

NAVIGATING IN THE NEW WORLD DISORDER: GLOBAL ADULT EDUCATION FACES THE 21ST CENTURY

Michael Welton

Mount St. Vincent University

Abstract

Adult educators confront many urgent challenges as the world enters a new global era. The context is corporate forces for globalization from above and people's efforts for civil globalization from below. Tasks are identified for adult educators to turn these challenges into a fabric of hope.

Résumé

À mesure que le monde entre dans une l'ère nouvelle de la mondialisation, les éducateurs d'adultes se voient confrontés à plusieurs défis urgents. Ils se retrouvent coincés entre les forces des grandes corporations transnationales et les efforts des citoyens pour instaurer une mondialisation civilisée. Le texte identifie des tâches pour les éducateurs d'adultes qui permettent de transformer ces défis en espoirs.

The world seems incredibly unpredictable and disorderly. We humans appear to be standing at the edge of the 21st century holding maps and charts that no longer provide us a sure way of navigating. Poised at the dawn of the new millennium, we are off kilter and perceptually out-of-focus. I argue that the world is entering a new era of history, the global era, and consequently people confront urgent learning challenges. The transformational trajectory of the last three decades is pressing researchers to re-examine "issues of time, space and territorial organization" and place them into the "centre of the frame of the argument" of the meanings of this new age (Albrow, 2000, p. 118). The multiplex phenomenon called globalization captures well the lineaments of the present transformed world. The idea of a learning challenge assumes that history contains potentialities for developmental justice and its opposite, degradation of all species and their environments. I begin this article by characterizing what is new about the global era, then examine the phenomenon of globalization from above and below, and conclude by identifying several salient learning challenges engendered by globalization.

A World Out of Kilter

Since 1500, one might argue, disparate parts of the globe have been gradually incorporated into what Wallerstein (2000) has dubbed the world capitalist system. Thinkers like Wallerstein see present developments in the international economic system as continuous with earlier impulses, but globalization as market-expansion in the late 20th and early 21st century intensifies the movement of capital—partly because of the arrival of the World-Wide Web—and integrates national economies so radically that people are compelled to find new language to speak of the global era. A British historian, Hobsbawm (2000) thinks that this process of “drawing together of all parts of the globe into a single world” (p. 55) began seriously in the mid-19th century. Karl Marx, after all, observed that the bourgeoisie of his day rapidly improved “all instruments of production, by immensely facilitated means of communication,” drawing even the “most barbarous nations into civilization” (cited in Hobsbawm, p. 52). But contemporary economic globalization is drawing all economies, willy-nilly, into a single, interdependent, global economic system of winners and losers.

The present era cannot retain its pet name as a modern, industrial era. Economic globalization is fundamentally transforming the way the work of producing goods and services gets done. Zuboff (1988) argues that the new world of information technology (computer-mediated work) “brings about radical change as it alters the intrinsic character of work—the way millions of people experience daily life on the job” (p. 11). She postulates that the informing capacity of the new technologies has undermined the “historical role of the body in both industrial and white-collar work and depicts the emerging demand for intellectual skills, that frequently supplant the body as a primary source of know-how” (p. 16). Not only do these technologies automate production; they render visible the production process itself. This material and symbolic transformation within one domain of the system, paid activity, is solid historical ground for positing the appearance of a new *learning age* for humankind. Transnational corporations are driving inexorably towards computer-mediated forms of work organization, leaving peripheral parts of the global system scrambling to catch up.

The discourse of the learning society, prevalent in European liberal democracies, is impelled by material and symbolic changes within the organization of production. Learning is now placed in the foreground by United Nations policy makers (e.g., in UNESCO and OECD) and by adult education theorists, primarily because of the deep transformation of forms of knowledge and skill in the new informing work milieu and the

reverberations of these transformations within the lifeworld. The informing capacity of information technology is enabling people to transcend the tacit, implicit, action-centred forms of knowledge so characteristic of work in the industrial and automating ages (Zuboff, 1988). Capital flits about the globe at the speed of light, unsettling traditions and threatening to unravel the social fabric. The lifeworld (the realm of meaning-making, social obligation, and personal autonomy) of societies throughout the globe has been awakened and placed on alert. Learning processes in both system and lifeworld realms have been intensified. This has led to a kind of hyper-reflectivity as human beings struggle to find anchor points in a world of fluidity. Marx's portentous declaration in his mid-19th century *Communist Manifesto* that nothing seemed solid anymore is truer now than it ever was.

Hobsbawm (2000) is equally awestruck by the extent to which a kind of "international, and interlinguistic standardization of culture" (p. 55) now exists throughout the globe. He points to "the ever-tightening network of global communications, whose most tangible result was a vast increase in the flow of international exchanges of goods and men [*sic*—trade and migration" (p. 56). This global system delivers in a flash the "same films, popular music-styles, television programmes and indeed styles of popular living across the world" (p. 55). Barber (1995), in his hysterical text, *Jihad versus McWorld*, sees American popular culture and taste spreading like a cancerous sludge across the entire world, obliterating the distinctiveness of all cultures. Similarly, Sklair (2000) offers a depressingly neat scheme that has an insurmountably powerful transnational capitalist class ruling the rest of humankind through pushing a "culture-ideology of consumerism" (2000, p. 64). In contrast to the progressive conventionality of Barber and Sklair, other scholars like Pieterse (2000) posit more complex processes of cultural interplay between places and peoples. The languages of *transculturalism* and *hybridization*, pointing as they do to mutual influence and interweave, are more appropriate to the ways cultural influence actually moves and crystallizes. However, Sklair does identify an important dimension of globalization, namely, the way economic globalization interacts with the authority and power of the nation-state. Can researchers, therefore, speak of "political globalization"?

At first glance, the fact that the world is organized into nation-states itself speaks of political globalization. The editors of *The Globalization Reader* (Lechner & Boli, 2000) claim:

Never before has the world been composed of only one type of political unit. ... This indicates that the principle of state sovereignty itself has

become a central feature of global society and that a particular model of political organization, the sovereign state, has achieved global status as the most desirable, viable, and legitimate way of structuring political life. (p. 195)

Almost all of these states exhibit considerable uniformity in terms of goals, structures, programs, and internal operations. Democratic theorists are able to reflect upon the state of civil society in every part of the globe.

Another dimension of political globalization in the last century is the emergence of intergovernmental organizations. Hundreds of worldwide intergovernmental organizations and thousands of regional or sub-regional intergovernmental organizations (most prominent are the United Nations and its associated agencies) constitute a central, if flawed, communicative space where states conduct their international relations and grapple with shared social problems. Through these agencies people are conscious of not only inhabiting an imbricated global economic system; they are also acutely aware of sharing problems—like HIV/AIDS, drug trafficking, and pollution—that elude their national containers. And even problems that are not directly shared—like a civil war in Somalia or massacre of a species—seeps into the consciousness of those living everywhere else. Ideas and images of a beautiful and troubled world flow along capillaries spread like veins throughout the planet.

At the same time, small nation-states are excruciatingly aware that many transnational corporations have larger sales revenues than their own countries' economies, leaving them scrambling to meet their own people's incessant demands let alone those 4000 miles across the sea. Subdued by the power of the transnationals, some intellectuals have announced the "death" of the state (Ohmae, 2000). Although this prognosis is premature (consider only the resources still commanded by states in the liberal democracies), nonetheless it is evident that "faith in government to manage economies or provide for the general welfare of citizens has eroded badly" (Lechner & Boli, 2000, p. 197; see also, Rodrik, 2000; Yergin & Stanislaw, 2000). Minimally, one can say that economic globalization's fantastic capacity to compress space and time relations in its transactions places serious stress on formal political systems, anchored as they are to a particular place in time, and awakens civil society to its saliency in the global era.

Albrow (2000) has set out four core propositions about globalization, which he refers to as globalism, globality, time-space compression, and disembedding:

1. The values informing daily behaviour for many groups in contemporary society relate to real or imagined material states of the globe and its inhabitants (globalism).
2. Images, information and commodities from any part of the earth may be available anywhere and anytime for ever-increasing numbers of people worldwide, while the consequences of worldwide forces and events impinge on local lives at any time (globality).
3. Information and communication technology now make it possible to maintain social relationships on the basis of direct interaction over any distance across the globe (time-space compression).
4. Worldwide institutional arrangements now permit mobility of people across national boundaries with the confidence that they can maintain their lifestyles and life routines wherever they are (disembedding). (p. 119)

Albrow's encapsulation of globalization highlights the changed nature of the global network society.

Globalization from Above

Barnet and Cavanagh (1994) claim that the transnational corporations are the "first secular institutions run by men (and a handful of women) who think and plan on a global scale" (p. 15). Only several decades ago multinational corporations conducted separate operations in many countries, orienting their business to local conditions. Now mega-business enterprises have the fabulous resources to explode the limits of space, time, national boundaries, custom, and ideology. Products are produced anywhere and sold everywhere. From the remotest villages in the Andes to the urban ghettos of east Kingston, people are pulled into the orbit of transnational capitalism. *Barnet and Cavanagh* argue that a "relatively few companies with worldwide connections dominate the four intersecting webs of global commercial activity on which the new world economy rests: the Global Cultural Bazaar; the Global Shopping Mall; the Global Workplace; and the Global Financial Network" (p. 15). Like a gigantic spider web, these intersecting networks have snared millions upon millions of global citizens. Even those whom Frantz Fanon (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961) hailed as the "damned of the earth" may well be dreaming of wearing Nikes and watching Mission Impossible.

The corporate dream for global civilization envisages the world as a cultural bazaar. When I was in South Africa in 1995, my South African friend and I were visiting his wife's family in Port Elizabeth in Western

Cape. We arrived in Port Elizabeth in late afternoon and found about 10 people of all ages gathered in front of the television watching "The Mask", a Hollywood movie featuring the zany Canadian comedian, Jim Carrey. This movie is full of coarse language and violence, and I was certain that these images must have unsettled members of this Islamic family. Televisions seem to be on all the time, in department stores and private homes. Globalization processes and products insinuate into everyone's lives, interacting in unpredictable ways with local cultures, tantalizing us to enter the dazzling utopia of the Global Shopping Mall. In Capetown one can glide into the upscale malls along the spiffy waterfront and shop in stores that look and feel like those in Tokyo, Brussels, or Montreal. Restless tourists are at home nowhere and everywhere. Yet only a short 15-minute drive from the waterfront one enters the townships, teeming with hundreds of thousands of men, women, and kids living in tin shacks amidst staggering poverty, hopelessness, and violence.

Of the 5.4 billion people on the planet, close to 70% have neither cash nor credit to purchase much of anything. Millions of the earth's people have been cast out of the consumer paradise of plenty and progress. Within the global community, a continent like Africa appears to have been exiled from the new world order. At the dawn of the 21st century over 215 million Africans are living in poverty. The number of Africans unable to obtain the minimum daily requirements of 1,600–1,700 calories increased from 99 million in 1980 to 168 million in 1990–1991 (Delors, 1996, p. 75). The latest estimates also indicate that HIV/AIDS has affected the lives of 24.5 million Africans, a statistic too staggering to actually comprehend. In contrast, despite setbacks, the economies of the "Asian tigers" have been able to generate wealth and a reasonably prosperous middle class as well as opening up civil society to human rights issues and freedom of association. Economic globalization is complexly layered and many commentators get easily tripped into overly simplistic generalizations.

But left unrestrained and unregulated, economic globalization subverts the basis for human development. To be sure, the free play of the market fosters self-reliance, self-restraint, and other virtues. But it is also true that humans flourish in the shelter of families, neighbourhoods, tribes, traditions, and well-known and well-loved places. In his brilliant Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Kleinman (1999) observes:

By local world I mean the ethnographer's village, neighbourhood, networks, family, and other institutions. Even in a vast sea of globalization, in which we are more acutely aware that local worlds

have permeable boundaries, undergo frequent change, and that their members may belong to several different networks at the same time—even with these qualifications the local perdures as the grounds of social life. (1999, p. 359)

But he goes on to argue that an “unprecedented infiltration of globalization into every nook and cranny of local worlds ... [has precipitated a] deep and most dangerous transformation in subjectivity, ... [a] transformation in personhood, affect, and sensibility (p. 399). The United Nations’ 1995 *Human Development Report* (cited in Delors, 1996, p. 79) rejects the production-driven model of human development. It argues that people are not merely inputs in the production process; that people are not simply the beneficiaries of welfare; that those in the less-developed countries are not simply objects of aid to meet basic material needs. Rather, human development analyzes all issues in society—whether economic growth, trade, employment, political freedom, or cultural values—from the perspective of people. It thus focuses on enlarging human choices—and it applies equally to developing and industrial countries. This frame, suitably enriched with an ecological sensibility, provides an ethical starting point for global adult education to begin to articulate an agenda of lifelong learning for the global era.

As a relatively unrestrained market expansion has become ascendant over the last decade or so, adult education has been under tremendous pressure to couple its caboose to the corporate training and development agenda that accentuates cost cutting and hyper-efficiency and downplays a people-centred agenda. Everywhere adult educators are talking marketspeak, and lifelong learning comes to mean the lifelong adaptation of isolated, individual learners to the status quo (Briton, 1996). In contemporary societies of the north, the privatization of public life and responsibilities parallels the privatization and deregulation of the global market economy. The more directly we as people are exposed to global forces, the more overwhelmed and powerless we sometimes feel. When we feel powerless, we turn to the domain where we still have some control, our private lives and our bodies. These latter tendencies affect adult education as a field of practice rather dramatically. Adult education plays a decreasing role in addressing public issues. It is reoriented by powerful policy-makers and front-line adult educators towards supporting individuals who must adapt skillfully to new circumstances by reorienting their life scripts and fashioning new personal narratives. Public authorities, preoccupied with competing in the global era,

are very comfortable honing in on the person as human capital (Wildemeersch, 1995).

The People Dream: Globalization from Below

The corporate dreamers imagine transforming the world into a global supermarket and cultural bazaar. But this dream gives many nightmares. As people, we are living in chaotic and puzzling times. The scope of global disorder, inequity, and suffering is almost unimaginable, yet some national governments seem paralyzed and unresponsive to us the people. We are at another watershed in human history. Can we navigate our way towards a true global consciousness and ethic, one that "respects human diversity and values people one by one" (Barnet & Cavanagh, 1994, p. 430). Can we imagine an emergent countervailing global force that will regulate the market in the service of human well-being? Where we will find the energy and capacity to co-ordinate our activities in virtual and real space and time?

These are difficult questions to grasp, and one can only begin to sketch out some possible approaches. In the section on a world out of kilter I drew upon Zuboff's (1988) vision of the potentiality latent with the new informing technologies that are currently reconstituting the organization of work; her work can be interpreted as indicating that technological change can be learner-centred, developmental, and democratic. But, the hope for a people-centred global agenda may lie mainly with globalization from below. This elegant phrase captures the way, all over the world, local citizens' movements and alternative institutions are appearing to meet "basic needs, to preserve local traditions, religious life, cultural life, biological species, and other treasures of the natural world, and to struggle for human dignity" (Barnet and Cavanaugh 1994, p. 429). The dramatic struggle of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni people of southeastern Nigeria over the last decade typifies these kinds of citizens' actions. The Ogoni peoples' action against Shell Oil—accused of polluting and degrading the environment—was brutally crushed by the Nigerian military. Saro-Wiwa himself was *hanged* with the eyes of the shocked world looking on. The repression of citizens' action can induce despair; it can also serve as a symbol of the irrepressible spirit of resistance in the meanest of circumstances. More recently, in December 1999, thousands of protestors from around the world converged on Seattle, Washington to protest against the World Trade Organization's alleged secretive deliberations. This mixed bag of protestors offered no unified ideology. They protested because the World Trade Organization was making decisions of immense consequence behind closed doors.

The concept of global civil society may provide a useful conceptual framework to help people to devise an alternative to corporate-driven globalization. Civil society is a very nuanced, contested and multi-layered concept. Habermas (1996) maintains that the “sphere of civil society has been rediscovered ... in wholly new historical constellations” (p. 366). It cannot be identified with the bourgeois society of the liberal tradition, which Hegel identified with the market system involving social labour and commodity exchange. Most theorists of civil society argue that the concept no longer includes the economy. For example, Habermas claims its institutional core is the non-governmental and non-economic connections and voluntary associations that “anchor the communication structures of the public sphere in the social component of the lifeworld” (p. 367). Habermas explains:

Civil society is composed of those more or less spontaneously emergent associations, organizations, and movements that, attuned to how societal problems resonate in the private life sphere, distill and transmit such reactions in amplified form to the public sphere. The core of civil society comprises a network of associations that institutionalizes problem-solving discourses on questions of general interest inside the framework of organized public spheres. The “discursive designs” have an egalitarian, open form or organization that mirrors essential features of the kind of communication around which they crystallize and to which they lend continuity and permanence. (p. 367)

The idea of civil society was rediscovered in the 1970s by Eastern Europeans, particularly the Polish Solidarity movement, who created all kinds of independent, self-governing associations and publications alongside the official party and state apparatus. They discovered that genuine civic mindedness emerges less from traditional forms of party politics than from the hidden spaces and islands of freedom to be found in civil society. They discovered that a vital civil society fosters and develops the capacity of ordinary citizens to exercise responsible public leadership. These associations, movements, and publics function as schools of citizenship. They create communicative spaces conducive to reasoned reflection where citizens can deliberate about public problems.

Since the heady days of civil-society-versus-the-state struggles in Eastern Europe, many activists and learning theorists have begun to speak about a global civil society. This concept strives to capture something new and exciting that is percolating in many countries of the globe. One could cite innumerable examples of networks of wonderful variety that create

communicative spaces across national boundaries. Women's organizations have proliferated since the U.N. International Women's Year of 1975. Think of WAND (Women and Development in the Caribbean), CAFRA (Caribbean Association for Research and Action), Indigenous Women's Network, Commonwealth Women's Network, the International Women and Health Network, the Women's Global Network on Reproductive Rights, and hundreds more (Miles, 1996). These networks and others like them, besides enabling reflective learning in their own networks, participated in the great gatherings of civil society in the 1990s: Beijing (women), Rio de Janeiro (environment), Copenhagen (social welfare), and Hamburg (adult learning). Now that as people we are being forced together by the contradictory impulses of economic globalization, we are understanding that civil society is the key social space for democratic learning processes as well as personal and collective need articulation. But Bourdieu (1998) argues:

If it is true that most of the dominant economic forces operate at a world level, transnationally, it is also true that there is an empty space, that of transnational struggles. It is theoretically empty, because it has not been thought through, and it is practically empty, for lack of genuine international organization of the forces capable of countering the new conservative revolution. (p. 59)

At the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle, the civil (and sometimes uncivil) organizations gathered there scarcely constituted a genuine international organization. In fact, much of the protest seemed confused, reflecting mainly an overweening sense of powerlessness in the face of abstract economic processes. Public protests like Seattle are important episodic learning events within global civil society. But they do not reflect sustained, dynamic, coherent organizational forms.

The concept of global civil society may be a promising one for the world adult education community. Nevertheless, this alternative paradigm for global development presents us with several daunting learning challenges. For one thing, adult education organizations—local, national, *global*—*must* identify and classify the forms of civil society. In a word, deep theorizing on the meanings and significance of civil society as learning domain are very much in order. Second, enormous intellectual work is required to understand how the learning processes inside globally interwoven movements (like a movement to save rain forests) brings out issues that are relevant to particular societies and the world of others. For instance, systemically generated ecological problems are experienced first within the individual life-history, communicated to others, argued in small and large forums, and finally

distilled and delivered to the gates of the policy-makers' residences. Fundamentally, as adult educators, we need to understand how the learning processes within global civil society generate influence through the "life of democratic associations and unconstrained discussion in the cultural public sphere" (Cohen & Arato, 1992, p. x). How does global civil society influence policy-makers? Who are the policy-makers in a global web in which no single sovereign power is in control of the entire system? There is little doubt that questions of global governance debated now in elite U.N. circles will increasingly be on the people's global agenda. The idea of civil society in local and global manifestations may be a lodestar. It can help us navigate. It may provide some anchor points in a fluid world.

Specific Tasks and Challenges for Global Adult Education

Against a backdrop of growing interdependence among peoples and the globalization of problems, we as adult educators are being pressed to participate in the fostering of a true spirit of globalism and enlightenment. Phrases such as the *new humanism*, *global village*, or *spaceship earth* can easily evoke cynicism and anger unless our discussions include the "problems of the old Third World" (Castells, 1993, p. 188). What are some of the key learning challenges engendered by globalization?

The first challenge is to the adult education community itself. This community is too fragmented into multiple specialisms and must begin to articulate a more coherent vision of the central purposes of adult education in the 21st century. Developmental humanism may provide a broad philosophic basis for our thought and action in a global context. The vision of globalization from below may offer us a historically concrete way of thinking about how we can move forward collectively without being shipwrecked on the high seas.

The second challenge is linked to inevitable tension between the global and local. Jacques Delors, chair of the UNESCO Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, has said that "people today have a dizzying feeling of being torn between a globalization whose manifestation they can see and sometimes have to endure, and their search for roots, reference points and a sense of belonging" (1996, p. 18). As adult educators, how do we become global citizens without losing our roots? Globalization awakens an intense scrutiny of our cultural identities, of our particularity within the global rainbow of peoples and cultures. As we scrutinize our traditions, what do we want to protect and conserve into the 21st century?

The adult education community—local, national, global—must contribute its energy and know-how to the fostering of global solidarity. Roberto Caneiro (in Delors, 1996) suggests that the

dominant theme of the coming century will be one of hope. In this new age with its new social demands learning the art of living together will be seen as the means of healing the many wounds inflicted by the hatred and intolerance that have prevailed throughout so much of the twentieth century. (p. 201)

Castells (1993, pp. 37-39) points out that the huge danger of the current corporate-driven globalization is that vast sections of the earth—a “Fourth World, made up of marginalized economies in the retarded rural areas of three continents and in the sprawling shantytowns of African, Asian, and Latin American cities”—will spiral downward. Those who are cast adrift from the centres of economic and technological power may adapt to the new conditions of economic growth in three potentially very destructive ways. First, to establish linkage to the global economy through the criminal economy (drugs, arms, smuggling, traffic in human beings—particularly women and children). Second, to express utter desperation through widespread violence, individual or collective. Major cities in the Fourth World have been transformed into “savage, self-destructive battlefields.” A third reaction is the rise of ideological/religious fundamentalism. Here the excluded reject the dominant model of globalization and cut ties with the “other.” The excluded do not believe they have any chance ever to become partners. This spirit of alienation from the “dominant structure of the new world order” is fiercely present in a world in disarray.

The late Michael Manley thought that we could be “torn apart by intractable divisions” (cited in Delors, 1996, p. 221) if the dominant model of globalization continues unchallenged. This grim reality lends urgency to adult educators’ interventions in local, national, and global environments. Globalization forces us to think grandly, to see the big picture. But this does not mean we are paralyzed without possibilities. Our beloved places, our little patches of earth, must be nurtured first. Both school-based educators of youth and educators of adults must carefully consider how individuals can be prepared for civic engagement: to become citizens who, while respecting differences, emphasize the commonality of all human beings. In a violent, often fractious world, adult educators must place their faith in dialogic process: talking is better than fighting, persuasion is better than force (Chambers, 1996). In what ways are we adult educators promoting social cohesion and the vitality of civil society? In what ways are we building

bridges between perceived differences? What pedagogical strategies are we crafting to open up public space for deliberation on key themes in our local, national and global spaces? What learning opportunities are we creating for emotional and physical healing amongst our wounded and damaged citizens?

The fourth learning challenge engendered by globalization has to do with the extraordinary expansion of knowledge in the world. In the countries of the North, astonishing communications technologies—symbolized in the Internet and World Wide Web—are hailed by cyber-prophets as leading people into the new utopia. Although most parts of Africa, for example, are not covered by the Internet, the “new technologies have brought humankind into the age of universal communication” (Delors, 1996, p. 43). Individuals now learn at the speed of light (Plumb, 1999). Images flow freely worldwide; boundaries of various sort cannot stop ideas from flowing round them. The telecommunications revolution makes it possible to create the communicative infrastructure so necessary for global civil society. Zhou Nanzhao, vice-president of the Chinese National Institute for Educational Research, captures the new spirit of transculturalism:

If and when the East and West could learn and benefit from each other, integrating each other’s cultural strengths—for example, the individual initiative with the collective team spirit, competitiveness with cooperation, the technical capacities with the moral qualities—then desirable universal values will gradually develop and a global ethic will be formed. (cited in Delors, 1996, p. 245)

This vision notwithstanding, the global adult education community must be attuned to the way the global communications system is actually functioning. Who are the new techno-peasants, the castaways from the virtual communities of the knowledge utopia? How do the impoverished and *intensely exploited* places of the world learn to participate in the global conversations?

But this latter issue of accessibility begs the question of what we, as global citizens and occupiers of local spaces, need to know in order to survive and flourish in a global context where decisions made far away intrude into the here and now. Perhaps we can fashion answers to these questions by working backwards from our vision of the human race as an “interlocking, extended family on a finite earth” (Singh, cited in Delors, 1996, p. 226). Living in a truly global culture requires a broad background, a rich moral and spiritual foundation for living well in a world calling out for respectful and dialogic sensibility towards others. As Myong won Suhr of

Korea pointedly notes, "The world's peoples have to live together, whether they wish to do so or not" (cited in Delors, 1996, p. 237).

As adult educators we know that our world is flooded with transient forms of information. We know that we cannot know everything. We know there is too much to know. One of the challenges we face, therefore, is to really imagine what a learning society would look like. Basic education (in primary and secondary schools) must prepare youth to learn how to learn and to be competent, confident speakers and actors attuned to democratic learning processes. Our associations and organizations of adult life must be designed to enable men and women to manifest their capacities to exercise mastery and efficacy in the generic learning domains of work, state, and civil society.

A fifth learning challenge confronting us is directly linked to the emerging new world of work. In the leading centres of economic development, the "sheer pace of technological development has convinced business communities and nations alike of the need for flexibility in the quality of the labour force" (Delors, 1996, p. 71). The old training programs that emphasized repetition, uncritical following of orders, or simple imitation are inadequate in new workplaces. If we live in an "informational global economy" (Castells, 1993), then the "increasingly intangible dimension of work and role played by intellectual and social skills" (Delors, p. 71) will be accentuated. Educational curricula based on behaviourist assumptions must give way to programs oriented to critical thinking and active learner engagement in problem-definition and solution. The Delors Commission rightly insists that "education systems can therefore no longer be expected to train a labour force for stable industrial jobs; they must instead train individuals to be innovative, capable of evolving [evolutive skills], adapting to a rapidly changing world and assimilating change" (p. 71).

At the dawn of the 21st century, education and training of all kinds has become one of the prime movers of development. The widespread advance of knowledge in an informational economy is the most decisive factor of economic growth. But there are severe shortages of knowledge (appropriate both to the new technologies and lifeworld demands) in developing countries. In South Africa, for instance, 15 million people, mainly black, are illiterate. Countless numbers of talented men and women are pulled to the magnetic centres of affluence, bleeding poor countries of needed imagination. In intellectual circles of the North, serious discussion is occurring about the way "good work" has become a scarce commodity. The old industrial economies are in crisis because of "their failure to find a new

way of structuring people's time" (Delors, 1996, p. 77). How pertinent to the South are Northern analyzes of the "crisis of work"? What vision of good work captures the potentiality of Third World economies?

The sixth learning challenge is intimately linked with all human issues, namely, the education of women. Delors (1996) reports, "Gender inequality lies at the root of the lasting situations of inferiority that affect women at every stage of their lives" (p. 77). UNESCO statistics emphasize that two-thirds of the illiterate adults in the world—565 million people—are women, most of whom live in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. World-wide, fewer girls than boys attend schools. Women are hungrier than men, sicker than men, have fewer rights than men. Yet all development experts acknowledge that there is a clear correlation between educational levels of women and the overall improvement in a population's nutrition and health and the drop in fertility rates (see Delors, pp. 74-75). Miles (1996) provides a counterpoint to simple stories of women's plight. In her account, women are no longer just statistics. They become strong, active, visionary women who are organizing around the globe to analyze fundamentalism, alternative health, the trafficking in women, rape in times of war, and women's studies. At gatherings like the World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet in 1992, Miles contends, women from all over the globe articulated "remarkably similar concerns, priorities, and principles, reflecting the influence of intensive changes in plenary meetings, hallways, workshops, and drafting sessions on already well-established shared perspectives" (pp. 142-143). Miles knows that feminists have not yet been able to stop destructive global practices of fundamentalism and militarism. But she believes that global linkages are growing, "reinforced by the increasing activism and influence of women of colour, and indigenous, immigrant, and working-class women in the North" (p. 145). With few resources at their disposal, women throughout the globe have been able to build local and global connections.

Weaving the Fabric of Hope

In the aftermath of the collapse of the socialist dream and the exhaustion of the idea of the welfare state, few believe in grand schemes of salvation anymore. Indeed, as social reformers we adult educators are challenged to scale down our aspirations for the 21st century. The danger here, as Jacoby (1999) argues persuasively in *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy* is that we might skip dreaming altogether. Aghast at the horrors of the 20th century utopian experiments and our evident inability to

mastery complexity, a modest utopianism is in order. We need to dream close to the ground.

Erich Fromm (1968, pp. 6-7) refers to a character from Kafka's *The Trial* who comes to the door leading to heaven and begs admittance from the doorkeeper. Although the door leading into heaven stands open, the man decides that he had better wait until he gets permission to enter. So he sits down and waits for days and years. He repeatedly asks to be allowed in, but is always told that he cannot be allowed to enter yet. During all these long years the man studies the doorkeeper almost incessantly and learns how to know even the fleas in his fur collar. Eventually, he is old and near death. For the first time, he asks the question, "How does it come about that in all these years no one has come seeking admittance but me?" The doorkeeper answers, "No one but you could gain admittance through this door, since this door was intended for you. I am going to close it".

As Fromm (1968) explains, the bureaucrats had the final word. The old man's hope was passive and resigned. All he had to do was summon up the courage to disregard the doorkeeper in a liberating act, which would have carried him into the glorious kingdom. Where are the doors waiting for us to enter?

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