

## Feature Article

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# *The Global Reach*

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### **International Understanding: A Perpetual Human Quest**

For millennia humans have sought international understanding. Take the case of ancient Greece where the highly diverse city-states were often at war. An aim of the Olympic Games (started in 776 B.C.) was not just to compete, but to create an environment where both contestants and spectators could meet, greet, and be afforded an opportunity to cultivate an understanding of those from city-states other than their own, all in a non-hostile environment.<sup>1</sup> The challenge of cultivating international understanding continues in an ever more pressing manner during this new millennium. Factors such as a growing global economy, the accelerating capacities of communication technology, the growth of multinational and transnational corporations, and a host of other forces are pulling us closer together as a planet of people with the often corollary threat of pulling us apart. Our interdependence challenges us to deal with our differences, be they political, ethnic, religious, racial, or other “ways of being.” Differing value systems can precipitate large scale misunderstandings, but they also have the potential to catalyze opportunities for learning. The growth of multi-cultural societies around the world (see, for example, Dadzie, 1997; Yaron & Poggeler, 1993) can result in cultural clashes as well as provide a richness born from diversity. The scenario is particularly acute in newly re/emerging countries where freedom to express such differences often has been suppressed for decades and centuries. Once released, previously contained or repressed, hostilities to the oppressor or even to “the other” sometimes emerge as well.

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Add to this mix an increasing awareness that global terrorism has become all too common and that a spectrum of world issues, such as global environmental issues, AIDS and other health related pandemics, human rights violations (including trafficking, slavery, etc.), social exclusion and xenophobia, poverty eradication, migrant and refugee migration, as well as those seeking asylum, and other issues, beckon our attention. Undoubtedly, challenges are abound.

In this regard adult learning and education have been heralded as a key to bringing about not only peace but justice and solidarity, as well as sustainable development in the 21st century. Adult learning has also been championed as a right, a responsibility, and a necessity for all. One can readily see that strides are aimed at both the individual level and society at large, all sectors of society are called upon increasingly to work together in this quest. Our U.S. State Department, through its International Visitor Program, has even stepped up its focus on lifelong learning. Teams of professionals, especially from the “countries-in-transition,” are invited to spend three weeks visiting and dialoguing with adult educators and others across the country so that they can reap, learn, and then return to their countries to contribute to nation-building efforts;<sup>2</sup> clearly the importance of developing adults and their contexts for self-responsibility is well recognized in such countries. The purpose of this article is to raise awareness and broaden the scope for those new to the international aspects of our field, update others about this world phenomenon, and offer resources as to how we might stay informed as we consider the global aspects of our profession. An invitation to dialogue is extended to all.

### **International Adult Education and the Global Reach**

Historically, we can look at the 1920s as a time period that catalyzed the international nature of the adult education movement as a worldwide profession. Post World War I reconstruction efforts recognized the pivotal role that education of adults (for social change, not just skill development) could play. As part of the professionalization process an emerging body of knowledge was complemented by conferences, professional associations, and periodicals. It was during that period that the World Association for Adult Education was established, a quarterly journal (*The International Quarterly of Adult Education*) begun, and an *International Handbook of Adult Education* (World Association for Adult Education, 1929) published. The World Association functioned until the beginning of World War II. The post-World War II era provided another, but differ-

ent, catalytic advance for the international movement with the development of the United Nations (UN), the crafting and endorsement of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and, particularly, the establishment of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which has played a key role in lifelong learning. A continuous stream of literature also became apparent. Examples of such literature are: Adam (1948), International People's College (1949), Gross (1944), and the first *International Directory of Adult Education* (UNESCO, 1952). Well before those periods, however, adult education movements were appearing in a variety of countries, and ideas began crossing borders. In fact, some ideas have passed the test of time (e.g., folk high schools from Denmark, study circles from Sweden, later the Open University concept from the U.K., and others).

The global reach of lifelong learning through the adult years, or *international adult education* as it has been termed, has been catalyzed not only by international governmental bodies, such as the UN (especially UNESCO), but also by international, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), such as the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE); by grass roots groups, such as those of popular education; by professional associations and groups; and, over the last few decades, by the rise of multinational and transnational organizations (mostly corporate in nature) with their employee development and cross-cultural training programs. While comprised of different constituencies and modus operandi, as discussed in more detail later, all operate together form the aim of "civil society."

Civil society is a term employed increasingly around the globe. Although specific definitions vary, a consistently recurring theme is that the government is only one voice and that working with NGOs, grass roots, and other citizen-based groups and networks, professional associations, and philanthropic organizations is essential. These entities are, as a collection, often referred to as "civil society," with some renditions including business. Others exclude the for-profit sector as part of the definition, but nevertheless acknowledge the importance of all these sectors (governmental, nongovernmental, and for-profit) working together. The United Nations offers funding for public/private partnerships in this regard, as does the World Bank. University-based centers for civil society have emerged (such as the Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies and the Centre for Civil Society at the University of Natal in Durban, South Africa); independent think tanks (such as the Centre for Civil Society in New Delhi, India) have surfaced; and entities funded purely by support

from foundations and individual donors are emerging. An example is Civil Society International, which helps organizations in countries “inhospitable” to the principles of civil society.

### From International to Global

It seems that it was much simpler in the past, however, to define and describe international adult education. Matters are a bit more complicated today even with regard to the term itself: *international adult education*. The *adult education* part will be addressed first, followed by a brief discussion of *international*.

Perhaps due to the success of awakening awareness of the power and potential of tending to adults learning, changing, and growing, a variety of professions now recognize the importance of addressing the development of adults as well as the contexts in which they reside, be it team development, organizational development, community and nation building, or global development of the human species. The lifelong learning movement, even when considering only the adult years portion, embraces an array of professional identities. While some may identify with the term *adult education*, others consider themselves professionals in human resource development, vocational education, community education, continuing professional education, labor education, etc. For others, any such designation is secondary to their primary professional identity. While there are clear differences among these appellations, and while the conditions may vary in different countries, they are all part of the global reach of lifelong learning: the adult years.

At an accelerating rate it is becoming apparent that we are becoming increasingly a global society. Despite the issue of restrictions on international students, around the world we are physically more mobile, due to a variety of factors—including lifting of travel restrictions such as those from the former Soviet Union, the breakdown of barriers in Europe, etc. As a result, a problem with infected fruit flies or deadly viruses passed from animals to humans in one part of the world becomes a global concern. In fact, we do not need another SARS-like epidemic to convince us as a human species that our reality is collective and connected despite the time zones and geographic distances that may separate. Moreover, communities are no longer exclusively geographically place based, especially cyberspace communities which, in transcending national boundaries, have provided expanded opportunities for international cooperation, as well as “cooperation” of a more questionable nature, such as trafficking, “hate groups,” and the like. The very context in which we live is global.

Consequently, globalization is a term that has entered into common parlance, and it is conceptually different than the term *international*. The idea of “between nations” (inter-national) may have had more meaning decades earlier when the nation-state was a more discrete unit (harkening even to the city-state concept of ancient times), and when “local,” “regional,” “national” had more fixed boundaries. Now, global and local are not that discrete. The concept of globalization, while originating in the field of economics, has enlarged to include cultural and social aspects. Friedman (2000) offers a succinct rendition: Comparing globalization to the Cold War as international systems, he suggests that, while the Cold War could be summarized by the word “division” and the symbol of “wall,” globalization could be summarized by the word “integration” and the symbol of “web.” Indeed, interconnectedness abounds, but those left behind become the discontented (Stiglitz, 2002) and could potentially present a powerful fury when unleashed—especially when converging around a common identity such as race, socio-economic status, ethnicity, religion, etc.

Moreover, accompanying this global pull, a parallel rise in nationalism, independence, and autonomous statehood is also occurring worldwide. In fact, nationalistic moves for independence are being witnessed at the same time as rally cries for “One World.” This dialectic is, in many ways, our challenge for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond: how to achieve our autonomous identities as both individuals and nations while, at the same time, distilling the best of our global identity. Global citizenry transcends the concept of citizenship as defined by geographic borders

Clearly, then, *international* understanding and *international* adult education are still most appropriate terms to use, but they are used best when framed and embraced by a global perspective and the development of global citizens to complement their national, regional, and local identity.

### **Contributions of Different Global Sectors**

In the world of international adult education, or the emerging global reach, many sectors have contributed and continue to play influential roles. The purpose of this section is to elucidate those contributions and to provide resources for continuing inquiry.

#### ***International Governmental Bodies***

By far, the international governmental body that has contributed the most to the development of society and individuals through lifelong learn-

ing is the UN – particularly through the role that UNESCO has played. On the heels of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 57 of the United Nations Charter, established in 1945, created an institution specializing in the fields of education and culture, at first called UNECO until “Science” was added shortly after to form UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. As emphasized in the preamble to UNESCO’s constitution, as well as in informational literature, “since wars begin in the minds of men [sic], it is in the minds of men that defenses of peace must be constructed.” Integrated attention is directed to natural, as well as the social and human, sciences, along with culture and education. The earth’s resources have received central attention in the natural sciences, while ethics and human rights are central to the social and human sciences. In addition, following the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity in 2001, UNESCO is now establishing the Global Alliance for Cultural Diversity.

Many projects and activities over the years have been dedicated to the arena of adult learning and education, clearly recognizing the importance of efforts to develop both individuals and their contexts for individual and societal benefit. For example, since the 1960s UNESCO has designated each year with a specific global theme. Activities, materials, and press kits are available from the UN for local groups to conduct anything from media campaigns to forums to discussion groups around the global theme and its local meaning. Educators of adults clearly have a potential role to play. The year 1999, for example, was the International Year of Older Persons, while 2004 has been designated as both as the International Year of Rice and the International Year to Commemorate the Struggle Against Slavery and its Abolition. As a prelude some may remember that on October 3, 2003, a casket march took place, commencing at Pier 11 in New York City, to rebury slaves who were sold in slave trade on Pier 11 and who built Manhattan. The year 2005 has been designated as the International Year of Microcredit (with the interesting prospect of balancing cottage industry with multinational growth). Decades are also designated with particular themes. We are just beginning the International Decade of Literacy, 2003-2012, and will be concluding in 2004 the International Decade of Human Rights Education and the International Decade of Indigenous People. January, 2005, will usher in the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

Two other initiatives, both of which are top priorities for the year 2015, are the UN Millennium Development Goals and the “Education for All” movement (sometimes known as the Dakar Agreement – named for

the city in which the meeting was held, Dakar, Senegal). The latter not only anticipates a commitment from governments to achieve basic education for all (especially girls) by 2015, but it also involves a pledge from donor countries that no country should be impeded due to a lack of resources. Geared to primary education for all, adult literacy and gender equality are emphasized equally. The aim of the eight Millennium goals is to gain a pledge from all member countries to work toward meeting the goals: (a) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; (b) achieve universal primary education; (c) promote gender equality and empower women; (d) reduce child mortality; (e) improve maternal health; (f) combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; (g) ensure environmental sustainability; and (h) develop a global partnership for development. For further inquiry, see [www.un.org/millenniumgoals](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals).

Perhaps of most significance to *international adult education*, however, are the five international assemblies that cemented the international adult education movement around the world. All assemblies brought together heads of state to dialogue, debate, and produce a ratified document that could serve the adult education community worldwide during the decade that intervened between each assembly. Beginning in 1949 in Elsinore, Denmark, each assembly was designed with regard to, and in the context of, the world situation at the time. The 1949 assembly demonstrated on a world scale the importance of, and need for, adult education and promoted and institutionalized adult education. The second assembly, held in Montreal, Canada, during 1960, addressed the professionalization of adult education and sported the theme, "Adult Education in a Changing World." The third assembly, held during 1972 in Tokyo, Japan, carried the theme of "Adult Education in the Context of Lifelong Learning" and explored adult education as an essential element of lifelong learning, reinforcing its importance to democracy. The fourth assembly, held in Paris, France, in 1985, focused on the "Right to Learn," and the most recent fifth assembly, held during 1997 in Hamburg, Germany, was framed by the theme, "Adult Learning: A Key for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century."

All assemblies have produced documents to offer guidance for policy and a foundation for all countries around the world. The most recent assembly produced two documents: *The Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning* and the *Agenda for the Future*. Ten themes were embraced to guide action as well as inquiry until the next assembly, scheduled for 2009. *The Declaration* emphasizes the crucial importance of adult learning in addressing the present and future challenges facing the human condition

and the common concerns around the globe. *The Agenda for the Future* details an action plan framed by the ten themes which the assembly was designed: (a) Adult Learning and Democracy: The Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; (b) Improving the Conditions and Quality of Adult Learning; (c) Ensuring the Universal Right to Literacy and Basic Education; (d) Adult Learning, Gender Equality and Equity, and the Empowerment of Women; (e) Adult Learning and the Changing World of Work; (f) Adult Learning in Relation to Environment, Health, and Population; (g) Adult Learning, Culture, Media, and New Information Technologies; (h) Adult Learning for All: The Rights and Aspirations of Different Groups; (i) The Economics of Adult Learning; and (j) Enhancing International Cooperation and Solidarity. For your continuing inquiry and more details see [www.unesco.org/education/uie/confintea](http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/confintea).

Much of the momentum for the assembly and its agenda, as well as the themes, was catalyzed in large part by the report of the International Commission on Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, an international team that studied intensively for three years the question of education's role in the society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The team, financed by UNESCO but independent with regard to its work and the preparation of its recommendations, employed wide-ranging means of forums, working group sessions, etc., to tap consultative input from both governmental and nongovernmental sources. In addition to providing a clearer understanding of the tensions and challenges facing the globe in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the commission offered a succinct framework to capture the important scope of the meaning of learning. The framework is now becoming increasingly well known as the "four pillars" of knowing: learning to do, think, be, and live together or live with others. The latter is considered one of the major issues facing humanity. For that reason the importance of international cooperation figured prominently in agendas and documents from all follow-up forums and assemblies since the 1997 gathering. For your continuing inquiry, see the DeLors report, named after Jacques DeLors, chair of the commission (DeLors, 1996).

American representatives participated in this assembly, but they did so as observers since the United States had officially withdrawn its membership from UNESCO in 1984. During September, 2002, however, President Bush announced at the UN General Assembly that the USA would rejoin UNESCO, and the process of rejoining was completed as of October, 2003. Regional follow-up meetings to the 1997 assembly were held during 2002 in preparation for the mid-decade review that took place during September, 2003, in Bangkok. Europe and North America are consid-



ered one region, so the United States was officially represented and fully involved in that preparatory assembly, which was held in Sofia, Bulgaria, in November, 2002. Out of that meeting emerged the document, *Sofia Conference on Adult Education: Call to Action* (UNESCO, 2002). Clearly the need for finding innovative ways to international cooperation (theme 10) and the importance of global citizenry were stressed. Noted as of concern was the observation that “the allocation of resources in most countries favours adult learning for the work place at the expense of adult learning for active citizenship” (p. 2) and the need for a “system for accrediting prior learning” (p. 3) to recognize formal and nonformal, as well as informal, adult learning. Included among other needed priorities were the need for expanding “international co-operation and intercultural learning opportunities” to “contribute to peace and reconciliation” (p. 2) and “partnerships between statutory, nongovernmental, and social partners” (pp. 2-3). Europe was well represented, including the newly emerging “countries in transition.” In addition to the United States and Canada (for North America), observers from Asia were also present, adding to the dynamics of how very common are the issues that the field faces.

The mid-decade follow up brought all regions together in Bangkok in September, 2003, as noted above. Regional concerns were aired and a report emerged entitled, *Recommitting to Adult Education and Learning* (UNESCO, 2003). As indicated in the preface to the report, “Three hundred representatives of Member States and senior level officials, . . . as well as nongovernmental and civil society organizations, academics and research institutions from more than 90 countries” (p. 2) were represented. We can witness here a significant texture: Many sectors of civil society met together with governmental officials. A commonality of concerns became apparent. While it became clear that the vision of adult learning enunciated at the 1997 assembly was still honored, regressive tendencies were noted, particularly in the area of public funding. Moreover, a major concern was voiced regarding the world situation, which was seen as having deteriorated: “Due to global tensions, conflict and war as well as the weakening of the United Nations [the world situation] is dominated by fear and insecurity” (p. 18). I would add that the August, 2003, bombing of the UN in Iraq, for example, that killed the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Sergio Viera de Mello, was a mighty blow in this regard. Violence, as well as inequities, forms an important backdrop for the international adult education movement worldwide. Nevertheless, the mid-term review expressed confidence in “creative action.” As enunciated in the report, “Despite the daunting realities now confronting us, we are wit-

nessing the birth of a new global consciousness which itself, insisting on equality and diversity and calling for universal respect of ethics, rights and laws, spawns the hope that another world and another kind of education and learning are still possible" (p. 18). The proliferation of Adult Learners' Week in "more than 50 countries worldwide" was considered particularly heartening. (For continuing inquiry regarding Adult Learners' Weeks go to [www.unesco.org/education/uie/internationalALW](http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/internationalALW).)

Reiterating recommitment to the 1997 vision, the midterm review concluded that "today more than ever, adult education and learning compose an indispensable key for unlocking the creative forces of people, social movements, and nations. Peace, justice, self-reliance, economic development, social cohesion and solidarity remain indispensable goals and obligations to be further pursued and reinforced in and through adult education and learning," calling upon "Member States, UN agencies and nongovernmental and civil society organizations as well as social and private partners to organize the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) in 2009 as a case of accountability in adult education and learning, one based on collective monitoring and evaluation" (UNESCO, 2003, p. 19).

Finally, a discussion on international governmental bodies would be incomplete without mention of the UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE), which has been an integral part of the international adult education movement since its founding in 1951 as an educational institute of UNESCO. UIE, a nonprofit, international center located in Hamburg, Germany, is devoted to training, information, documentation, and publishing of sources on adult and lifelong learning. In addition, UIE is the editorial office and publishing site for the *International Review of Education*. A governing board of specialists from around the world is complemented by an on-site director and staff of about three dozen personnel (researchers, library personnel, communication technologists, translators, and others). An especially innovative and useful project is entitled Adult Learning and Documentation Information Network (ALADIN), established in 1997 as a result of the 5<sup>th</sup> International UNESCO Assembly, as a means to foster communication and cooperation among documentation and resource centers around the globe. By 1999 a website ([www.unesco.org/education/aladin](http://www.unesco.org/education/aladin)) had been launched, which is open to the public and offers a plethora of resources and links.

Repeatedly, even now in governmental documents, reference is made to civil society, as discussed earlier. While NGOs, professional associations, citizens' groups, and grass roots action activities have had a prominent voice in the world of international adult education, the importance of

governmental efforts acknowledging and heralding their voices is a more recent phenomenon. The next section is devoted to these kinds of bodies.

### *International Nongovernmental Bodies*

The largest international NGO by far in the international adult education movement is the International Council of Adult Education (ICAE), founded in 1973 through the effort of J. R. (Roby) Kidd. Kidd remained as Secretary General until 1979 when Budd Hall assumed that position. Peace and human rights, gender issues, environmental education, and literacy have figured prominently for years on the agenda of the ICAE. The ICAE is comprised of organizational members, both professional associations and regional bodies (such as the Asian Pacific Bureau), community-based action groups, and others. It is also the home of the journal, *Convergence: The International Journal of Adult Education*. For an overview of ICAE's history and structure, see Khalil-Khouri (1996). The website ([www.icae.org.uy](http://www.icae.org.uy)) may provide updated information as well.

Since 1976 ICAE has held worldwide assemblies every three to seven years. The first venue was Tanzania in 1976; the second was Paris, France, in 1982; the third, Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1985; the fourth, Bangkok, Thailand, in 1990; the fifth, Cairo, Egypt, in 1994; and the sixth—the most recent—was held during 2001 in Ochos Rios, Jamaica. Each assembly sported a theme of concern for that period. For example, “Literacy, Popular Education, and Democracy: Building the movement” was the theme for 1990; “Women, Literacy, and Development: Challenge for the 21st Century” was the theme for 1994; and most recently, during 2001, the theme was “Creativity and Democratic Governance—Adult Learning: A Strategic Choice.” Furthermore, a document, based on common concerns, emerged from each assembly to guide action around the globe. The most recent, the *Ochos Rios Declaration* (available at <http://www.icae.org.uy/eng/ordeceng.html>) targets globalization as a growing concern, especially economic globalization, that is, the deepening gulf between the haves and have-nots. Globalization, however, can refer likewise to knowledge and the means of communication and contact. For example, one commitment, of many, on the declaration targeted helping “people benefit from each other’s experiences by ensuring the best access possible to relevant information through networking and the imaginative use of technologies,” recognizing “the value of grassroots materials and activities and their efforts to document them” (Dobson, 2001, p. 5). Resources abound for continuing inquiry relevant to globalization. Helpful examples include Friedman, 2000; Henderson, 1999; Singer, 2002a, 2002b;

Stiglitz, 2002; and Walters, 1997.

Many organizations and groups that are members of ICAE, as well as other nongovernmental, nonprofit groups, play an array of vibrant roles relevant to international adult education. Those who may be interested in the popular education arena may wish to subscribe to the *Popular Education News* by contacting Larry Olds (lolds@popednews.org).

### *The Role of Professional Associations*

Professional associations are also contributing their share to the global reach, particularly by offering members opportunities to share and exchange experiences with those from other countries. A few examples follow. The American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE) has sponsored for decades an International Preconference as part of the annual association conference, designed and hosted by its International Unit, often in cooperation with other international groups, such as the International Associates and the International Society for Comparative Adult Education. Study travel and exchange programs have also been hosted for decades. In addition, alliances with other national adult education associations are being reinforced, for example, with the German Adult Education Association for which Heribert Hinzen, Head of their Institute for International Cooperation, has been most instrumental.

The American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) has begun recently to reach into the global community and form partnerships with the Canadian Society for Training and Development and the comparable association in the Netherlands. In addition, the association is establishing “global networks” to afford an opportunity to professionals, particularly those without comparable associations in their countries, the opportunity to form a local group (much like an ASTD chapter) abroad that would be able to meet and learn from each other and exchange knowledge with similar groups around the globe and with U.S.-based members. Then there is the International Federation of Training and Development Organizations, Ltd. (IFTDO), which is a network of human resource management and development organizations, consisting of about 150 member organizations and devoted to global workforce development. For more information, see its website at [www.iftdo.org](http://www.iftdo.org).

Another example is the International Community Education Association (also known as ICEA), which adopted the motto “Think Globally, Act Locally” in the 1970s with the environmental movement. Here is what the association literature says:

ICEA can make a specific contribution to solve local as well as global problems because it is able to mobilize many people and unite them for a common effort in any part of the world. It can carry out projects on a local level as well as on a regional and trans-regional level. Why? Because we are a worldwide network of local NGOs, a large group of volunteers, professionals, and individuals. (Cited from ICEA's website at [www.icea.de](http://www.icea.de))

One more example is the International Vocational Education Association, which, as its website ([www.iveta.org](http://www.iveta.org)) announces, is "working to create a new era in communication among vocational educators around the globe."

### ***The For Profit Sector***

International adult education discussions do not often include the for profit world, perhaps due to the profit motive which, in some instances, results in behaviors that appear antithetical, especially to the norms of NGOs with their concerted emphasis on human rights. To put it another way, for profits may sport a different worldview and way of being. Aside from the possibility that this stance may be a misleading generalization, pleas for "civil society" and the cooperation of all sectors in society suggest that a brief consideration would be meaningful. Perhaps bridges might even be constructed between purely economically driven conceptualizations of globalization, and the more social and cultural aspects of the concept that have potential to cultivate international understanding, as well as pull diverse professionals together. Multinational and transnational corporations could provide a lead in this direction. Some advances are on the horizon.

In mid-August, 2003, the United Nations Sub-Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights approved a draft document delineating the responsibilities of companies for human rights (not harming consumers, such as not polluting the environment or prohibiting bribery). Although neither a law nor a binding agreement, it does begin to set standards for corporate responsibility. Moreover, it is not restricted just to transnationals; rather, it is available to all businesses. Implicit in this advance is that all companies have responsibilities with regard to human rights. In addition, with the United Nations' "Partners in Civil Society" initiative, businesses are invited to interface with UN programs around the world, or they may join the Global Compact program which brings the corporate world together with UN agencies, NGOs, and others with the intent of partnering and pursuing "good corporate citizenship." For continuing inquiry see [www.un.org/partners/civil\\_society](http://www.un.org/partners/civil_society).

### Upon Reflection

So, what is meant by the global reach in our field of study and practice? Certainly, it is about learning from (and with) other countries, but it is overarched by an understanding of the state of the world. Celebrating and honoring our differences is a start, but deeply understanding the common challenges we face as a human species and how our efforts can interface is paramount. We must embrace the four pillars of learning undergirding the Delors (1996) report. They are about the action and “learning to do,” but are also about “learning to think” (“Think globally, act locally.”), “learning to be,” and, most of all, “learning to live together.” With the advent of new communications technologies mega strides have been made in that direction. Not everyone in the world has access to food and fresh water, let alone communications technologies, however.

This brief essay began with an observation that the quest for international understanding has been a recognized challenge for the human species from the beginning of history, but the saga now continues in a world transformed by forces that are pulling us together, but with the potential to simultaneously pull us apart. Throughout the last century, however, the education of adults has been held as a vision as well as an action tool to cultivate a more humane world order. In contemporary times our professions are called upon ever more fervently to rise to the challenge of reaching for common ground while honoring and celebrating differences. Equipped with a broader embrace of our profession (which may go by a spectrum of identities and names) and having an understanding a global reach, we might find ourselves in a more advantageous position to “think globally” even when “acting locally.” Internationalizing curricula and programs means not just learning *about*, but also learning *with* those from other cultures and value systems, a feat especially possible with the advent of distance learning. (Witness someone like Roger Boshier at the University of British Columbia teaching a course with one student in Iraq while that country is in a state of war.) Of course, recognizing that many also are far removed from access to these technologies is equally important. To understand the strides made—knowingly or unknowingly—by those in governmental organizations, NGOs, grass roots groups, professional associations, and even the entrepreneurial or business sector and the call to action issued to all of civil society equips us with a perspective and worldview for the future. We have many sources and resources for our continuing inquiry and action. We also have each other.

In commenting on the SARS situation, Barry Bloom, Dean, Harvard

School of Public Health, stressed that it was important to create global health networks to train experts in epidemiology to combat current and future epidemics. What about those of us in adult education? What kind of social and cultural epidemics are we, or might we be, dealing with . . . and what will we do? Consider this an invitation to dialogue.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The Olympic Truce, an integral part of the Games, protected the sports' participants and spectators and promoted peace during the games by calling for a laying down of arms and prohibiting war among city-states during the period of the Games. During the 2004 Olympics, which are returning to their birthplace in Greece, the idea of the Olympic Truce is being resurrected. Initiated and spearheaded by now Foreign Minister of Greece, George Papandreou, supported by a UN General Assembly resolution in 1997, and endorsed by a growing list of heads of state worldwide, the vision is that the Truce and its principles will remain an integral part of all future Olympic Games as well. Peace education forms that foundation.

<sup>2</sup> Nation building refers not just to building the economy but to the social arena of developing citizens as well.

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Note: While some of the authors listed above may have included the comparative adult education stream, a growing number of comparativists see that literature base as distinct from international adult education. For further inquiry into that body of knowledge, see, for example, Bennett, Kidd, & Kulich (1975); Charters & Hilton (1989); Charters & Siddiqui (1989); International Experts Meeting (1972); Liveright & Haygood (1968); Peers (1972); and Reischmann, Bron, & Jelenc (1999).