

Notes on the Civil Society Forum: Looking Toward UNESCO CONFINTEA VI

Meeting location:
The Ohio State University, Center on Education and Training for Employment
Meeting held October 2, 2008
Notes prepared October 29, 2008

Objectives

- Deepen our collective understanding of US interests, policy objectives and role in CONFINTEA VI.
- Generate input—issues, interests, big ideas—for use by the lead federal agencies as preparations continue for CONFINTEA VI.

Agenda Overview

- Welcome
- Background
- Review of CONFINTEA V
- Identification of key themes—Breakout discussions
- Wrap up

Key Themes for US CONFINEA Platform

This section presents a transcription of flipcharts generated by breakout discussion groups that were tasked to a) agree by consensus on key themes in adult literacy in the US, and b) for each theme, to identify the big ideas, challenges, and additional players who should be involved in developing the US platform.

Three Discussed Themes in Adult Education in the U.S.

The group went through a consensus-reaching process and agreed on these themes for US adult education:

- Inclusion and participation
- Policies, structures, financing for Adult Learning and Education (ALE)
- Quality of ALE/Literacy and other key competencies

1) Inclusion and Participation

Big Ideas—Innovations, Data, Trends, Best Practices

- Diversity of delivery, learners
- Professionalization (professional associations)
- Technology
- Formal, informal, nonformal learning—military, employers
- Access, outreach
- Inclusion, for example, Americans with Disabilities Act

Key Issues—Challenges, Obstacles, Constraints

- National awareness
- Decentralized
- Dissemination of best practices
- Communication between associations and government
- Mobility
- Attitude
- Language

Who Else Could be Invited to Weigh In

- Private sector
- Trade unions
- Museums/libraries
- Organizations working with immigrant populations
- Civic education organizations

Other Recommendations for Developing the US Platform

- Diversity of adult learning options (community colleges)
- Multi-lingual challenges
- Survey where learning is taking place

2) Policies, Structures, Financing for ALE

Big Ideas—Innovations, Data, Trends, Best Practices and

Key Issues—Challenges, Obstacles, Constraints

- More connection between ALE and economic development
- Adult ed act so broad
- Funding available from
 - Corporations
 - Foundations
 - State/federal government
- Giving incentives to business to provide literacy
- Portability of credentials
 - Formal (What do other countries do?)
 - Local
 - State level

- Data is available
- Need shift in looking at ALE—need more consistency
- Variety of programs, funding, etc., is positive
- Many volunteers in the US
- PD is important in ALE
- We know what is good PD—some limitation in providing
- Strong in standards
- Continuum in above in various states
- Transitions to higher education—expanding role of Higher Education (HE)
- Our adult ed should be broader—need learning society
- Do we need to redefine “literacy”?
 - Health
 - Technological
 - Financial
 - Etc.
- So much funding goes to P-12
- Financial aid is a big issue
- Applied R&D (need office to consume information)
- Multi-access points
- Relationship of a literate workforce and economic development
- Can you make an impact starting with adults—or do you start with pre-school?
- Probably need full-time system (for teachers and students)
- Return on investment—share with tax holders
- How do we change the structure for better results?
 - One education system?
 - K-12
 - Higher ed
 - ALE
 - Even larger?
 - Add other partners
 - Economic development
 - Labor
 - Development
- Need leverage of knowledge (evidence on our side)
- We do provide some of this (leverage of knowledge)
- Data systems

Who Else Could be Invited to Weigh In

- Business and industry (and unions)
- Knowledge of ESL
- Participants
- Elected officials
- Partner agencies
- Foundations
- Ask Cheryl Keenan

- Other federal agencies

Other Recommendations for Developing the US Platform

- Stay focused on the learner
- Focus on skills
- Special accommodations
- Student organization

3) Quality of ALE/ Literacy and Other Competencies

Big Ideas—Innovations, Data, Trends, Best Practices and

- Changing nature of students and reasons for participation—pragmatic application of education, not education for education’s sake
- Changing nature of the workforce and employer requirements
- Changing responsibilities of teachers
- Delivery/program changes

Role of Adult Ed

- Connection of disparate programs
- Linkages
- Moving people along a continuum

Best Practice

- More data—having more data, using more data, using data more

Key Issues—Challenges, Obstacles, Constraints

- Professionalization of the field (salary, benefits, job security)
- Talent retention (no career path for adult ed directors/teachers)
- Change in workforce demands—need for specialized instruction
- Student demographics (increase in non-native speakers)
- Skill gaps—how teachers teach vs how students learn

Who Else Could be Invited to Weigh In

- Community colleges and professional organizations for community colleges
- Chambers of Commerce
- Employers
- HE institutions that provide teacher training
- Social service agencies
- National organizations representing ethnic/minority groups
- Researchers
- Taxpayers/public
- Students

Other Recommendations for Developing the US Platform

- Maintain broad (that is, federal) definition of “literacy”
- Recognize the need to serve those at the lowest levels

- Address the issue of large numbers of unserved
- Better connection between career tech and adult literacy

Other Key Issues to be raised at CONFINTEA VI

- Adult learning continuum
- US holistic approach to ALE
- Flexibility in learning systems
- Sequence of education leads to economic benefits

Feedback on the Meeting

Appreciated

- Information on UNESCO, State Department, etc.
- Getting the CONFINTEA history
- The meeting's format
- Being with this group
- Diversity of the group
- Site selection
- Lunch!
- Learning about all the groups involved

Do or Do Differently Next Time

- Could have been longer
- National report was long
- List of participants