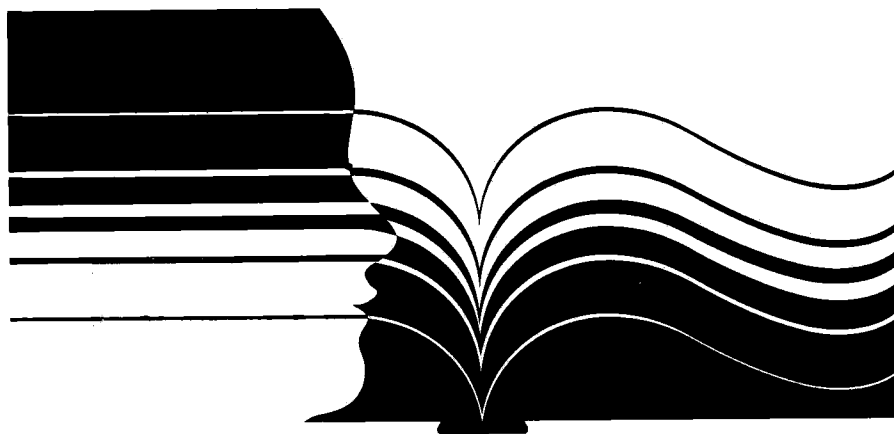


# Perspectives: From Adult Literacy to Continuing Education

Alice M. Scales, Senior Editor  
Joanne E. Burley, Editor



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Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 90-83706

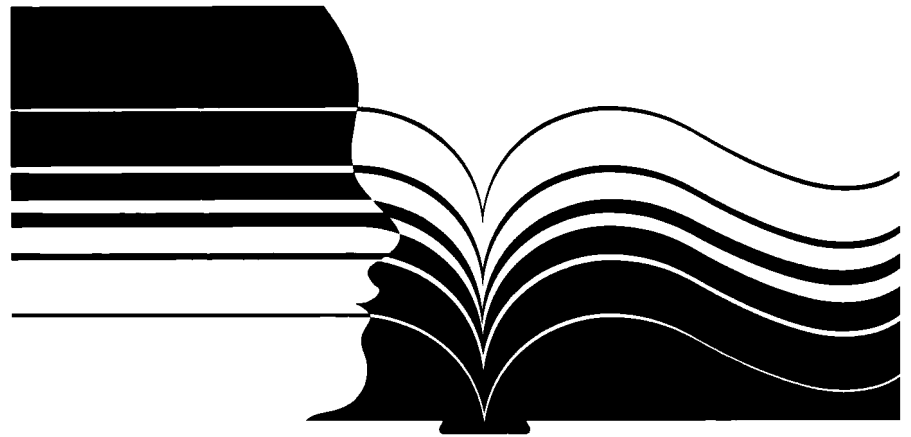
ISBN 0-697-11793-6

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Printed in the United States of America by Wm. C. Brown Publishers,  
2460 Kerper Boulevard, Dubuque, IA 52001

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Perspectives:  
From Adult Literacy  
to Continuing  
Education



# dedication

To those who believe that achievement of literacy will make a difference in the lives of people throughout the world.

To the Scales family: Eller—Lorenzo, Zeela, Cerone; Gracie—George, Gerald; Verlenia—John, Michael, William, John Jr., Robert; Goldie—Octavia, Kelly; Joe Jr.—Sean; and my parents, Lennie and Joe.

To the Burley family: Jack Sr., Diana, Jack Jr., and my parents, Elmer and Josephine Cobb.

# foreword

In 1990 the United Nations launched International Literacy Year. With walls coming down all over the world, educators are challenged to empower all people with the basic skills they need to function effectively in their environs. To meet the challenge, Scales and Burley have provided us with a broad range of philosophical, psychological, sociological, and economical perspectives that address literacy and continuing education. Such is evidenced by the contributors who have rich backgrounds in many arenas (e.g., colleges, universities, military, industry, communities) where literacy is being addressed today.

Literacy is a global concern. Clearly, illiteracy presents every country with tremendous human and social problems. To solve these problems, "literacy providers" must acknowledge that literacy is more than the ability of individuals to read and write. Literacy sets the stage for empowerment and opens the door to further opportunities for education and training. I am pleased to see chapters from leaders whose international experience can help readers understand how educators in other countries and other contexts are addressing issues that affect all people.

During my twenty years of involvement with literacy education, I have learned the importance of being sensitive to perspectives from academia, government, nongovernment, and business. This volume captures that sensitivity. Likewise, I believe it will make readers more aware of the issues under discussion. Specifically, I believe readers will benefit from this well-balanced exposure to literacy education as well as to the problems and solutions currently under discussion among educators, administrators, researchers, practitioners, and others. Alice M. Scales and JoAnne E. Burley have given us a book that will be helpful to anyone who is involved in the literacy movement today. I am pleased to add it to my collection and I look forward to sharing it with my adult literacy and continuing education colleagues throughout the world.

*Jane L. Evanson, President (1989–1990)  
American Association for Adult and Continuing Education*

# **preface**

This volume is based on the premise that adults (urban and rural dwellers, rich and poor, employed, underemployed, and unemployed) want to remain productive their entire lives. It has been designed for college students and instructors; educators, researchers, and administrators of adult education programs; personnel in adult education programs; and others worldwide who are interested in adult literacy and continuing education. As this anthology is read, the reader will learn what experts from various disciplines have to say about challenges, beliefs, endeavors, accomplishments, and outlooks for adult literacy and continuing education.

Herein literacy has been examined from philosophical, psychological, sociological, and economical perspectives. Philosophy, in this volume, has reference to the underlying developments of literacy in that it is inherent in the total educational milieu. Psychology has reference to the influence of human behaviors upon selected populations in literacy education. Sociology has reference to how literacy programs, in part, have changed the lives of adults who are in transition. Economics has reference to the funding aspects and costs of adult literacy programs. The four perspectives are to be viewed as aspects of life. Each suggests parameters whereby issues of literacy education have been examined from various countries in the world. Each chapter is meant to be one of provocation rather than of resolve. Challenges are to consider the perspectives and to relate content from the chapters contained therein to a more immediate environment.

*Alice M. Scales  
JoAnne E. Burley*

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# Philosophical Perspectives

Philosophy is inherent in all that people do. It influences beginnings or initiatives, understandings, personality developments, belief systems, relationships, and so forth. Philosophy is not an isolated field; it merges easily with other academic areas of study. Moreover, philosophers have merged with psychologists to explore and explain phenomena as they relate to educating adults and children. That educating has been examined through such philosophical viewpoints as (a) a *liberalist* whose view is that good comes from within oneself and education is the tool to release it; (b) a *humanist* whose view is that people are inherently good and with an education, albeit not a formal education, each has the power for obtaining a good life; (c) a *behaviorist* whose view is that an individual's personality and character are the product of his/her total experience, which includes education; and (d) a *pragmatist* whose view is that one's education is a means of freedom from confusion and ignorance.

Introduction

The viewpoints presented in the previous paragraph describe a frame of reference that suggests that literacy education causes good in the lives of people. Education that has advanced such goodness has been advanced through adult literacy efforts. To learn about this education and goodness in adult literacy, we asked the question, How can students of adult literacy learn about such education for goodness in the lives of people? Our answer is to study the chapters that focus on how UNESCO's global commitment has advanced literacy (see Bhola); how literacy began (see Hilliard); how countries have campaigned against illiteracy (see Amstutz); how literacy education has become more evident in selected African countries (see Lucas); how literacy is perceived in Senegal and Egypt (see Scales & Zikri); how literacy evolved in the U.S. (see Rose); how intergenerational relationships can teach the importance of an education (see Sibold); and how industry has involved itself in efforts to improve literacy (see Klimek-Suchla).

## Initiatives of UNESCO in Adult Literacy Education

H. S. Bhola

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), today, is the world's conscience keeper as the nations around the world move haltingly toward implementing the ideal of universal literacy. UNESCO adopted literacy as the central theme of its programming from its very inception in 1946 when hardly a country had put adult literacy on its educational agenda. Some forty-five years later, UNESCO led in the commemoration of International Literacy Year, 1990 (*World Charter on Education* . . . 1989). Jointly with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and The World Bank, UNESCO cosponsored the World Conference on Education for All (WC-EFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand, during March 5-9, 1990. This conference had hoped that all the world's nations that came to gather in Thailand would agree upon the following planning targets for the year 2000.

*Primary Education:* Each country would strive to ensure that at least 80 percent of all fourteen-year-old boys and girls attain a common level of learning achievement for primary education, set by the respective national authorities.

*Adult Education:* Access to basic skills and knowledge for all.

*Literacy:* Massive reduction of illiteracy with targets to be set by each country prioritized by age and sex (Inter-agency Commission 1989).

These are certainly bold initiatives in behalf of truly great ideals. However, to put things in a proper perspective, both the limitations and the possibilities of UNESCO's role in being an educational leader to the world must be stated before proceeding any further. UNESCO's limitations lie in the fact that it is an international organization, and not an instrument of a world government. None of UNESCO's resolutions are binding on its member states. All of UNESCO's policy initiatives must indeed be submitted anew to the political processes of each country. There they must be approved by policy-making organs of each member state before they become official policy, often in some adapted form.

In terms of resources, UNESCO is greatly limited. Its annual budget in a normal year would be no more than half the annual budget of a typical mid-western university in the U.S. Yet, exciting possibilities remain. UNESCO is indeed one of the most important policy makers that influences education, science, and culture on the world scene. Through dialogue and discussion, and sometimes by providing seed money for pilot projects, UNESCO has disseminated new theories and conceptualizations, new policy directions, and new methodologies of planning and research.

In this chapter the reader can explore literacy theories that have contributed to UNESCO's focus, politics and projects that have been supported by UNESCO, and various consequences of literacy. One hope is that the reader will generate questions as she/he reads this chapter and that the questions will serve as the bases for further in-depth study of UNESCO's literacy initiatives.

UNESCO is an international institution born of practical idealism. Having seen unnecessary death and destruction and senseless sufferings of millions during World War II, there was the need to mobilize the intellectual resources of the world in behalf of world peace. The governments of the states that were parties to the UNESCO constitution adopted in London on November 16, 1945, the following: "That since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed."

The battle, thus, was for the minds of men! In other words, UNESCO's strategy for peace was an educational-psychological strategy. It was by educating the minds of men that peace was to be defended and assured in perpetuity and the horrors of war avoided. Individual psyche was to be the theatre of peace. School children had to learn about peace, but adults had to learn about peace with an even greater urgency, for it was they who allowed wars to happen and they who went to fight the wars. That would mean *adult* education for those now out of school or bypassed by the school in the first place.

In the Third World, then and now, adult education could be equated with *adult literacy*. Illiteracy rates in the Third World have always been high, and even today 98 percent of the world's illiterates live in the Third World. The first director-general of UNESCO, Julian Huxley, had made the right connection between literacy and peace when he said that

... where half the people of the world are denied the elementary freedom which consists in the ability to read and write, there lacks something of the basic unity and basic justice which the United Nations are pledged together to further. (cited in Hamadache 1989, 3 & 4)

Since then, the struggle against illiteracy has been on the agenda of UNESCO. Over the years, literacy has found many more justifications in UNESCO programming: as an instrument of mass education, social progress, and international understanding; and as a human right needing no outside justification (Jones 1988).

The theory of literacy implied in UNESCO discussions and actions can be characterized as being essentially *psychological*. UNESCO documents do not, of course, directly argue about Goody's (1968) *technology of intellect* hypothesis that asserts that literacy (particularly writing) changes human intellect so much so that the new literates change their mentalities in regard to their modes of logic, abstraction, memory, and communication. Nor does one find in UNESCO's materials systematic theoretical discussions of Scribner and Cole's (1981) cautions about the Goody hypothesis, asserting that consequences of literacy may not be as general as earlier claimed but rather limited and

The Birth of a  
Commitment  
for Literacy

UNESCO's Theory  
of Literacy:  
Tension Between  
Psychological  
and Structural

contextual to social uses of literacy. It could be surmised, however, that UNESCO does not consider Scribner and Cole as serious challengers to Goody but merely as offering a sensible modification of his position. Literacy per se may not change the mentalities of people, but it does, nonetheless, significantly affect the habits of the mind in the specific social contexts of the uses of literacy.

Thus, UNESCO's theory of literacy could be seen as accepting the notion of literacy leading to some sort of individual modernity in the new learner (Inkeles & Smith 1974). It accepts that the new literate does become relatively more objective, more independent, and even more individualistic. This position is quite reasonable. Indeed, it is impossible to deny that literacy is "potential added" to the new literate so that the new literate is able to make more effective transactions within the *totality* of his or her environment—economic, social, political, informational, educational, and cultural (Bhola 1984b). But UNESCO cannot be satisfied with only a psychological theory of literacy. It has to have a complementary *structural* theory of literacy as well. In this policy-oriented world, literacy cannot be justified in terms of individual growth alone. It must be justified as a function of development. Development, in turn, is not just more wealth but more distribution of the wealth. Both modernization and democratization are considered equally important. This means that existing economic, social, and political structures must often be renovated, if not drastically changed.

This is where the tension between the psychological and the structural appears in UNESCO's theory of literacy. UNESCO must take the economic, social, and political structures of its member states as given. It cannot question existing political arrangements within its member states. It cannot preach that the oppressed overthrow the structures that oppress them. Irrespective of the institutional values of universalism to which UNESCO subscribes, it must serve both the U.S. and the USSR, Israel and Syria, Iran and Iraq, India and Pakistan, North Korea and South Korea, Libya and Chad, and everyone in between. Naturally, UNESCO has to define development in apolitical terms, hinting, but not stating. It must remain general and ambiguous, using economic, social, and cultural discourse that accommodates the relatives of socialism, capitalism, fascism, and plain barbarism. When the individual purposes and the purposes of the state are congruent in a nation, the tension between the psychological and the structural does not become apparent. However, when the state is not propeople or is insensitive to their immediate needs, the tension between the two levels of theory creates serious contradictions.

#### UNESCO's Policy on Literacy: 1946–1990

The tension inherent in UNESCO's theory of literacy reappears, understandably, in the policy initiatives that UNESCO promotes (Bhola 1984a, 1989). The language of literacy promotion may sound quite radical, but in implementation, most UNESCO-sponsored campaigns, programs, and projects have to be acceptable to the governors of the member states. International institutional arrangements being what they are, UNESCO is obliged to deal



only with governments, and therefore, its projects do often end up serving state purposes more effectively than peoples' interests. Yet over the years 1946–1990, one can see that the language of UNESCO's policy discourse has moved from literacy as charity to literacy as the professionalization of labor, to literacy for the liberation of the human being. UNESCO does dare set objectives that seek to serve the interests of the disadvantaged, the marginalized, and the excluded.

While literacy had been embraced by UNESCO at its very inception in 1946, the love affair with literacy took time to heat up (Bhola 1989). The First International Conference on Adult Education held in Elsinore, Denmark, in 1949, was much allured by the new electronic media and thought that while literacy would be nice to have, literacy was not indispensable. Media, it was thought, could reach the illiterate in the meantime. By the time the Second International Conference on Adult Education met in Montreal in 1960, literacy had moved center stage, and the Montreal conference was asking for the establishment of a special fund for adult literacy promotion in the Third World. What the Third World got, however, was no special fund for a world campaign but the Experimental World Literacy Programme (EWLP) (UNESCO 1976). During the years 1966–1974, UNESCO with support from UNDP sponsored functional literacy projects in eleven countries: Algeria, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Guinea, India, Iran, Madagascar, Mali, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, and United Republic of Tanzania. The total expenditure was around U.S. \$27,184,973; 40.6 percent of this was provided by UNDP and the rest by host governments. Some 1,028,381 adults (45 percent male, 55 percent female), whose average age was twenty-five years, were taught in 20,000 classes by 24,000 teachers. On average, 24 percent completed the final stage. Most classes had agricultural content.

In the Third International Conference on Adult Education in Tokyo in 1972, while delegates were impressed with the high-tech gadgets that had become available, they were also expressing discontent with the rather narrow work-oriented conception of literacy. The International Symposium for Literacy held in Persepolis, Iran, during 1975 heartily rejected the work-oriented conception of literacy. Instead of technical literacy, it proposed humanist literacy that would contribute to the liberation of individuals and to their full development (Bataille 1976).

In the most recent Fourth International Conference on Adult Education in Paris (*Final Report*: . . . 1985), the world adult educators had an even broader conception of literacy that included basic literacy, cultural literacy, and technological literacy. The Paris declaration that embodies these "literacies" is worth quoting in full:

The right to learn is:

- the right to read and write;
- the right to question and analyze;
- the right to imagine and create;
- the right to read one's own world and to write history;