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Spanish contexts of Adult Education: trends towards democratisation

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Abstract

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This text is focused on examining the relevance of the trends towards democratisation in the Adult Education context of Spain. After giving a description of the legal frame, the text develops a brief explanation of the different models which coexist in Adult Education centres. In particular, the author emphasises the relevance of the social model in the Spanish contexts of Adult Education, as it is starting from high expectations about the learners' capacities and based on the participant's rights. This social model adopts, as main reference, the international results and agreements on the field and is contributing to develop measures to extend the educational opportunities to all adults. In that sense, it is explained the relevance of the Movement of Democratic Education, led by CONFAPEA (Confederation of Adult Education Participant's Associations), in promoting changes in the Adult Education field. This movement, which is contributing to the extension of the social model, is strengthening the participant's voices in the design and organisation of the Adult Education centres and practices, and thus, is becoming a clear evidence of the trends towards democratisation that are taking place in the Spanish AE in the XXI century.

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This essay provides an overview of different fields related to Adult Education (AE) in Spain as well as an approximation to the trends towards democratisation in AE, which will be the main core of the presentation within the International Course: *Spanish contexts of Adult Education: trends towards democratisation*.

Legislation

The Spanish Constitution (1978) established a decentralised model of state organisation, which means that, from that moment on, several Autonomous Communities¹ acquired competencies in educational matters and took control of the educational system at the regional level. By this, competencies in education and adult education are mainly decentralised into autonomous communities' governments, although laws established at the national level are valid in all these regional governments. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Science is still the national reference in policies on adult and continuing education, and has the *Servicio de Formación Permanente. Área de Formación a lo Largo de la Vida* [Service of Continuous Education. Lifelong Learning Area]. This service is coordinated together with other public administrations with competencies in the field.

In Spain there is no a specific act in Adult Education at a national level. The legal framework is mainly regulated by the *Ley Orgánica 2/2006 de Educación* (LOE 2006), which has dedicated one section to AE (chapter IX, articles 66-70). According to this section, adult education is understood as a provider of a basic education, as a way to extend and improve skills acquired through continuing education and as a mechanism to access to different branches of the educational system. It is also understood that adult education allows for the development of competencies for the social, cultural and economic participation of people and to reinforce their right for a democratic citizenship. At the same time, its role as a way to overcome social exclusion is also emphasized. In addition, this act regulates the procedures to guarantee that adults can have a secondary education offer specifically addressed to them, based on mobility and transparency criteria. For that reason, this act also includes the resolution of providing a distance education offer through the information and communication technologies in order to supply an effective answer to the need of continuous education for adult learners.

The *Ley de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo* (LOGSE 1990), already included a title dedicated to adult education, which made the move from the remedial to a transformative conception of Adult Education. This move was made after the theorisation of the unlevelling effect. The remedial conception stated that the solution for the future was to increase and improve the educational provision of younger generations which will be the adults of the future. The transformative conception demonstrated that the successive reforms that increase the educational level of younger generations provoke an increase of the number of adults that do not have the new required educational level. As a consequence, the need of AE is not a consequence of the deficiencies of the past, but an increasing component of the present and future development of our knowledge society. Following this conception, different specific Adult Education Acts have been developed in some autonomous communities: in Andalucía (BOJA, 6-VIII-1991), País Valencià (DOGV, 31-I-1995), Catalunya (DOGC, 27-III, 1992), Galicia (DOG, 6-VIII-1992), and the Islas Canarias (BOC, 15-VII-1994).

¹ Nowadays, the Spanish state is organised in 19 Autonomous Communities or regions.

The new act (LOE 2006) is introducing the recognition of the different ways of learning that adults have and of the need to establish ways to acknowledge the competencies acquired in these different forms of learning. It has enabled the improvement of the legal frame for the definition of accreditation policies.

Other legal references had been approved with an impact in the development of AE:

- *Ministerial Order 16/2/1996 and Regulation 17/4/1996* which regulate literacy and the consolidation of knowledge and basic instrumental techniques. These legal texts establish the organisation and contents of basic education addressed to adult learners, distinguishing amongst level 1 (literacy) and level 2 (consolidation of knowledge and basic instrumental techniques).
- *Real Order 1631/2006*: In the first additional disposal, it is established the minimum learning offer in the Compulsory Secondary Education addressed to adults.
- *Real Order 135/2002* which regulates the test to obtain the Secondary Education Degree for Adults.

These are some of the main legal texts which regulate Adult Education in Spain. However, some of these acts have generated debates and controversies within the adult education movement as in some cases, adult learners consider that these texts are not answering to their educational needs or are not providing an adult education of quality really accessible to all. Therefore, it is important to mention that several efforts have been done in Spain addressed to democratize AE research and practice, as it is illustrated with the [CONFAPEA](#) (Confederation of Federations and Associations of Participants in Democratic Adult Education and Culture) movement, explained below.

Educational Institutions

AE is provided in different educational settings in Spain: adult education centres, popular universities, centres developing social initiatives, trade-unions, neighbourhood associations, non-profit organisations ... When the educational provision is addressed to reach one of the degrees included in the *Ley Orgánica 2/2006 de Educación*, it should be provided by the educational centres authorised by the administration with competencies in the field.

Regarding the adult education centres, the most of them are public ones and are managed following the *school model* or the *social model* (Medina 1997). The main differences amongst both models refer to the understanding of the adult learning process and in the organisation of the AE centres. The school model, which was the most common in the past and it is still present in the most AE centres, considers AE as an educational process which has to provide adults with an education which they had not had the opportunity to acquire before. AE is considered thus as a second chance based on a compensatory understanding and on an approach based on the adult learners' deficits. The class schedules are mainly organised according to time preferences and interests of educators.

By contrast, the social model starts from high expectations about the learners' capacities and tries to bridge amongst different educational formats and modalities (basic education, continuing education, leisure activities, attendance or distance ...), extending the educational opportunities to all adults. In this context, classes are planned according to time preferences of adult learners

to facilitate their attendance. The social model considers that people who participate in an adult learning process have many competencies, skills and knowledge which can enrich the learning context and the learning process itself. It is based on participants' rights and adopt as main reference the international research results and agreements on the field. Educators establish close connections with the community, allowing the access of volunteers to the schools, and perform their task assuming the transformative character of education at the individual and social level.

La Verneda-Sant Martí School for Adults (see Sánchez 1999) is an internationally recognized example of social model of AE centre. *La Verneda*, named after the working-class neighbourhood of Barcelona where it is placed, is a learning community, based on the full involvement of adult learners ("participants") in the decision-making processes and in the management of the centre (through two participants' associations, *Agora* and *Heura*), and on the definition of different democratic school bodies, as assemblies, school councils and working teams, managed by the participants themselves, where listening and taking into account the voices of the most excluded is prioritised. This school is providing a wide offer of formal and non-formal education provision, from basic literacy to the preparation of the test to enter the university, and from literary circles to crafts workshops. Its approach and understanding of AE allows the reaching of a high quality education, which responds to the needs of a wide range of adult learners' profiles, and it is also promoting social transformation within the community, partly promoted by the high involvement of volunteers in the school activities.

Financing Adult Education

The current educational law (LOE 2006, art. 66) includes the need to provide an offer on basic and non-compulsory education to all learners older than 18 which want to acquire, complete or improve the knowledge and skills needed for their professional and personal development. It also contemplates this provision in the distance modality. In addition, art. 155 is including the commitment of the public authorities to provide the educational system as a whole with the necessary financing resources to comply with the stipulations of this law.

Finally, the Ministry of Education and Science is providing with economic resources through grants and contractual agreements to different associations and organisations which are providing with an adult education offer of the public administration track. Associations and organisations offering different forms of AE are also asking for grants or participating in competitive projects at the national and European level to complement their resources.

Provision

The AE provision in Spain includes training activities at the formal or non-formal level, as well as initiatives addressed to prepare adults for specific tests which allow obtaining degrees or to access to specific education programs.

The *Ley Orgánica 2/2006 de Educación* establishes a list on main objectives to be answered through adult education, giving to it a similar treatment as to the rest of educational provisions

included in the educational system. This offer is managed by the Autonomous Community governments or by the Ministry of Education and Science in some specific competences. Thus, the provision on AE in Spain is organised as follows²:

- **Formal education:**

- o Basic education
 - Level 1: Literacy (attendance). *Contents:* Literacy and new-readers. *Duration:* Without temporal limit.
 - Level 2: Consolidation of knowledge and instrumental techniques (attendance or distance). *Contents:* Language and Literature, Maths and Natural and Social Sciences. *Duration:* 1 academic year (extended to 2).
 - Level 3: Secondary Education for Adults (in two modalities: attendance or distance). *Contents:* It includes different fields: Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences and Languages. *Duration:* 4 periods of 4 months. This education provision (organised around modules) allows obtaining the *Graduado en Educación Secundaria (GES)* [Secondary Education Degree].

- o Post-compulsory education:
 - High School Degree (*Bachillerato*) (art. 69 LOE)
 - Vocational Training (*Formación Profesional*):
 - Intermediate Vocational Training
 - Higher Vocational Training
 - Other workshops addressed to improve professional skills
 - Social Guarantee Programs (for those learners which have abandoned the secondary compulsory education without obtaining its degree, in order to facilitate them the access to further vocational programmes)

The Centre for Innovation and Development of Distance Education (**CIDEAD**), which depends on the Ministry of Education and Science, is providing Secondary Education for Adults and the High School Degree Programme in its distance modality with an open and flexible methodology. This body is also in charge of designing and producing didactic resources.

- o Initiatives for the preparation of specific tests:
 - o Training for the preparation of the tests addressed to access to the Intermediate and High Vocational Training Programmes.
 - o Training for the preparation of the tests addressed to access to the High School Degree Programme.
 - o Training for the preparation of the test addressed to access to University for Adults older than 25.

- o Spanish for immigrants: specific courses for people from other countries who wish to learn Spanish. These courses are taking place in Adult Education Centres and have specific materials edited by the Ministry of Education and Science.
- o Courses on other languages: i.e. The Catalan government is promoting courses for learning Catalan.

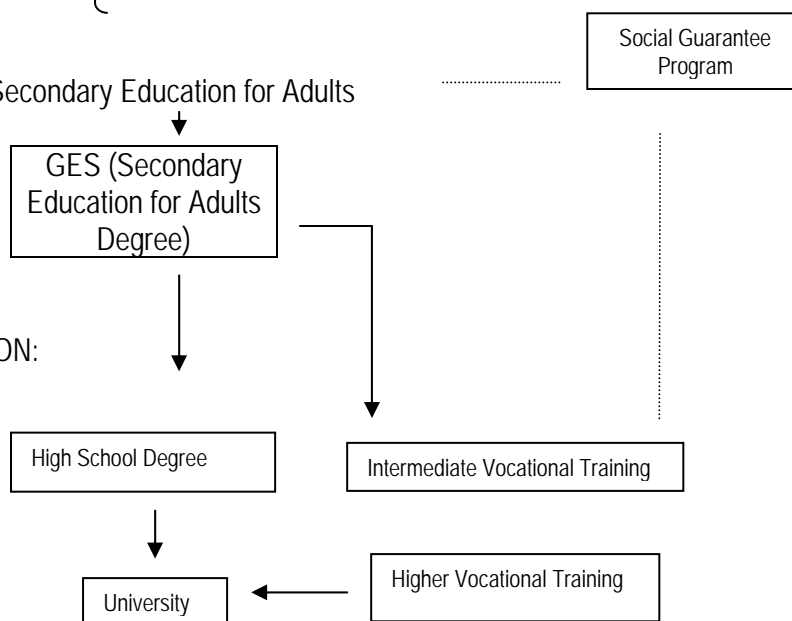
² <http://www.mec.es/educa/jsp/plantilla.jsp?id=170&area=sistema-educativo&contenido=/sistema-educativo/eadul/ig/ens/eebpa.html>

BASIC ADULT EDUCATION:

- Level 1 and 2 }
 - Literacy
 - Consolidation of Knowledges

- Level 3: Secondary Education for Adults

POST-COMPULSORY EDUCATION:



- **Non-formal education:** This offer includes a wide variety of courses which have as a main objective the personal development for an active participation at the social, political and economical level. The courses provided are defined according with the demands of the target groups.

Despite the educational provisions offered, adult education movements are suggesting changes in some of them, as in some cases it is considered they are not reasonably answering to the need of flexibility and provision of an education of quality for all adult learners. Amongst the several movements on AE in Spain, namely FEUP – Federación Española de Universidades Populares, FAEA – Federación de Asociaciones de Personas Adultas and the CONFAPEA and REDA – Red de Educación Democrática de Personas Adultas [Network for Democratic Adult Education], special emphasis is granted to this last movement. This is due to the fact that these two organisations (REDA and CONFAPEA) are giving voice to adult learners – and specially focusing on the most excluded among these – in the decision-making processes followed in the adult education field, according to the democratizing trend explored here.

Indeed, the REDA has as main aims the promotion of a pedagogic renovation in the field of adult education, as well as giving support to the adult learner's organisations in order to not replace their voices in the decision-making processes affecting them and to create the conditions for a greater democracy in AE centres and entities. REDA is working on collaboration with CONFAPEA, mainly to improve the equal opportunities of the most vulnerable groups, supporting the decisions taken by these groups.

CONFAPEA is composed by federations and cultural and educational associations in which the decision-making processes and the management of projects are led by adult learners ("participants") without university degree (as being the ones in a more disadvantaged position)

and who are not receiving a salary for their involvement in the management of the AE projects. They are participating as volunteers in these projects and are not pursuing their own interest but the improvement of the quality of AE for all. Some examples of the way participants' voices are included in the Democratic Adult Education are obtained from European projects or activities managed by members of CONFAPEA, as FACEPA (Federation of Cultural and Adult Education Associations): i.e. the elaboration of the Participants Bill of Rights (1999), the creation of the Manifesto for an intercultural adult education in Europe (Who speaks 2003), or the Manifest for our literacy (2000-2002)³.

Participation

According to the statistical data⁴ corresponding to 2005 and 2006 (published in the last statistics of the Ministry of Education and Science, 2007), the number of adult learners in adult and distance education is distributed as follows (in both public and private centres):

<i>Adult learners registered in formal adult education (all types of centres)</i>	
Basic Education	
Literacy. Level 1	93.918
Consolidation of knowledge. Level 2	53.800
Secondary Education Degree for Adults (GES). Level 3. Attendance modality	83.224
Secondary Education Degree for Adults (GES). Level 3. Distance modality	40.611
Preparation for the test to obtain the GES	7.834
Spanish for immigrants	39.955
Catalan language	12.150
Preparation for the University access test for Adults older than 25	10.279
Preparation for the Intermediate Vocational Training access test	3.391
Preparation for the Higher Vocational Training access test	10.590
Other professional trainings	24.505
Total	380.257
<i>Adult learners registered in non-formal education</i>	141.701

These figures are showing an important participation of adult learners mainly in basic adult education. The distribution of the participation in formal AE amongst public and private centres during 2005-2006 was as follows:

<i>Adult learners registered in formal AE</i>				
	Public	%	Private	%
Total	367.611	96.0	12.644	3.35

Regarding this distribution in one of the post-compulsory education programmes (High School Degree), it is as follows:

³ <http://www.facepa.org/eng/6eng.htm#trobadang>

⁴ http://www.mec.es/mecd/jsp/plantilla.jsp?id=310&area=estadisticas&contenido=/estadisticas/educativas/eenu/result_det/2005/resultados.html

<i>Adult Learners registered in the High School Degree (distance modality) (2005-2006)</i>			
(from 18 to +)	Total	Public Centres	Private Centres
Total	35.129	33.489	1.640
Males	17.080	16.320	760
Females	18.049	17.169	880

These figures are showing the predominance of the public offer in contrast with the private one.

Staff

Teachers on AE have diverse profiles in Spain, answering to the diverse AE offer. Their professional situation varies according to the educational programs they are providing and to the characteristics of the educational institutions in which they are developing their jobs. Teachers working in public schools must have an undergraduate degree in Primary School Teaching, as there is not a specific Degree on Adult Education at the undergraduate level.

In addition, in order to teach within the Secondary Education for Adults Programme, teachers must have a bachelors degree in the subject they are teaching (i.e. History, Biology, Spanish Languages ...), as well as having passed a course for pedagogical capability.

<i>Teachers by gender in public and private centres on AE (2005-2006)</i>								
All Centres			Public Centres			Private Centres		
Male Teachers	Female Teachers	Total	Male Teachers	Female Teachers	Total	Male Teachers	Female Teachers	Total
4.014	7.286	11.300	3.701	6.554	10.255	313	732	1.046

Finally, it is important to mention that the social and democratic model on AE is including another profile: the volunteers, who collaborate within the institution providing AE without remuneration and allowing a greater involvement of the community within the schools. They are not replacing professionals, but in many cases contributing to publicise the need of more job posts in the field, and enriching the learning process of participants.

Research and Higher Education

In 1990 the *Grupo 90* emerged, composed by a group of professors at different Spanish Universities⁵ which had the objective to promote a social research model within the field of AE, enforcing the participation of Spanish AE researchers at the international scientific community.

⁵ This group is formed by scholars from the Universidad del País Vasco, Universidad de Barcelona, UNED-Madrid, Universidad de Murcia, Universidad Castilla-la Mancha, Universidad de Valladolid, Universidad de Salamanca, Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, Universidad de la Coruña, Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, Universidad de Oviedo, Universidad de las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Universidad de Valencia, Universidad de Zaragoza, Universidad de Almería, Universidad de Tarragona, Universidad de Córdoba.

Since then, this group is developing an interdisciplinary and inter-institutional research work addressed to find ways based on research findings to extend the social adult education model (see "[Trends towards democratisation](#)").

CREA, Centre of Research in Theories and Practices for the Overcoming of Inequalities at the University of Barcelona, is member of the *Grupo 90*, and has been widely developing research with this aim, in collaboration with CONFAPEA which coordinates adult learners ("participants") associations at the national level. Researchers from CREA have also collaborated with authors such as Freire, Beck, Butler, Giroux, Searle or Touraine and have been internationally active in conferences, seminars and meetings, contributing to the scientific debate on different fields, including Adult Education. Some of the theoretical contributions developed which respond to this social and democratic understanding of AE are the dialogic learning (Flecha 2000) or the dialogic feminism (Beck-Gernsheim/Butler/Puigvert 2003).

In this research field CREA has also introduced the communicative research methodology (Flecha/Gómez 2004), which is based on the need to contrast the existing knowledge in the scientific community with the interpretation about this knowledge on AE with adult learners and AE educators. Objectivity on these analyses is reached through discussion amongst researchers and these social agents, who are included alongside all the stages of the research project. The use of the communicative methodology in research on AE has reached relevant impacts on the scientific level, promoting scientific discussions with authors or debates on the frame of research projects, and also into the practice of AE.

The scientific community in Spain has seen the need of giving adult education research an interdisciplinary view as well as to closely collaborate with social movements. Nowadays, adult education in Spain is considered a main area within the broader field of education, with a solid and rigorous theoretical framework. Its reputation is well-known by the scientific community both at the national and the international level.

International Contacts

Spanish scholars are increasingly working within networks and transnational projects within the European Research Framework Programmes or within Grundtvig and Leonardo da Vinci Sub-Programmes, amongst other EU programmes. Their works are answering to the priorities defined by the European Commission.

AE educators and adult learners participating in non-profit organisations or adult education centres are also establishing contacts at the international level through their involvement in the management and development of European projects or of transnational initiatives addressed to promote the overcoming of barriers within AE and to guarantee the democratisation of this field. We can find several examples: from European projects coordinated by participant's organisations as Agora, which led, among others, the project *ABE-Campus (Virtual Adult Basic Education Communities in Europe)* (2003-2005) to international practices as the exchange Verneda-Porto Alegre, which is a project undertaken between the Verneda-St. Martí School for Adults and two AE centres in Porto Alegre (Brasil) to share educational experiences and to make progress towards the end of adult illiteracy.

On the other hand, it is also important to mention the Spanish participation in, amongst others, the following international organisations:

- ERDI (Consortium of European Research and Development Institutes of Adult Education)
- ESREA (European Society for Research on the Education of Adults)
- OEI (Iberian-American Organization for Education, Science and Culture)
- PEN (Popular Education Network)
- EAEA (European Association for Education of Adults)
- UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)

Trends towards democratisation

In 2000 the 1st Tri-Conference for the Democratic Adult Education was held in Barcelona. Adult education scholars and researchers, trainers and participants met together for the first time to discuss the future of the Democratic Adult Education in Spain. This event was the starting point of the Democratic Adult Education movement in Spain, after several years of adult learner's work, organising themselves at the regional and national level. Indeed, for many years, adult learners have defended their right to a quality and democratic education and to fully participate in society. In Catalonia, in addition to FACEPA (established in 1986), an AE trainers association, AEPA (Association of Education for Adults) was also created at the beginning of the 1980s to promote a social model of AE and to overcome the former school model. This was the beginning of intensive debates about the present and future trends of AE in Spain.

The 1st Tri-Conference (2000) was organised by CONFAPEA with the support of the REDA educators' network and the GRUPO 90 university network. Since then, this conference has taken place every three years, addressed to promote the democratisation of research and practice on adult education.

This movement is supporting thus the extension of a social model of AE instead of a school model. As seen above, it means that an AE model based on adult's competencies rather than on deficits is promoted, contributing not only to the participants' personal development but also to the social transformation. With this approach, efforts are done to strengthen all participants' voices in the design and organisation of AE centres, mainly of these people who have been traditionally excluded of these decision-making spaces. One example of the impact of this approach in the practice is the fact that CONFAPEA states that every association or educational centre which wishes to join this Confederation should assume the Ethical Code for Democratic Adult Education and The Participants Bill of Rights. Another example is found in the organisation, each year, of The *Literacy Congress of Participant people on Adult Education* or every two years of the *Literary dialogical circles Congresses* managed by adult learners associations: the first one aimed to discuss relevant issues of literacy programs where the main protagonists are the participants in these literacy programs, and the second addressed to disseminate the experience of the Dialogical Literary Circles, which have been internationally recognised as a way to democratize the access to classic literature and culture to all adults.

Consequently, this movement is setting forward the agenda of the Spanish adult education for the 21st century, addressing a common goal shared by scholars, trainers and participants to promote an inclusive and democratic adult education for all.

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Websites

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EAEA: <http://www.eaea.org/>
ERDI: <http://www.die-bonn.de/erdi/>
ESREA: <http://www.esrea.org/>
FACEPA: <http://www.facepa.org/eng/index2eng.htm>
Literacy Congress of Participant people on Adult Education:
<http://www.facepa.org/eng/4eng.htm#litera>
Literary Dialogical Circles Congresses: <http://www.facepa.org/eng/4eng.htm#literary>
OEI: <http://www.oei.es/>
REDA: <http://innova.usal.es/courses/31REDA/>
UNESCO: <http://www.unesco.org>
Virtual Adult Basic Education Communities in Europe: <http://www.basicampus.net/>
Who speaks. The voices of immigrants on adult education: <http://www.neskes.net/whospeaks/>

Abbreviations

AE: Adult Education
AEPA: Associació d'Educació de Persones Adultes [Association of Education for Adults]
CIDEAD: Centro para la Innovación y Desarrollo de la Educación a Distancia [Centre for Innovation and Development of Distance Education]
CONFAPEA: Confederación de Federaciones y Asociaciones de Personas Participantes en Educación y Cultura Democrática de Personas Adultas [Confederation of Federations and Associations of Participants in Democratic Adult Education and Culture]
CREA-UB: Centre de Recerca en Teories i Pràctiques Superadores de Desigualtats de la Universitat de Barcelona [Centre of Research in Theories and Practices for the Overcoming of Inequalities at the University of Barcelona]
FACEPA: Federació d'Associacions Culturals i Educatives de Persones Adultes [Federation of Cultural and Adult Education Associations]
FAEA: Federación de Asociaciones de Personas Adultas
FEUP: Federación Española de Universidades Populares
GES: Graduado en Educación Secundaria [Secondary Education Degree]
LOE: Ley Orgánica de Educación
LOGSE: Ley de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo
REDA: Red de Educación Democrática de Personas Adultas [Network for Democratic Adult Education]