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Françoise F. Laot
Maître de conférences
CERLIS – Université Paris Descartes

Focusing on Permanent Education Idea in France in the sixties and its progressive decline

After World War II France was in reconstruction. Industry needed to be modernised and run by new elites. And yet French economy crudely lacked of engineers and “chiefs” as they were so called. Schools and universities didn’t provide enough of them. Moreover, engineers and managers already at work needed to improve their education for the studies they did, did not enable them to face new technological advancements nor to take into account the “human factor” that entered in the industrial world. State progressively began to feel more concerned with adult education. The result of which was the attempt, on a legislative level, to get schooling democratisation and the rise of a new notion: social promotion. The goal is to allow already at work adults, qualified workers or supervisors, to go back to studies for having access to higher hierarchical functions: managers or engineers.

Between 1948 and 1959, several laws were implemented in order to introduce a first coherence in the adult education device.

In the same time, a new idea, this of *éducation permanente* (permanent education) was emerging and getting sense in different social spheres. This notion was at first supported by what is called in France Popular education movements¹, i.e. very schematically because definitions are not precise, different volunteer associations whose goal is mostly educative action or cultural development situated on the leisure time, and directed to all sorts of audience, children, youth and adults. Three big associations specially worked on this notion: the *Ligue de l’enseignement et de l’éducation permanente*, the CEMEA (Training Centre for active education methods) and above all *Peuple et Culture*, that published different books on Permanent education. Then, industrial world, through progressive captains of industry, get hold of the permanent education notion. They made it a quite synonym of adult education. During all the sixties, this idea was also being elaborated by first pioneer “formateurs” (adult educators), in some adult education institutions that were then created, notably in the CUCES-INFA of Nancy that will be presented here. Notice that this notion of permanent education was later studied besides others like ‘recurrent education’ at an international level, at the end of the sixties and in the seventies, mainly within the UNESCO (Forquin, 2002). Notice also that the French terms *Education permanente* was then translated into English *Lifelong education*.

The idea of permanent education met its peak in France in 1968. It was concretised through two law texts, the first in the *Loi d’orientation* in 12 November 1968, directly connected with the May-Events that gave to universities the “mission of permanent education”, in order to facilitate the return to studies for adults; the second in the 16 July 1971 law. This law was implemented following the inter-vocational agreement signed in 1970 between trade unions and employers upon continuing education and training. We will come back to it.

Before detailing the content, the dissemination then the decline of this idea, we would like to stress the tremendous hope of social transformation that many social actors put in the

¹ Popular Education in France is not at all connected with Paulo Freire ideas, like it can be the case by using this expression in some English literature. History of French Adult Education traditionally goes back to the 19th Century or even sometimes back to the French Revolution (notably the Condorcet Report of 1792).

permanent education project. Through permanent education it was question to take up the challenge of the educative system crisis, to change the pedagogic relation, to “awake”, to open to a richer life... Permanent education that was for some of these actors the main of 1971 law will, under economical pressure and stakes, be relegated in the background, then progressively forgotten to the benefit of other more narrow and immediate aims

I – Permanent education idea within the “CUCES-INFA Complex of Nancy”

What is the “CUCES-INFA Complex of Nancy”

In 1954 in Nancy, some personalities created an organism, the CUCES: University Centre for social and economical cooperation.² Among them there was heads of local education authorities and leaders of local industry. Nancy is a particular industrial area and the town then counted 6 post-graduate engineers schools. The goals of the founder of the CUCES were to move closer two worlds: industry world and University world. The CUCES began its work in 3 domains: increasing engineer students awareness on economical and social issues in companies; perfecting engineer’s and senior executive’s education; and, since 1956, what we called in France “promotion” i.e. complementary education through evening courses to lead workers becoming engineers.

In 1960, Bertrand Schwartz, who was then head of the *Ecole des Mines* of Nancy, a prestigious school of engineers, become head of the CUCES. Helped by a little team that he assembled himself mostly with some of this previous *Ecole des Mines* students, he undertook a radical reorientation of the organism and of the CUCES project, in the aim to face the “underdevelopment” of France in the domain of adult education. Indeed, in 1960 Bertrand Schwartz made a study travel in USA where he visited American universities and organisms opened to adult learners. He came back very impressed by what he had observed there, that was so different of what existed in France: i.e. then, nearly nothing in comparison. In a Constitutive paper, he announced a “general mobilisation for a general instruction” and developed an idea of “permanent education”. This latter was based, in a first stage, on education actions in the companies’ milieu, and then in a second stage, in collective education actions³ in Lorraine mining area that was in total conversion: mines were closing one after the other in the East of France during the 60s. The CUCES developed itself, employed a staff more and more important and multiplied its innovative actions in different ways.

In 1961, the Ministry of Education of the de Gaulle government, who was then Lucien Paye, visited Nancy and met Bertrand Schwartz. Interested in he’s ideas, he put B. Schwartz in charge of creating a new institution: the INFA (National institute for adult Education and training)⁴, with the aim to extend CUCES action to the whole France. Many administrative difficulties later, the INFA was officially created in 1963. CUCES and INFA were thought to be complementary; their mission was to develop, through both research and action, “permanent education”. This institutional complex had many difficulties to coordinate. Indeed working relations between researchers of INFA and adult educators (“formateurs”) of the CUCES were quite uneasy because of their different ways of thinking the relation between action and research. After May-1968, there had been a long dismantling process that ended in

² Actually they created two organisms: the CUCES which is a public university organism and the ACUCES which is an association (A is association of the CUCES), i.e. a private one, financed by other means. But the A was not visible during years, the two organisms were merged. The A appeared again in the acronym when the two organisms (CUCES and ACUCES) “divorced” in the beginning of the 70s.

³ ACF : *actions collectives de formation*

⁴ Institut national pour la formation des adultes

1973 with the closure of the INFA and with the division of the CUCES in two distinct bodies: the CUCES Institute on the one hand and the CUCES Association on the second hand.

How can CUCES-INFA' permanent education action be described?

Common characteristics can be found in each action:

- a focus on *conditions* in which adults, involved in working and social life, sometimes with unhappy schooling experience, really do *learn*. Year after year, the focus on specific difficulties encountered by adults with low qualification level was emphasized. This was, then, a very new way of thinking, indeed adult learning had not been, at least in France, thought as such previously.

- the *transfer of the location of education place*. It left the classroom in order to get the “*milieu* of life” (the word “*milieu*” is important, as it was used in popular education field), the working place first and then, the socio-professional milieu (with collective actions), i.e. involving all the economical, social and also political actors of a territory (a region or an employment basin).

- the will to *consider each problem in its entirety* that means for example the refusal of a separation between vocational training and general cultural and social education; or research and action; initial education and continuing education.

- at last, the most significant characteristic is to consider *training of trainers as basis* of the educational action. Indeed, the whole system imagined to lead France out of its underdevelopment in terms of adult education was based on mutual education, multiplied everywhere⁵. The solution consisting in opening existing (like university) or to be created institutions to a new adult audience was not promoted.

The inspiring sources of this particular approach were, themselves, numerous and not much theorized. The little founder team – that was constituted by engineers and by psychosociologists, however most of them previously of currently involved in popular education movements⁶ - took ideas from different existing schools and made an original synthesis with them. So, US TWI⁷ pragmatism was in close contact with popular education cultural activism (notably *Peuple et Culture*'s⁸ ideas) or educative activism (active education movements), the whole fed by contributions from human relations' school and Lewin's groups dynamic and, later, from Rogers' contribution. So we can see that American influence was real, however mixed with more national conceptions mostly embedded in activist action more than in theory.

A mythic experience

Why did this experience become almost mythic in the history of adult education? This is a question that led me all along my historical research. I can see three sets of answers.

The first is linked to the period and the conditions in which this experience occurred. There was almost nothing, at least into institutionalised forms. All was to be invented. In the same time, it was a prosperous period of fast growth; all opportunities were possible. Financial means, political support, social and economical demand: all tended to create optimal conditions of success, with reduced constraints. Bertrand Schwartz and his team occupied this free arena. If, considering their action from an institutional point of view, the way of doing

⁵ One (education or “instructor” like it was first called) who has to educate 10 who have to educate 100...

⁶ Notably in *Peuple et Culture* association

⁷ Training within Industry: short training programmes based on learning by doing; or its French adaptations that were much fashionable in the 50s in French industry.

⁸ *Peuple et Culture* is an important popular education association that was created at the end of the war in 1945.

looks rather haphazard. What is striking in the building of CUCES-INFA project is the furious energy put to find or to invent institutional patterns and status for adult education institution (CUCES and INFA and other body that would succeed them) that can both encourage and consolidate innovation. A status that can bring together what can't be mixed: flexibility, autonomy and initiative with social recognition, permanence and employees security... Innovative institutional forms were experimented. Thus, INFA was created. If its realisation did not correspond to its founder's expectations, it remains the first – and last⁹ – institution totally devoted to multi-disciplinary research on adult education. The AUREFA (Regional university associations for adult education and training¹⁰) was another try. They were supposed to replace both CUCES and INFA within a great National network. However, they had no more success because, although officially created by decree, they were born-dead in 1969. Yet, they put forward a permanent education coherent system, based on a far less commercial logic than the one that was chosen later, with continuing education and training law, in 1971.

The second set of responses, surely to be linked to the first one, is to be related not so much to the personality of each of the actors of this history, but to the combination of their complementarities and differences. Their biographies cross themselves at this precise moment of the history that gives them the opportunity to innovate together. Obviously, Bertrand Schwartz's personality nevertheless played a fundamental role. He knew how to organise the points of view-exchange, how to encourage creativity, how to entrust his team the missions he had in charge, and how to give all his complete confidence to sometimes very young and inexperienced people in whom he believed. The permanent education project of the Complex of Nancy was that way *collectively* lead, sometimes within conflicts, often within debate, however always with a tremendous energy.

Lastly, the violent end of the complex INFA-CUCES/ACUCES that was dismantled between 1968 and 1972, and the "diaspora" that ensued, played a large part in the myth making. Already weakened, the complex received the death blow when the 1971 law was implemented. Indeed, the institutionalisation of continuing vocational education and training (*formation professionnelle continue*) put an end to its exceptional status, by making commonplace an experience that was previously thought as extraordinary. Furthermore, this law opened to new choices of society (opening an adult education and training market) that were fundamentally different from those imagined through the AUREFA. So it turned a page of the history by opening a new era in which most of previous Complex of Nancy senior managers (those who were at the head of a team or of a project) will play leading roles. By occupying key positions in great companies or in the shadow of ministerial staffs, by having papers or books published, they contributed to mark a new field; and to build the basis of a new culture that draws from this mythic history source. The Journal *Education permanente*, that was created within CUCES-INFA in 1969, and still exists, survived the Complex for long and played a major part in this process. Previous members of the staff of the CUCES-INFA were indeed for a long time involved in this journal. One or two still remain today (notably the current editor).

In tension between social and educative aims and response to economical needs

The Complex of Nancy action was a response to the State demand (1959 Social promotion law) as well as a strong social demand. This latter demand was heterogeneous;

⁹ After its closure in 1973, equivalent institution was never created. Research in adult education was onwards scattered in different places without coordination.

¹⁰ Also imagined by the same team.

however its different components succeeded to meet in a way seemingly based on consensus. Economical issues (industry modernisation) coincided with some social and cultural issues that can briefly be defined as a shared willing to “unblock” the society. In fact, it was not so urgent to locate adult education in the political arena. Priority was given to action. The goals and of the consequences of adult education were not really questioned, perhaps because they were considered as “obvious” from the outset by the first INFA-CUCES staff: adult education was aim to educate people to change their “milieu”.

The May-1968 Events made this consensual veneer being blown to pieces and put into questions the generosity of the permanent education project. In Nancy the staff of the CUCES and the INFA participated actively in the strikes and the demonstrations. The CUCES-INFA began to be considered as a nest of leftists. The first consequence was economical: Bertrand Schwartz left the confidence of industrialists and heads of administration. For the first time, they found potential danger in the CUCES action, in the declared aim of educating “change agents” who “have taken awareness of their social actor quality”. Internally, critiques and tensions between different members that already existed reached their heights. We have to underline that, from a handful of people that made up the whole team at the beginning of the 60’s, the CUCES-INFA workforce had increased up to 150 people. Tensions in May 1968 were essentially about the question: “change agent or policeman?”¹¹ as it was written on the walls of the town. An ambivalent position consisting in a double refusal was adopted by CUCES-INFA workforce in the weeks after May-1968, in numerous meetings where goals were finally debated. Through lack of agreement, a compromise solution was chosen: trainers¹² were not activists neither were they technicians without soul or critical thought. So they stood on tightrope, attempting to conciliate pedagogical and pragmatic approaches by taking into account social, technical and economical factors. Trainers were invited to multiply their efforts towards the adult education so-called “*non-public*”, in others words those who never benefited of education actions: less qualified workers and women that were sharply discovered. This new position, described as “intermediary and of reformist or neutral type” as written in a text in June 1968, contributed to weaken at the same time the trainers denounced blindness as well as their enthusiasm and to diminish the scale of the project. Otherwise, it showed the necessity to deepen the “adult education theory” that was supposed to lead action in a less ideological way.

In the same time Bertrand Schwartz as head of theses institutions – so representing the contested authority - was strongly critiqued. This episode hurt him and he progressively began to take distance with the Nancy complex. He joined the minister Edgar Faure as adviser in the National Education Minister cabinet. He took his part in the building of the 1968 Loi d’orientation. This new position, close to the state powers, allowed him to make some of his projects go forward, notably the AUREFA project that benefited from the support of the Minister up to his replacement by Olivier Guichard some month later.

School as negative model and adult education

Generally in the texts produced in the 60’s and 70’s on adult education, the theme of the school as a negative model is omnipresent, within the CUCES-INFA or elsewhere. In the same time, the permanent education project brings the explicit hope that it will change the school, by introducing there new praxis, methods and settings experimented in adult education.

¹¹ There’s a pun in this slogan for policeman in French is Police agent.

¹² The word *formateur* (trainer) began to spread in the second part of the 60’s

Critique of School system was based on its bureaucratic and centralised functioning and developed a questioning on traditional teaching and pedagogy. Two themes were representative of this critique:

- the “school knowledge” which was considered as inappropriate, because cut into isolated sections and cut from the social reality,
- and the necessity to rethink the teacher/pupil relation.

It led to define a new logic relation between three poles: knowledge, learner, and trainer.

The idea that knowledge can be *transmitted* was also questioned. Constructivist, socio-constructivist approaches were preferred: people do build their own knowledge by themselves or with their peers. Self-education, mutual education, self-evaluation was favoured practices inside CUCES-INFA and some significant adult education institutions.

In these conditions it is not surprising that the theme of “rapport au savoir” (relationship to knowledge¹³) arose in the middle of the 60’s in the milieu of adult education, within the CUCES-INFA before spreading later throughout the whole educative sphere. Effectively, one of the sources of this notion, which was essentially thought in the CUCES-INFA through the theme of trainer-trainee relation, is the question of the relation to the authority given by the knowledge and of the relation between power and knowledge. In the case of an adult/adult relation the question of dominant/dominated; knowledge owner/ignorant, an unbalanced relation appeared more acutely than in the case of an adult/child relation.

II – Towards Vocational continuing education and Lifelong « Education and Training »

In 1970, employers and trade unions agreed about the development of means for the workers’ education and training. This agreement will largely be taken again and widen by of the 1971 law, also named Delors’s Law¹⁴, implementing the “organisation of vocational continuing education and training¹⁵, *in the framework of permanent education*”. With this law, companies began the main education and training development actors. Indeed, within a joint device, gathering State, trade unions and employers, they are obliged to finance their employees’ education and training actions.

The first article of the 1971 law is opening on a solemn declaration: vocational permanent education and training constitutes a *national commitment* and precises that it is addressed to young and adult *workers*, already engaged in “active life” or to those who are entering it. Its definition is very open, not only limited to vocational aspects:

“Continuing vocational education and training is part of permanent education. Its aim is to allow workers adaptation to technical and working condition changes, to encourage their social promotion by giving access to different culture and vocational qualification levels and their contribution to cultural, economical and social development.” This very sentence is then taken again in the booklet IX of working code (working rights).

Issues of education and training rights in the paid working time, joint to the idea of social promotion brought to a large social consensus. Despite some rare voices expressing reservations or worry about the opening of a “market” of education and training, 1971 law is

¹³ This notion appears to be rather close to “one’s way of knowing” as it has been explored in English literature or “personal epistemology” when psychology is not the only underlying reference theory. Berstein and Bourdieu’s “relationship to language” could be considered as one of the sources. However philosophers (with their “relationship to the world”), Foucault and the psychoanalysis (notably Lacan) provided other important roots to this notion which is now widespread in France in the domain of educational sciences.

¹⁴ This law was called by his name, although Jacques Delors was responsible for this law no as a politician but as the social adviser at the Prime Minister Jacques Chaban Desmas cabinet.

¹⁵ The French word « Formation » encompasses Education *and* training

greeted as a very significant social progress (Terrot, 1995; de Lescure, 2004). Furthermore, the idea of permanent education contained in the title and in the first article of the law was bringing a social change hope as Jacques Delors would express it in several papers. And yet, adult continuing education and training will become obvious mainly in the field of work and employment. With the financing obligation, companies get also the liberty to direct education and training actions towards better productivity, the salaries however keeping a little freedom margin thanks to the “Congé de formation” (education and training leave¹⁶) created by the 1971 law. To meet the main demand education and training offer were progressively narrowed: vocational skill improvement, adaptability to the workplace, the concern of employability has grown under the pressure of the 80’s employment crisis. All other aims (social education, cultural and personal development, citizenship participation via education) were rejected in the margins or in the private sphere, without consistent means. Moreover, despite the generous aims put in the foreground, all sociological surveys realised upon the audience have shown inequalities in the access to adult education and training. The aim to give a “second chance” by continuing education did not reach the reality, less qualified and less graduated are also the ones who benefit the less from the system. Women and employees in the very small firms are also disadvantaged. Several times revised, current devise remains today mostly the same as 1971’s. However, a “new” right, the DIF (*Droit à la formation professionnelle*: vocational training right) was implemented in a 2004 law. This DIF was added to the pre-existing edifice, that it individualises still more. In the same time, the DIF re-introduces the idea that the workers have the “possibility” to participate in education and training programmes *outside of their working time*, being *partially* paid, according to the situation that constituted the rules before 1971 law, in the sixties...

In the same time, parallel to those national evolutions, the European Commission launched in 2001 the Lifelong learning European space. Although open to every forms of learning and qualification, personal, civics, social or linked to employment, the last ones are occupying the larger room in this space, at least in the texts that promote it. French as European worker is not only encouraged to educate him/herself, but also to take a part more and more important in the success or the fail of his/her inclusion in the work world and in the new “knowledge economy”.

To conclude, let us enlighten that it is noticeable that the expression “Lifelong Learning” is translated in French “*Education et formation tout au long de la vie*” (All lifelong *Education and Training*), so not so far from Condorcet’s expression (1792) “Education à tous les âges de la vie” (Education at any age of life). The focus on *learning* doesn’t appear because “*apprentissage*” which is the literal translation of *learning* means something else. The *apprentissage* is a specific programme of vocational education for young people between 14 and 18 years old, alternatively at work and at school. Using this term in French wouldn’t fit. This detail of translation is not so insignificant because it puts differently the question of the pre-eminence of learning upon setting, like things are debated in the Anglo-Saxon world. However, the same issues of individualising, or of making people responsible for their employment are at stake. There is an attempt to create new words or expression to reach the English meaning of learning like for example the neologism “*apprenance*” (that could be heard as “the action of learning”) as well as the term *governance* was recently created in French. Future will tell us if these expressions will be adopted in the long term¹⁷. It will also

¹⁶ According to the 1971 law, employees can leave their work for an education and training action either on their employer initiative (enterprise education plan) or on their own initiative (conge de formation)

¹⁷ The word “*apprenant*” to mean learners, who was introduced in the 80’s, tends to be adopted nowadays in the adult education milieu

tell us if the idea of permanent education, as a global vision and humanistic conception, will be definitively forgotten.

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