value. By the late 1990s, workforce education, job training, and difficult-to-achieve accountability goals were in place. These were especially enconced in the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001/2008; No Child Left Behind Act, 2001)*.

Recent policy developments related to ALE include the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, Division of Career and Technical Education administering the *Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins IV)* of 2006. This prepares students for work immediately following high school. The legislation is based on the premise that “globalization has reshaped the workplace and changed the focus on workforce and career development” (*U.S. National Report, 2008*, no page number). It is about the nation’s ability to meet demands by developing a credentialed workforce that will shift production to meet market demands. The Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE) administers Title II of the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 and amendments. This legislation increases access to postsecondary education for disadvantaged students, and provides student and teacher development resources. And, on July 31, 2008 the U.S. House and Senate overwhelmingly passed the *Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA)* to reauthorize the *Higher Education Act (HEA)* for the first time since 1998, purporting that it will provide additional aid and benefits for students.

ⁱ The primary contact for this report is Dr. Robert J. Hill. *Appendix I. The United States Federal Government and Adult Learning and Education: Policies For People or For Profits? A Brief History* is derived from a draft of a book on policy and adult education by the first author. This study is a result of a graduate level seminar in Adult Education Policy at the University of Georgia.

ⁱⁱ The concept of “economism” is found extensively in Marxist discourse. It is critical of the reduction of social particulars to economic parameters. It is used here in the way employed by Holford (2008), as a movement that emerged with economic scholars and policy-makers in the early 1970s, and arguably continues today. Serra and Stiglitz (2008) suggest that new policy frameworks are currently being formulated that offer possible reforms to the current system of global governance. Privatization, or the movement of control from the state to corporate governance and the private sector, is key to economic discourse.

ⁱⁱⁱ Neoliberalism is, in part, hegemonic corporate and business behaviour, and the establishment of market freedoms. See page 26 of this report for details.

^{iv} The Adult Education Association of the U.S.A. (AEA-USA) was formed in 1951 by the merger of the American Association for Adult Education (supported by the Carnegie Foundation) and the Department of Adult Education of the National Education Association. In 1982, the AEA-USA combined with the National Association of Public School Adult Educators (NAPSAE) to become the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE). See <http://library.syr.edu/digital/guides/a/aaace.htm>