

ADULT EDUCATION: A Lifelong Journey

The Scope of the Policy The Increasing Importance of Adult Education

The recent adult education policy adopted in Quebec reflects the ongoing transformation of education in advanced industrialized countries.

Three themes are emphasized:

1) The complementarity and specificity of education in youth and adult sectors

Numbers in adult education have grown and now rival the youth sector, while making a complementary contribution to formal education. The mission of raising the general education level of the public is now a lifelong process that requires an intergenerational strategy.



Education in the youth and adult sectors: Two equally important areas of the new education scene

This section gives data on the youth and adult sectors in 1995- 96 taken from the MEQ and from the 1997 Statistics Canada Adult Education and Training Survey (AETS):

Youth: 1,350,000

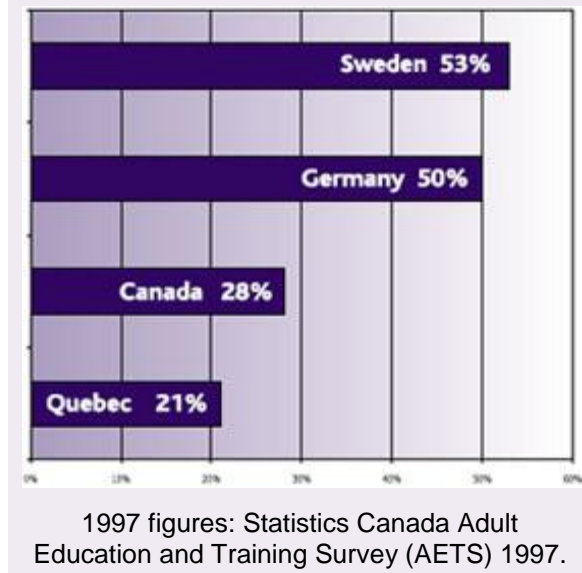
Adult: 1,475,000

While rates of participation in AE are increasing, Quebec still has catching up to do.

However, the data reflect only the formal sector — the tip of the iceberg in total numbers of adults engaged in learning.

Complementarity between education in the youth and adult sectors

Participation in adult education depends heavily on prior education and training. Therefore, government policy on adult education and training cannot be effective unless supported by a policy of democratization of education in the youth sector. However, basic education for adults is being made a priority because it can accelerate the traditionally lengthy development of literate societies. Raising the general level of education of the population only through education in the youth sector would take 30 years, too long to meet the urgent economic and social demands. Quebec cannot wait; it needs to raise the basic competency level of its population in the next 5-6 years.



Specificity of adult education

Adult education and training require specific strategies and approaches. The policy identifies **five areas of specificity**:

- 1. Expression of the demand for education and training**
While children have compulsory school attendance, and generally follow a set process of education, adults are dispersed and do not follow a "normal" educational path. ABE target groups are not organized and are isolated. In a non-compulsory sector, motivation is key. An ABE policy must include a major focus on expression of demand.
- 2. Learning contexts**
Adults have to balance work, family and learning — and their immediate learning contexts, and require an adult-centred approach. Their formal training is often intermittent. There is need for recognition of experiential learning.
- 3. Educational solutions**
Adults' aspirations are more immediate and concrete than those in the youth sector, and have social and economic implications. They require different intake and support strategies that include flexible scheduling and adult programs (content, respect, etc.)
Challenges:
 - To reach target groups and convey a positive image
 - To offer training meaningful to adults
 - To provide training that leads to a recognized diploma

This "difference and equivalence" paradox requires a new design for Continuing Education and the training of "specialists."

- 4. Relationship to social participation**
Adults are directly involved in work and community, and have private responsibilities. There is a direct connection between training and action. The application of learning must be immediate and improve adults' capacity for action in their workplace, community and personal lives.
- 5. Funding for individuals and institutions**

Both individuals and institutions need funding. Adults will not be able to participate without financial assistance, i.e. reimbursement of direct costs, loans for part-time studies, living allowances, paid educational leave, transportation, daycare, etc...Institutional arrangements also have to be different from the youth sector, and could require open or closed resource envelopes, and negotiations with local employment centres, businesses, etc..

16- to 20-year-olds

The recent phenomenon of school leavers coming into general adult education has led to an increase in the numbers who obtain their secondary or vocational diploma, but we should not fall into the trap of seeing increased numbers in AE as an increase in those over 20. The needs of this group are different from those of adults over 20. The new regulations call for the demands of both to be met. This is a challenge.

2) Expression of the demand for education and training: A strategic factor in the development of adult education

This section tracks the number of francophones in Quebec who have completed basic education since 1926.

1926: 94% had only six years of school
1958: 63% had only six years of school
2000: 1% had only six years of school

However, nearly 20% of population currently has less than grade 9, almost double the percentage in Ontario, if translated into training demand. There are also significant regional differences. IALS figures show literacy needs, and Statistics Canada data on participation in adult education show an increasing gap between Quebec and Canada.

The needs of a modern society require more than catching up; the general education level of the population must continue to rise.

All these factors suggest that there should be a great demand, but there is not. The question is whether this is an unexpressed demand or a demand that is difficult to express

The analysis suggests that adults are dispersed and isolated, that information is hard to find and hard to apply to their situations/experience. These adults may have had negative experiences with learning in the past. All these factors may make them unreceptive to messages about education. There is then a need to set certain conditions for success.

Need to establish certain conditions for success before organizing training

Active expression of demand for education and training requires, for example:

- Favourable living conditions: active participation, capacity of initiatives
- Improvement/enhancement of educational environments
- Recognition of training as voluntary action on part of individual
- Accessible information, reception, and support
- Policy of recognition of non-formal prior learning
- Awareness campaigns
- Positive public image of needs and possible basic education paths

3) Integration of basic education into the specific situation of each individual The role of basic education in building an active educational society

This section suggests that basic education must be seen positively as the foundation for all further education and for active social participation.

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