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Non-formal education

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NFE IN MEXICO

Claudia Flores

PART I: Background and Introduction

Adult education as Non-Formal Education

Non-formal education in México was a popular term during the early 1980s, both in rural and urban settings (Aguilar, 1981; Brunner, 1983; Picón, 1985; Pieck 1995). It was only in the 1990s that Mexico had major education guidelines for adult education. It is noticeable that the preferred term to address most NFE practices is the term 'adult education'. In fact, as Schmelkes (2003:596) states regarding the state of art on adult education, "the area is still fragmented". The latest study by the Mexican Council of Education Research (Bertely, 2002), indicated that the adult education field was composed of five sub-fields, namely

- literacy and basic education;
- youth and adult education linked to labour;
- education and citizenship, community organizing and gender;
- youth and adult education and families;
- youth and adult educators. This presentation relies upon the first three sub-fields identified.

The Fox presidential period and Conevyt

In this section, I present what Ruiz (2007:3) introduces as the main institutional bodies of Adult Education.

She considers as the main objectives of the National Education Programme 2001-2006:

- Equity in education;
- Quality education adequate to the needs of all Mexicans;
- To enhance educational federalism, institutional management, and social participation in education.

It is within this framework that the national government created the National Council for Life and Work (Consejo Nacional de Educación para la Vida y el Trabajo, **CONEVyT**), as an education strategy that responds to the needs of lifelong education and work. Its main objective was to support and coordinate the activities that various bodies offer in this area.

CONEVyT had as its main objective the creation of *community plazas* within the whole country, where adults could certify their education, but also have access to the use of computers. The Council aimed to preserve the orientation towards the poorer sectors and be flexible with all programmes. However, its basis regarding work training did not have the desired effect.

CONEVyT works as an intersectorial commission, which interrelates for educational and work aims, the following national institutions:

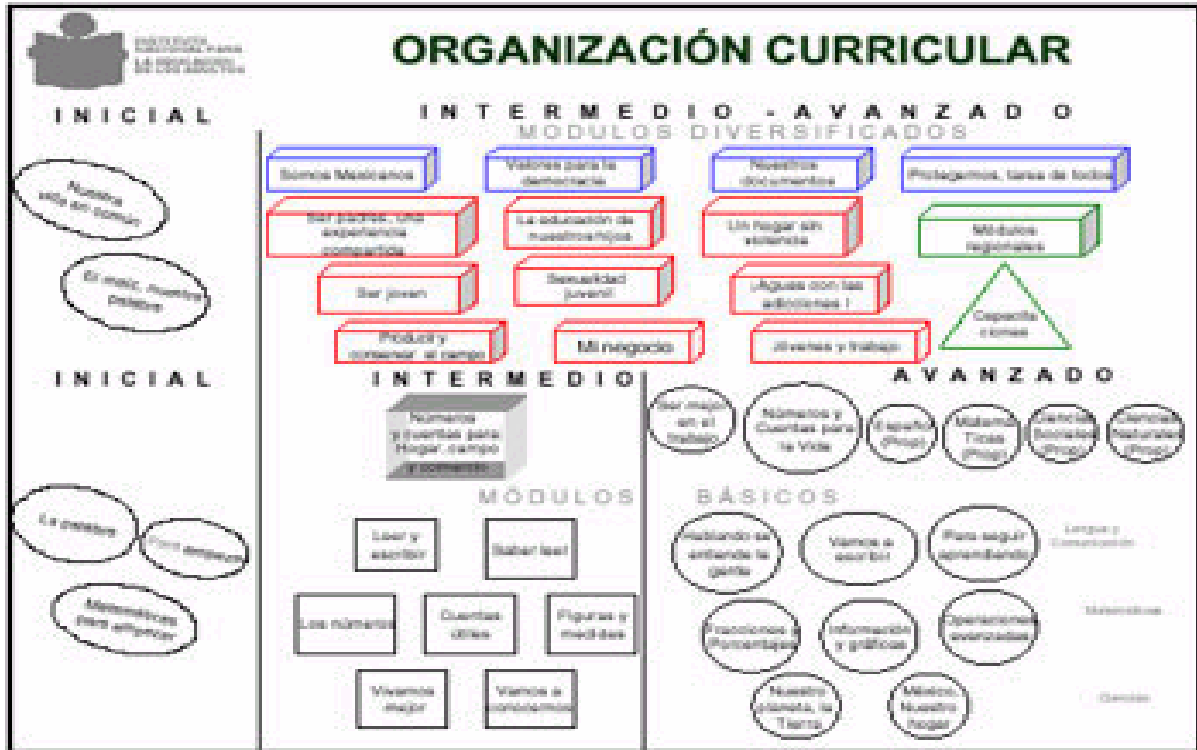
- The National Institute for Adult Education (*Instituto Nacional para la Educación de los Adultos*; INEA)

- The National Council for Educational Enhancement (*Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo*, CONAFE)
- National College for Technical Professional Education (*Colegio Nacional de Educación Profesional Técnica*, CONALEP)
- The Centre for Industrial Labour Training (*Centro de Capacitación para el Trabajo Industrial*, CECATI)
- The Council for Regulation and Certification of Labour Competencies (*Consejo de Normalización y Certificación de Competencia Laboral*, CONOCER)
- The Programme for Technical Modernisation and Training (*Programa de la Modernización Técnica y la Capacitación*, PMETyC)
- Adult Open Secondary (*Secundaria a Distancia para Adultos*, SEA)
- The Programme for Holistic Training and Modernisation (*Programa de Capacitación Integral y Modernización*, CIMO)
- Scholarship programme for the Training of Workers (*Programa de Becas para la Capacitación de los Trabajadores*, PROBECAT)
- Colegio de Bachilleres (COLBACH) post 16 education
- National Institute for Youth (Instituto Nacional de la Juventud, IMJUVE)
- The Latin American Institute for Education Communication (*Instituto Latinoamericano de la Comunicación Educativa*, ILCE)

Substantial programmes and services of INEA-CONEVyT

Ruiz (2007:5-6) points out that there are three main programmes within the education project of CONEVyT: literacy, or initial stage, primary; intermediate level, secondary; advanced level. These programmes are integrated in the Education Model for Life and Work (Modelo de Educación para la Vida y el Trabajo, MEVyT). This is oriented towards the acquisition and strengthening of knowledge, capabilities, useful learning, labour training and the development of productive skills.

Each of its modules has a specific objective; however, they are addressed to the development of general communicative competencies, reasoning, problem solving, and responsible participation, basic reading skills, writing, attitudes and values, especially self-esteem, gender equity, human rights, respect, identity and cultural diversity.



Advisors guide a group of adults; they are not exactly teachers, but promoters and motivators in the learning process. Advisory sessions consist of the clarification of doubts derived from reading materials.

PART II

1) Literacy and numeracy programmes from the age of 15

According to Kalman (2003:638), most programmes which have been coordinated by the State through INEA have been the object of a number of reflections and critiques, while at the same time, various authors suggest alternatives against them. For instance, Kalman (2003:638) suggests some authors have sought to understand how educational practices within night schools and INEA circles of studies are structured within educational services that the State offers.

Special attention has been paid to the design of programmes that meet the requirements of flexibility and diversification, both criteria that have been key to the transformation of adult and youth education. Kalman (2003:640-41) identifies four different programmes that meet this criteria:

1) **Distance high school education for adults.** This is a curriculum design created specifically for youths and adults who completed 6 years of primary schooling. It reduces the number of study years from three to two, and groups disciplines in four curriculum areas – language, social sciences, natural sciences and maths. Topics covered in each of those, the selection of materials, and the elaboration of activities aim to make use of the previous knowledge of students and their previous school experience. The innovation in this case consists of a didactic strategy in which activities that invite the user to “dialogue”

with the materials presented, and to reflect upon how they can be located in their own context and how the contests could be useful.

2) **Life Education Model** (*Modelo de educación para la vida*). This is a curriculum innovation for primary schooling that seeks to offer an educational programme according to the needs and interests of youths and adults, according to their life conditions. This approach develops contents in a meaningful way, taking into account the situation and living conditions of students. Maths, language, social and natural sciences contents are organized by modules, which allows flexibility to the courses and allows the student to choose their own education path. There is some innovation in some cases, such as in the teaching of science e.g. topics are grouped and contents are approached in a holistic way, besides of the underlying concept of education. However, these innovative practices appeared together with the continuation of traditional study methods and contents in other cases, as in the case of the literacy approach based upon syllables, grammatical contents and concepts around reading.

3) **Post-primary programme developed by CONAFE** (National Council for Education Enhancement, *Consejo Nacional de Fomento a la Educación*). It was initiated in 1996, and was designed for rural areas. It is an alternative to carrying on studying after primary school. The approach is based on an educational concept of action which acknowledges the capacity of learning as complementary to previous knowledge. Pedagogical work is based upon the dominium of basic learning skills through the development of the self-learning method. Two core issues to the project are community work, hence the commitment of the institution with community education, and the participation of instructors, which is key to their development.

4) **Material addressed for parents, designed by CREFAL** (Regional Cooperation Centre for Adult Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, *Centro de Cooperación Regional para la educ de adultos en América Latina y el Caribe*) in collaboration with SEP (Ministry of Public Education, *Secretaría de Educación Pública*). This is a collection of seven books called “Books of mum and dad” which were distributed in various basic education schools. The aim of this collection is to support parents around habits, attitudes and values which are enhanced within families. This series provides information regarding addictions, sexuality, violence, health, nutrition, and mass media.

Remarkably, there has been an unprecedented emphasis on programmes regarding adult education for indigenous peoples.

2) Equivalency, ‘second chance’ or alternative schooling (from about the age of 10)

Post secondary open education

Hernández (2006:1) describes the demand and offer of post 16 education for adults who never attended school or who remained outside the system of post-secondary school education. He highlights the fact that in Mexico there exist three subsystems which offer open post-secondary education for adults who are not registered in schooling, and who are incorporated in economic activities and with responsibilities to sustain their households.

The three systems depend upon the General Baccalaureate Department (*Dirección General de Bachillerato*, DGB) within the Ministry of Education.

Programmes and registration of each subsystem:

Students registered on Post-Secondary non-schooled education, 2001				
	Created in	Programme	Population that attends	Registered or active students
Open Baccalaureate	1979	General baccalaureate	Adults in general	1,181,177*
Semi-schooled baccalaureate	1990	General baccalaureate	Teachers in indigenous communities	3,108
Distance post-secondary education	1997	Technological baccalaureate	Recently secondary graduates and adults who cannot attend school	319
				TOTAL: 1,184,604
Source: Dirección General del Bachillerato – SEP				

Como se puede observar, es el sistema Preparatoria Abierta el que atiende al grueso de la demanda en educación media superior para adultos, mientras que las dos últimas modalidades atienden a un sector sumamente reducido de ésta. Enseguida se amplía la información sobre las características del sistema PA, pues es el único subsistema de bachillerato para adultos que tiene un carácter nacional y público, y sobre el que se dispone de información más detallada.

Open baccalaureate

This covers grades 10-12 (out of 12) of the national system. Its curriculum implies that it is designed for self-learners. Its main characteristics are:

- there is no exam for entrance
- there is no age limit
- there is no requirement on previous marks to have access
- registration is allowed throughout the whole year, in monthly periods
- there is no continuation of subjects, so that students can choose how to credit the subjects independently
- there is no time limit to complete the studies, so that the pace of each student relies on themselves;
- there is no requirement to attend school centers, neither schedules to fix, but students must acquire materials (textbooks and anthologies) for independent study.
- The service is offered throughout the whole country, and the payment includes: textbooks, exam applications and the expedition of student card or certificate.

The current curriculum in 2004 includes 33 subjects, 17 of which are the common area and compulsory, and 16 other to be chosen in 3 different areas:

- Humanities
- Administrative and Social Sciences
- Sciences - Physics and Maths

In spite of the flexibility, the average period to conclude this modality is between 3-5 years. Standard multiple choice exams are applied to evaluate the total of learning objectives presented on didactic materials.

Advisory System

As in any open education model, students are expected to take charge of their own learning, based upon study and resolution of printing materials. Although there is no proper infrastructure to provide this service, there are some offices of this system within the country. For instance, while there are 4 offices in Mexico City, there is only one office in the capital of most states.

The advisory system consists of a service free of charge, under the responsibility of qualified advisors on each knowledge area who do not teach but rather guide students with their own self-learning and administrative tasks, and are paid by hour. This service is run publicly, but allows registration for private centres.

Youths for Change

Pieck (2003: 670) points out the emphasis that basic education and education for work had during the 1990s. The community development baccalaureate scheme gained constituted an alternative for low income population who hardly have access to tertiary education (Pieck, 2003:674). An interesting proposal was CESDER, which has diversified its offering through a programme called “youths for change”, in Valle de Bravo. This strategy is oriented towards the betterment of familial and community conditions based upon self-subsistence as a strategy in rural areas. It was developed throughout twelve years in the mountains of Puebla and has been constituted as an example for other areas in the country. The aim of this project is an educational model that balances the need to maximise the function of individual utility of education and the need for an emancipatory educational practice that addresses social transformation, making an emphasis in offering

- the promotion of a social conscience of group and community cultural identity;
- a relationship with the context to transform the conditions of family life and local relations that has immediate outcomes in the means of subsistence and means of production; and
- a group of effective competencies that facilitate a competitive intervention in the profit world, not only in the fishing and farming sector.

This comprises the acquisition of knowledge, values, attitudes and skills that facilitate the intervention.

In this way, the curriculum that sustains it holds an educational process tightly linked with productive activities and community work.

3) Life skills and community development

Salinas (2003:684) identifies the area of life skills and community development as social learning. This means that courses and topics are not always offered to learn about democracy, self-promotion, gender equity or citizen rights, but that they represent the educational dimension implicit in a wide range of practices. The best promoters of such practices have been NGOs (non-governmental organisations) that work on *popular education*. She points out that during the 1990s, the democratisation of the Mexican political system was strongly important to promote that range of learning.

4) Income generation programmes, non-formal vocational training and rural and community development programmes for youth and adults (15+).

Pieck (2003:657) reports that a range of studies regarding farming and fishing training proliferated at the end of the 1990s. Many of those studies addressed the appropriation of technologies in different areas of farming and fishing production, and report the need to base programmes on local knowledge, promote equalitarian communication amongst producers as a mechanism for diversification and address some of the weaknesses of collective management on experimental farming. Pieck (2003:658) also reports that pilot experiences to train in labour competencies in rural microenterprises were promoted amongst fishing and farming producers, intervening both technicians and trainers.

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