

RESEARCH

THE PRESS AS AN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE

Complexity and Pertinence of Its Use in Adult Education

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Abstract:

This article presents empirical research that is based theoretically on the use of the press in the curriculum of basic education for adults. It forms part of a broad study recently completed at the Galician Autonomous Community in Spain, on teaching activity that is focused on earning the two basic secondary school diplomas: *Graduado Escolar* and *Graduado en Educación Secundaria*. The study represents significant advancement in the knowledge of the dynamics of using the press in adult education, and well as in understanding this situation. The principal findings are referents for including the press as a didactic resource, and contribute to the debate on the complexity and pertinence of the press in basic education for adults.

Key words: adult education, mass media, the press, didactic materials, Spain.

Introduction

In Spain, organic law 1/1990 (dated October 3, regarding the general organization of the educational system in its Title III of Adult Education, article 52 (*Boletín Oficial del Estado* number 28, dated October 4) presents the priority lines of intervention for adult education: updating or acquisition of basic education; improvement in professional qualifications and/or preparation for new professions; and development of training for participating in social, cultural, political and economic life. These guidelines of action are considered by the above law in an independent manner, and allow adults to select their preferred educational setting as a function of their needs and aspirations.

In a society of permanent change, however, the links and connections among different lines of intervention in educating adults must work together in a timely manner. Education has been related to employment with increasingly greater frequency; thus Jabonero (1993) echoes the existing articulation between the employment world and the educational system which, at least in our country, takes the form of the correspondence established between the required earning of a degree and the job. In addition, Gairín (1989) reminds us that adult education is a social process since its reality is linked to the needs and possibilities of the local community. Therefore, adult education must be developed gradually, in the most holistic manner possible. In this sense, the curricular integration of the media serves as a bridge between the various areas of intervention covered by the above law, and the social/employment world in which adults are immersed.

The mass media, and the press in particular have great potential as a didactic resource (Agnés y Savino, 1988; Jurado y Gilabert, 1994; Sevillano y Bartolomé, 1997a; Ricoy, 2002). Thus we consider it relevant to research adult education and the dynamics that involve the use of the press in learning; in this sense, our challenge is to discover the fundamental lines of action in which the press is used as a didactic resource in the basic education of adults.

The press is present in a comprehensible format that is close to all citizens; it compiles the events of the immediate surroundings and the most impressive world news, but its contextualized nature, colloquial language, simple and familiar support are the elements that facilitate its use and make it of interest for adults. Thus the integration of this medium in adults' basic education assumes a unique manner for both teachers and students to approach the press.

The format presented by the press is planned for use by adults, and its content and price are attainable by almost all of our citizens. Such aspects clash, however, with the press' lack of trajectory in educating adults, as proven by the reduced number of publications, articles and research studies regarding the use of the press in adult education, in contrast with those dedicated to elementary and secondary school students (Nieto, 1986; Bautista, 1989; Santos y Pinto, 1992; Bartolomé, 1996) (who nonetheless are not offered methodical, extensive and continual use of the press at school).

Thus, as we indicated, part of our interest in this research is centered on studying the potentials and controversies involving the press as a didactic resource in basic adult education. The starting point of this research activity was the vacuum surrounding its possibilities and limitations.

The presence of the press in the daily context, as we have pointed out, is a fact. Therefore, its characteristics as well as those of the other mass media assume a constant, direct influence on adult students. In addition, we must emphasize its validity as teaching/learning material; i.e., its importance in critical education in today's complex and plural society. Didactic resources in adult education accept diverse options in their nature, origin, format and use, although this diversity should not be an impediment for having specific curricular material (Ricoy y Feliz, 1999). We sustain that the use of resources created for non-educational purposes can be necessary and ideal for the teaching/learning process.

Frame of Reference

To allow the reader to understand the current situation of adult education in Spain and the integration of the media in the curriculum, we shall present a brief approximation.

This article centers on adult education, which officially is oriented to compensating for the failures of elementary education by attempting to provide the population with basic elements. The meaning of this compensation has been to offer the minimal level of education considered elementary, using as a legal reference the ordinary curriculum of compulsory education. In this manner, specific education for adults becomes a difficult challenge. In Spain, this education is known as "basic adult education" and culminates with the acquisition of the elementary diploma.

We must realize that it is not usual to find research, or even experiences, that include the double topic we are studying. This is a limitation we accept in approaching the frame of reference from the complexity and pertinence of using the press in adult education. In Spain's universities, most experts work with lines of research independent from adult education (Ferrández, Gairín, Medina, Ramírez, Sarramona, among others) and from the didactic use of the printed media (Rodríguez Diéguez, Sevillano, Bartolomé, Ballesta, etc.). We shall see that the scientific production in which authors combine both topics is almost inexistent.

Adult Education

The so-called “adult education” appeared institutionally in Spain with a compensatory purpose, with the Moyano law of 1857, still in effect. However, during the past two decades, this perception has undergone noticeable modifications. The book, *Libro blanco de la educación de adultos*, published by the Ministry of Education and Science in 1986, presents diverse possibilities for adult education, implying that it must surpass the framework of educational compensation for the failures of basic education, in order to become involved in the field of permanent training.

The education of adults, as of people of other ages, is part of the field of permanent education. It has various settings of intervention: cultural compensation, employment training, socio-participative training, and free-time education through classroom and distance learning. For this reason, the above-mentioned organic law 1/1990 of Spain, Title III, indicates that public administration with full competence in adult education will cooperate with other administrations, and especially with employment administration.

The delimitation of the above settings of intervention in adult education referred to in recent decades by the experts (Ramírez, 1976; Rubio, 1980; Viladot y Romans, 1988; Ferrández, 1991; Medina y Gento, 1995)(and also echoed gradually by the laws of education of various countries, like Spain) establishes the different facets of adult education. Therefore, it is necessary to address basic adult education in terms of its shortages; in any case, such education results happily in the acquisition of an elementary diploma (in the case of Spain, a *graduado escolar* diploma stipulated by the law of education of 1970, and a *graduado en educación secundaria* diploma, promoted and recently implemented by the law of the general organization of the educational system of 1990).

In Spain, basic adult education provided by the state is free, and is directed to adults over age eighteen. Any person under eighteen must remain in ordinary schools, where they will complete their compulsory education (which has been ten years of schooling since the enactment of the most recent law of education, in 1990). Therefore, compulsory education in Spain is now until age sixteen, and students may remain two years more in secondary school (until age eighteen). In justified cases, when students cannot attend ordinary classes, the educational administration may authorize the enrollment of students under age eighteen in public schools of permanent adult education; in practice, this permission is reduced to a simple application process.

Another aspect to take into account in the teaching/learning process with adults is the methodological model, which must be in agreement with the uniqueness of the situation. In this sense, Sarramona (1989) believes that methodological guidelines will address:

- Respect for personalized learning and the adaptation to diversity (personal, familiar, professional, etc.), which require the use of educational resources that can be used where and when the person desires and needs, in the time period of his choice. Thus we must also have the possibility of using the mass media. However, the use of each resource will depend on didactic, economic and other variables.
- Timely conjugation of personal and contextual needs, care for interpersonal relationships, as well as planning, selection and elaboration of didactic material.

Over all, the methodological model of adult education must permit a high degree of openness and flexibility in the teaching/learning process in order to interact with the

surroundings; its adaptation to different situations is feasible from adult uniqueness up to specific characteristics attributable to the physical/experiential context.

It should be emphasized that in the international panorama, Leirman (1994) emphasizes the importance of including a participative methodology in adult education. Arnold (1997) underlines the need for adults to learn from the personal perspective, and to receive support in order to be able:

- To formulate in a personal manner their need for learning and to assume gradually the definition of this goal.
- To organize what they have to learn by relating it to their current personal problems.
- To utilize their own learning resources, especially with regard to the experiences of students and the teacher, in order to have the opportunity to participate in processes of reciprocal learning.

Federighi (1994), on the other hand, on referring to policies and measures for developing adult education in Europe, indicates that the new legislative and political dynamics should be included in the action of one of the most important transnational public organizations with legislative power: the European Union. Urher, Bryant and Johnston (1997) develop a line of research on what postmodern adult education should be from contextualization, and are highly critical of traditional models. These authors value the relevance of attention to diversity in a technological world of profound, accelerated change.

The Press as an Educational Resource

References to the curricular integration of the mass media are not recent. As an example, we shall briefly mention some of the experiences that we could describe as pioneers in the area; such experiences have contributed to including the written media under study in this research.

In Spain, the press was included in the non-university educational system for basic general education in 1981, with the topic of the "Communication Media" in the areas of social science and language of the middle and upper years of compulsory basic learning. These programs emphasized reading newspapers and developing a critical attitude. In 1984, the Preliminary Project of Reform included the media in the initial, middle and upper cycles. Thus the press is considered in the areas of knowledge, with an accent on a global focus and the development of critical attitudes among students.

The lines of institutional action mentioned above led to the implementation of the Press/School program by the Ministry of Education and Science in the 1985-1986 school year, upon the Ministry's signing of an agreement with the Association of Spanish Newspaper Editors. This project was created with the purpose of activating didactic work with the press. The settings of program application are the non-university schools founded in Spain as a result of the General Law of Education of 1970, at the following levels: basic general education, middle education, professional training, and basic adult education. Teacher participation in the program was voluntary.

We also want to mention the importance of the UNESCO (1980) initiative for Spain, regarding the use of the media in education, called "Education in the Subject of Communication". The project generated important motivation for developing pioneer projects of an educational nature for teachers. In addition to the above is the recent

pronouncement of UNESCO (2002), which suggests the parameters to consider for appropriate schooling about the media: teaching and learning about the media; analyzing the media critically and making productions; promoting commitment and social/personal responsibility; and directing the media to the formal and informal education of children and adults.

It is also necessary to state that the precedents and evolution of Spain's trajectory in the legitimate curricular integration of the media, and particularly the press, in the non-university educational levels, are impregnated by the work of diverse associations and collectives of pedagogical renovation that have promoted changes in teaching.

Research studies and experiences regarding the use of the press in adult education in Spain are reduced. In an insufficient manner, we have the experience of the teachers at the prison of Carabanchel (Madrid), published by Sevillano and Bartolomé (1995) as "models for working with the press in adult education". The article describes uses given to the media in adult education by addressing the content of the *graduado escolar* diploma requirements; providing general culture; studying the press with the medium itself; globalizing adult education; and compiling a dictionary of economic terms with vocabulary extracted from newspapers and magazines.

Sevillano and Bartolomé (1997b) have also researched the training in media competence of teachers who work with adults; the project culminated in the publication of the report of the following study and experiences:

- *The teachers of adults and their media training.* The most significant findings of this research address the pertinence of using the press in adult education, and assure that it: improves the classroom atmosphere; increases motivation to study and favors academic progress; permits contact with reality and the immediate surroundings; contributes to continual updating; develops a critical attitude; increases interest in world events; promotes interdisciplinary work among the different subjects on the adult curriculum; and develops the ability to synthesize.
- *The press in adult education.* This research addresses experiences of successful work in general culture, with two groups of adults in Santa Fe (Granada) and Aranda del Duero (Burgos) and one group in Aliseda (Cáceres), which satisfactorily integrated the press into the curriculum of adult education by dealing with aspects of the quality of life.

On the other hand, Rodríguez Diéguez (1997) has carried out a study on iconic/verbal language that formulates a series of research hypotheses on iconic/verbal communication in so-called traditional supports (newspapers, magazines and advertising). In this study, an outstanding hypothesis is that "The iconic communication provided by the mass media is more efficient and complete than the communication of the media and didactic resources" (Rodríguez Diéguez, 1997:37).

The author concludes that iconic/verbal communication has higher quality (understood as less effort required from the receiver of the message) in the mass media than in textbooks and didactic material. In addition, the study suggests that we still have much to learn from magazines, usage manuals and instruments about technological products in the home, due to their didactic training, quality, and instructional effectiveness. The study also provides characteristics that teaching resources could take into account from the mass

media, and situate the lines of influence on: uniqueness *versus* multiplicity, predomination of a single language *versus* iconic/verbal integration and iteration (mechanical repetition) *versus* interaction.

Another interesting project on the use of printed media in basic adult education is presented by Molina (1999), and analyzes the use of the “sentimental” press as a resource for students to become familiar with the mass media and explore the world. The study backs the educational usefulness of the press in the contact that adults habitually maintain with “sentimental” publications (women’s publications) and sports publications (men’s publications). Adults recognize the modernity of these publications and the use of language and iconography that is easy to access. The experiences developed in both cases address the comprehensive reading of image and text; the holding of debates; the preparation and/or rewriting of the news; the application of learning to solve daily problems; the critical analysis of texts; the relation of news with events in the immediate surroundings; and exercises of creativity.

In a recent study, Ricoy (2004) states that the use of the press in basic adult education involves favorable aspects not exempt from complexity. She shows that the topics covered daily in the printed media are not always feasible for linking to the planned teaching/learning process, nor can they totally guarantee association with the content established by the official curriculum. Nonetheless, it is proven that the press’ contributions to updating knowledge assume important educational wealth.

Sevillano (2004), in the most recent research report published on this topic, shows that didactic work with the media requires in-depth knowledge of its conditions, potential and limitations as a teaching/learning resource. We cannot deny that the presence of the press in our surroundings is habitual, as well as its influence or persuasion. Therefore, thoughtful, critical analysis of the press (and other media) is more than justified.

Based on the above, we sustain that the use of the press and other media as an educational resource presents possibilities and controversies.

Basic Adult Education and the Media in Spain’s Educational System

During the time we carried out the research, programs were in effect for adults to obtain the two basic secondary school diplomas: *graduado escolar* and *graduado en educación secundaria*. Our study coincided with a time of transition in which the new curriculum for adults, established by the Law on the General Organization of the Educational System of 1990, coexisted with the recently extinguished teaching (2001-2002 school year) corresponding to the General Law on Education of 1970. For this reason, we address the situation from this unique perspective.

When we were completing the empirical study reported in this article, the schools and public classroom for adult education in the Galician Autonomous Community (Spain) offered classroom and distance learning for adults to obtain their basic *graduado escolar* diploma. Up until that time, students took their courses in adult classes and schools, and took special open examinations. This situation was the consequence of applying royal Decree 1487/1994, dated July 1 (*Boletín Oficial del Estado*), which modifies and completes royal Decree 986/1991, dated June 14. The calendar of procedures 1990 for the new organization of the education system was approved, and schools stopped offering “Eighth in Basic General Education”. Only adult classrooms and schools were authorized to give

training to prepare for the open examination for earning the diploma. According to the resolution of July 14, 1997, the General Director of Education and Professional Training for Galicia required examinations of maturity for adults to earn the diploma (*Diario Oficial de Galicia*, 4/3/1998).

In such a panorama, the examination of maturity for earning the diploma may be taken by individuals over age fourteen (the person must have been fourteen before December 1, 1997), who are not enrolled in regular school in the ordinary education system. They may take the examination if they are enrolled in the public classrooms or schools for adults or if they sign up for open access to the examination. The examination, described in *Documentación sobre la implantación de la enseñanza básica para las personas adultas de la Junta de Galicia*, en 1997, covers the academic contents of the areas of mathematics and natural science; social science; foreign languages; Spanish and Galician. The subjects are taught by assigned teachers.

Until this time of transition, the legal panorama of integrating the media into the curriculum, and especially the press into adult education, adhered to the stipulations of the above paragraph. The 1990 Law on the General Organization of the Educational System established the legitimate bases to incorporate the mass media *extensively in the different cycles and stages* of non-university education. The uses of the media include the press as a teaching/learning tool, and are part of the new basic curriculum for adults in the “field of knowledge of communication” and within the “setting of the media of social communication”.

The order of May 26, 1997 (*Diario Oficial de Galicia*, 15/7/97), which regulates basic education for adults at the Galician Autonomous Community, established the structure and curriculum in this entity (Table 1). The starting point is the general guidelines of Organic Law 1/1990, Title III, dedicated to adult education, and adapted to Decree 78/1993 of February 25, which establishes the curriculum of compulsory secondary education.

The curriculum of basic adult education includes the integration of the media with an *obligatory nature* (Table 1), under the reasoning that the media, in addition to their own particularities, represent for students a multitude of topics, intentions, linguistic codes, and visual tactics. The media’s content expressly addresses the “setting of society”.

The general objectives of the official curriculum of basic adult education with regard to the *mass media* are: *a)* to analyze and interpret the specific language and social functions of the media; and *b)* to manifest a critical attitude towards their power to influence public opinion, in the light of possible interests.

As an example, we can present some of the contents of the curriculum of basic education for adults:

- Importance and function of the radio, the press and television in modern society; specific media; information, opinion and persuasion.
- Variety of records in the media.
- Study of the interaction of the different language used in the media: press, radio and television.
- Recognition of the resources used by the media to influence the public, and the comprehension of ambiguities, contradictions or untruths found in the message.
- Analysis of text, image and context to understand the social criticism present in iconic/verbal texts.

- Critical attitude towards advertising messages that attempt to influence the public's consumption or ideological persuasion, and towards degrading messages.

Fundamentally, these objectives and contents influence the development of the students' critical reasoning, and offer them procedures, techniques of analysis and strategies of comprehension.

TABLE 1
Structure of Curriculum of Basic Adult Education

SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR ADULTS					M o d u l e
Galician Autonomous Community					
Structure of Curriculum					
Field of Knowledge	SOCIETY	NATURE	COMMUNICATION	TECHNOLOGY/MATH	
S e t t i n g	People and Resources	Earthly Materials	Communication through Diverse Languages	Design and Technique	C o m p u l s o r y
	Future of Society	Water and Air	The Media	Technology and Development	
	The Modern World	Living Beings	Literary Communication	Industry and Market	
	Economy and Work	Health and Environment	Language as an Instrument for Organizing Knowledge	Work and Company	O p t i o n a
	Art and Leisure	Machines and Products	Personal and Professional	Application of	

Study

Problem and Objectives of Research

To begin, we must clarify to the reader that the problem as well as the objectives that guide this research process are independent from the prescriptive contents and objectives of the official curriculum of basic adult education. For this reason, the references given about this plan of studies in Spain should not be understood as conditions for autonomous research, like this study, but as an additional contribution to the context of study. The analysis presented is not subject to the evaluation of the objectives and contents of the official curriculum with regard to the study of the media in basic adult education (presented in the previous section). Nor is the object of this research to evaluate programs on the media, to which we alluded at the beginning of this article in approaching the frame of reference and context of the study. A study of this type has been addressed in Spain by other colleagues, however, and we would like to refer the reader to Ballesta y Guardiola (2003).

The focus of this study is a consequence of the questions that arise from our professional concerns regarding basic adult education, as well as our solid knowledge of research in the field. These questions serve to center our attention on margins of flexibility throughout the entire process (Stake, 1998). In a preliminary form, the following questions arose: Is the press used as a way of learning in basic adult education? What educational possibilities does the press offer at this level of adult training?

Although the central problem of a study is the formal beginning of any research (Herrero, 2002), the questions a priori are a consequence of the vacuum that surrounds the topic of our interest (Manheim, 1982). Such questions became bridges that permitted defining the problem of study. The resulting situation of uncertainty revolves around basic adult education. The central areas in the research problem are synthesized as knowing the dynamics of education and the use of the press as a learning resource. Identifying the problem is a key step in reducing the topic on which research must be focused, and requires an ongoing readjustment process based on the context of the sample (Medina y Domínguez, 2003).

In order to respond to the questions of the research and solve the problem of study, we established objectives to orient the various stages of the process. These objectives were essential referents in guiding the work and favoring pertinent readjustment or control (Pérez Serrano, 1990). The definition of the purposes helps to focus the research by allowing the researcher to analyze, know and understand the educational reality under study in natural contexts. The objectives included in our project are the following:

- Verifying if the press is used as a learning resource in basic adult education.
- Identifying the frequency of use in working with the press.
- Defining the preferences for the type of press used.
- Determining the conditions for using the press as an educational resource.
- Discovering the problems derived from handling the press as a learning resource.
- Researching the work dynamics that favor the use of the press in adult education.
- Learning the educational possibilities generated by using the press with adult students.

Methodological Aspects

The most adequate methodology will allow us to learn more about the real situation under study, with the purpose of addressing the problem of the research and reaching the objectives we have established (Coller, 2000; Hernández, 2001). The methodology used in the part of the research discussed in this article was a survey. Surveys allow studying a large number of people through statistical analysis, with less in-depth study than qualitative studies. In agreement with Bisquerra (1989), we reinforced the consistency of the quantitative results by studying a large sample of participants (512 individuals) and including a qualitative analysis of the open questions on the questionnaire to supplement the initial questions (see Table 3 above). The entire research project was carried out with the use of eclectic methodology that permitted the confluence of quantitative/qualitative methodology. Because of the length of this article, however, we shall limit ourselves to the study of the interviews.

The focus of the research is descriptive, in order to organize, classify, compare, contrast, analyze and interpret (Cohen and Manhion, 1990). As the terminology indicates, the study includes the description and interpretative analysis of the facts' meaning and relevance.

The descriptive research surpasses the simple collection and tabulation of data, by assuming an interpretative element of the meaning or importance of what it describes. It is related to existing connections, practices, opinions, points of view or attitudes that are maintained, and undergoing processes or tendencies developed. For this reason, the

description is frequently combined with comparison or contrast, implying classification, analysis and interpretation (Best, 1981).

This focus permits obtaining different dimensions in the research. In this case, based on the problem of study, we have addressed eleven dimensions: the curriculum perspective, objectives, contents, activities, resources, didactic methodology, settings of action, institutions, organization of space and time, evaluation, and the initial and ongoing training of teachers. For this article, we utilized a relevant part of the results obtained from the dimensions of curriculum perspective, didactic methodology and the organization of classroom space.

The research design combined the transversal cut of a single cell and a longitudinal cut (to permit the follow-up which, as mentioned, will not be covered in this article due to space limitations). The work we describe is concentrated on the transversal design, with data collected in timely fashion (Wittrok, 1989). The first phase of the procedure for obtaining this information was a pilot study of the questionnaire and the second phase was the compilation, analysis, results and conclusions of the research.

The survey methodology allowed us to use the questionnaire as the instrument for obtaining data. The questionnaire was prepared for the research and submitted to the pertinent scientific requirements. The items for students to answer (the subject of our report), were closed questions (fill-in-the-blank and multiple choice); semi-closed questions with diverse alternatives and one open question; and open questions, which we use to compile the participants' voluntary opinions or experiences with events or situations. The focus of the questionnaire design offers a way of integrating quantitative and qualitative data (through open questions), even though open questions are not easy for students to answer (Walker, 1989). The scale of value used in the closed and semi-closed items to indicate the degree of agreement or disagreement, was the Likert scale (five ranges).

Description of the Sample

Given the impossibility of selecting the sample with a probabilistic method, we have done so by a non-probabilistic method. The criteria depended on the possibilities of access in the field as well as the difficulties in determining the size of the selected population (Arnal, Rincón y Latorre, 1992). In this situation, the conventional procedures for making the decision were highly complex, given the impossibility of knowing the number of the population studied. The fundamental obstacles are that the population we were studying is very heterogeneous and geographically disperse, and the schools depend on various unconnected organizations. In addition, it is a mobile population which, through the so-called "live enrollment", can sign up at any time during the course, drop the course, or change to another level. These facts prevented determining the precise number of students under study. However, to ensure the study's representativity, we invited all the students enrolled in the final level of the adult schools of the Galician Autonomous Community to participate, whether working toward a diploma as *graduado escolar* or *graduado en educación secundaria*.

Although the sample size was not selected by making conservative estimates of the values of the population (resulting in a level of precision determined by the population's size), based on my experience and knowledge as a researcher of the context, implied population, type of schools, topic of study, etc., I have evaluated the sufficiency of the sample obtained and can ensure that it is representative of the collective under study.

Therefore, I can affirm that we have worked with a broad sample of study. We know that the study design implies making complex decisions, with both advantages and disadvantages. For this reason, I once again turned to my experience and knowledge to make the most optimal and feasible decision in each situation. The sampling was made by analyzing the emergent variables, with the understanding that the project implies a relevant contribution for the population studied (Manheim, 1982).

Cooperating in the research were students enrolled in basic adult education at a distance and in the classroom, in both urban and rural settings. The invitation to participate in completing the questionnaire was also extended to students at other schools of adult learning. The questionnaire compiled data from 512 individuals at 24 schools. The broadest participation in terms of the number of schools and students occurred at the public schools of Permanent Adult Education. These schools give basic training for adults to earn *graduado escolar* or *graduado en educación secundaria* diplomas. The remaining types of schools participating in the study were institutes of secondary education, programs of basic education for adults and workshop schools.

Approximately one-half (44.9%) of the students in the study are from the public schools of Permanent Adult Education. This fact is logical in light of these schools' historical preponderance in Spain in the "tutelage" of basic adult education. Slightly more than one-fourth (27%) of the sample is students from the Basic Education Programs for Adults, subsidized by local public institutions (city governments and congressional districts) or by nonprofit associations (cultural associations and associations of individuals subsidized by the autonomous governments) that are dependent bureaucratically on the former. A total of 18.5% is from the institutes of secondary education (which have recently added adult education) and 9.6% is from workshop schools (which are also relatively recent, are promoted by city governments, and are dependent on the Basic Education Programs for Adults as well). These entities are dedicated to adult education, including the granting of elementary school diplomas.

Participation in the questionnaire was quite equal in terms of gender. Females represented 50.2% and males, 49.8%. With regard to age groups, the largest group is the youngest group (72.5%), in contrast with the lesser contribution of the older group (46 to 60 years old, 6.4% of the total). The participation of the middle group (31 to 45 years old) was 21.1%. We can state that these percentages reach a good level of agreement with the rates of enrollment of the respective groups of the population. The resulting representation reflects the volume by age group that corresponds to the students enrolled in basic adult education. In addition, on forming the sample of questionnaire participants, we took into account the public nature of the schools (in the jurisdiction of the public Permanent Adult Education and institutes of secondary education). We did not include strictly private institutions due to their scarcity or absence in most of the provinces of the Galician Autonomous Community.

Procedure of Data Analysis

Once the information from the study had been compiled, analyzing the data was decisive for organizing, reducing, examining and interpreting the information. The analyses used to examine the collected data were logically determined by the nature of the questionnaire.

The data from the closed and semi-closed questions of the questionnaire were analyzed with the statistical package for the social sciences, SPSS for *Windows* (version

10.00). This software was extremely useful because it allowed us to enter a large amount of information and synthesize the raw data obtained (Ferrán, 2001). The open questions were analyzed quantitatively by *Excel* spread sheet. The analyses permitted presenting the results in a descriptive manner.

From the quantitative data, we collected, according to Pérez Juste (1990), the most important numerical statistics: arithmetic mean, standard deviation and percentage.

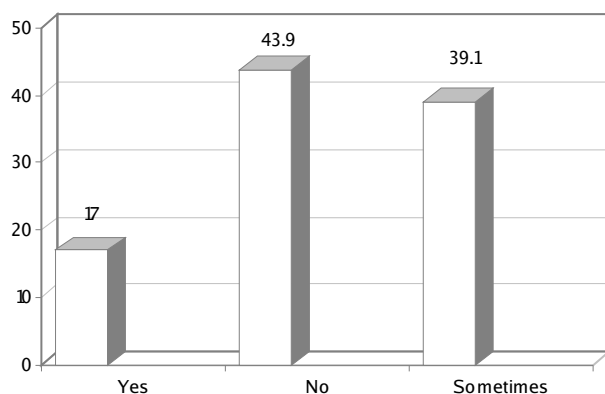
The data collected from the open questions on the questionnaire (see Table 3 of Results) were studied with an analysis of content, of a categorical type (Bardin, 1986). The different categories were defined once the information had been collected from the open questions the students answered voluntarily. The general and specific categories were created as a function of the units of content to be studied (Huber, 2003). We attempted to make the categories clear and not overly numerous (Anguera, Behar, Blanco and others, 1993). The results of content are presented with their respective frequencies and percentages, the form most utilized to show categorical units (Rangel, 1997).

Results

Presented below are the significant results for the research, followed by the descriptions of a quantitative and qualitative nature obtained in the study.

A minority (17%) of the adult students participating in the research affirmed using the press as a resource or means of learning in their basic education, while 39.1% stated using the press on occasions. Overall, these data ensure that more than one-half of the respondents work with the press (56.1%). On the other hand, one groups of students (43.9%) declared never working with the press (Graph 1).

GRAPH 1
Use of the press as a learning resource

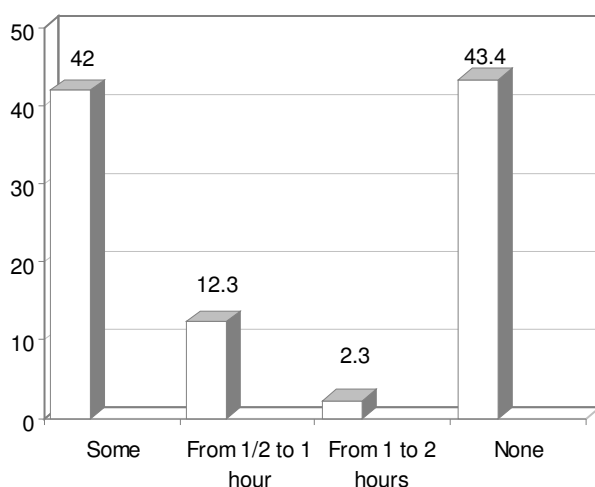


To begin with, it is a fact that material not produced with a completely educational objective has fewer possibilities of being used for this purpose; its consideration for such a task would even be initially questioned. To the degree that the agents and actors in the educational process understand that learning is fully related to individuals' life histories, places, daily events, etc., which are covered by the press, the use of this resource will be further justified and as a consequence, will tend to be extended, increased and regularized.

Yet we cannot lose sight of other variables. The type of school the student attends (micro or macro), the institution's economic sufficiency or insufficiency, or expenditures on materials that the students must assume (economic cost the students refer to in Table 3, as a negative aspect of using the press), the geographical context (rural or urban) in which the students are immersed, as well as the teachers' training in the media, are determining elements that favor or hinder using the press as a directed resource of learning. In this manner, the road to generalized or at least more extensive use of the press in basic adult education is complex. The pertinence of its use, however, remains manifest in the considerable percentage of students who recognize it as a learning resource.

On the other hand, we confirmed that among the adult students who participated in the study, a high percentage (43.4%) stated not dedicating any time during the week to working with the press, while a group of a similar size (42%) indicated using it occasionally. A minority (14.6%) indicated using the press from one-half hour to one hour (12.3%) or from one to two hours (2.3%) each week. The adults who declared using the press do so between one-half hour and two hours each week (Graph 2).

GRAPH 2
Amount of time dedicated to working with the press each week



In this sense, we must remember that teachers and students make the generalized complaint that they have limited time for covering the broad content of the official curriculum (the use of the media as well as the content of other areas of the curriculum). To this we must add the lack of trajectory of the didactic use of the press in basic adult education, without discarding the possible aggravation of its absence in education that is non-compulsory and part-time: in other words, education that is shared with work, family, friends and the many other responsibilities that adults must assume. The use of the press as a learning resource is complicated when it must go beyond its own limits to become linked to the requirements of obtaining an elementary school diploma.

The agreement between the results of Graph 1 and Graph 2 must be emphasized. A high percentage of students declared not using the press in their basic education and not carrying out didactic work with the press. At the same time, the considerable portion that stated using the press, indicated that it is also employed in learning activities.

On the other hand, less than one-half of the study's respondents (43.8%) affirmed having used a daily newspaper in their education, and a much lower percentage (22.1%) of the students declared they had worked with two newspapers. A minority (15.4%) of the adults stated using three newspapers, and a still smaller percentage (4.7%) mentioned four newspapers. In percentages with little significance, the adults mentioned using a newspaper and a magazine (2,8%); three newspapers and a magazine (2.5%); two newspapers and one magazine (1.2%); two of each type of publication (2.3%); three of each (2%); one newspaper and two magazines (1.7%); and four newspapers and one magazine (1.5%) (Table 2).

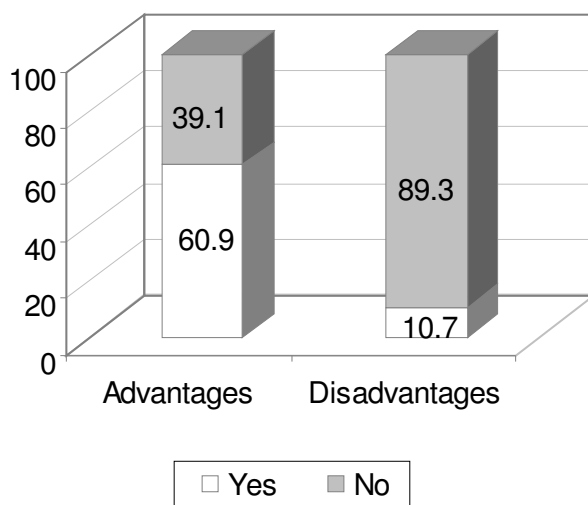
TABLE 2
Use of different types of publications

Newspapers and Magazines Used by the Respondents	Percentage
1 newspaper	43.8
2 newspapers	22.1
3 newspapers	15.4
4 newspapers	4.7
1 newspaper and 1 magazine	2.8
2 newspapers and 1 magazine	1.2
3 newspapers and 1 magazine	2.5
4 newspapers and 1 magazine	1.5
1 newspaper and 2 magazines	1.7
2 newspapers and 2 magazines	2.3
3 newspapers and 3 magazines	2

We found a close relation between the complexity of integrating the press into the academic curriculum of basic adult education and the limited use of the press in educational activities. The results obtained in the study suggest that the use of the press as a learning resource is more complex and of course less usual if more than one publication is involved (newspapers and magazines). However, both the difficulty of obtaining various publications as well as the limitations of adult students in using the press, are compensated for by the progress and satisfaction of their learning.

More than one-half (60.9%) of the students found advantages in using the press in their education, and only a minority (10.7%) declared that the press is not useful. This was doubly reinforced when a similar percentage indicated that classroom work with the press has disadvantages, thus confirming that 89.3% believe the press has benefits (Graph 3).

GRAPH 3
The use of the press has advantages and disadvantages



The data obtained from this question clash with the data obtained from the three previous questions regarding the use of the press as a learning resource in adult education (see Graph 1), the limited time the press is used each week (see Graph 2) and the few publications used (see Table 2). It should be noted that the adult students expressed in a revealing manner their positive perception of using this resource: they appreciate the advantages of using the press in their education, and their opinion is supported by their relation with the press in their daily environment, as well as by the repercussions of the educational use of the press. Made evident is a “climate of cultivation” favorable for implementing procedures and strategies for the effective use of the press as a resource in basic adult education.

The adults expressed in a conclusive manner the pertinence of using the press as a learning resource, by means of the positive aspects of its use (427 reasons), considered more important than the negative aspects (61 arguments) (Table 3). They placed more emphasis on the pertinence of the educational use of the press than on its complexity. They underlined the usefulness of using the press especially for *updating* knowledge, a reason mentioned by 228 of the 512 participants. In addition, the comparative and contrasted analysis allowed us to detect that this result is related to the result presented (see Table 9 below) on the type of information and education the press provides adults: their staying up to date or their continual updating (3.846). Thus there is close correspondence with the data obtained on the existence of the use of the press. The students also evaluated positively the possibility the press offers them to contrast and supplement information.

TABLE 3

Positive and/or negative aspects of the press as an educational resource

Category	Frequency	Percentage
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Advantage	Up-to-date	228	53.4
	Cheap	20	4.7
	Supplementary	55	12.9
	Facilitates the comparison of information	72	16.9
	Encourages debate	22	5.2
	Motivating	19	4.4
	Linked to practice	11	2.6
	Total	427	100
Dis-advantage	Implied cost	14	23.0
	Lack of rigor	26	42.6
	Requires time	16	26.2
	Topics not always appropriate	5	8.2
	Total	61	100

The complexity of using the press in basic education is made evident by the negative components the students associated with working with the press, including the occasional lack of rigor in the information presented. Other ingredients make using the press seem unfavorable: dedication of time, which is subtracted from other parts of the curriculum, the cost of the material, and the diverse topics not always linked to the content of the official curriculum.

The mentioned elements reflect greater or lesser ease in using the press as an educational resource. They are also a “culture broth” for adult students to have solid impressions of various types with regard to the pertinence and complexity of using the press in their education.

The fundamental appreciation of adult students in using the press as a didactic resource is its practical application, more than the theoretical contributions associated with the formal curriculum over the medium term.

The adult students stated, at a rate greater than the arithmetic mean (3.248), that the use of the press as an educational resource depends on having more time than is usually assigned to it. To a lesser degree (2.979), they believed that to work with the press, the number of students in the classroom should be smaller. One group of students (2.879) assumed effort would be required to hold the class by using the press. They made mention of other conditions that would be required to use the press: a level of cooperation (2.738) and participation (2.521) among class members. These data present a high level of correlation with the statements (Table 4) of adult students that working with the press favors working in small groups.

An important factor that determines the use of the press as a learning resource is the nature of the material itself. Its complexity resides in the fact that it is not simply another resource of the curriculum; rather, the teacher must configure and determine the teaching strategy to use (Salinas, 1999). This process is simplified when we employ structured didactic resources from the same educational activity. Such resources provide, along with the content of the curriculum, the teaching strategy to be used. Examples are the textbook and workbooks. According to Trilla (1999), the media become educational resources when they are implemented in a didactic manner to channel information or if they cause educational effects in students.

The minimum didactic contributions of resources not created for pedagogical purposes are to supplement, broaden and update the contents offered by materials of a curricular nature, while didactic resources are used and their relation in the teaching/learning

process is optimized. In spite of the above, in today's basic adult education, the use of structuring materials in education continues to have preponderance over materials conceived as auxiliary.

TABLE 4
Conditions that require the use of the press in education

Requirements for Using the Press	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation
A small number of students per classroom	2.979	1.422
More class time	3.248	1.430
Efforts to continue the lesson	2.879	1.248
Little participation	2.521	1.303
Excessive cooperation	2.738	1.258
Other, specify:	—	—

The complexity of the press in basic adult education is reflected in the difficulties of using it, among other aspects. Thus more than one-half (55.1%) of the students mentioned encountering problems on working with the press, primarily because of the unclear, *complex language* used. We cannot ignore that although the press is directed to the adult public, it requires a minimum mastery of basic reading and writing abilities, organization skills, comprehension, interpretation, relation of facts, situations and opinions, transference capacity, etc.. On the other hand, almost one-half of the participants (45.1%) stated that the excessive text and limited images of the press were an obstacle. This problem was aggravated in cases of deficient academic preparation, especially when associated with elementary factors of an instrumental nature (reading/writing and mathematics).

TABLE 5
Obstacles to using the press as a learning resource

Difficulties encountered	Yes (%)	No (%)
Language of publication	28.9	71.1
Size of font	32.2	67.8
Much text and few images	45.1	54.9
Presentation mostly in black and white	35	65
Arrangement of text in columns	32	68
Utilization of complex, unclear language	55.1	44.9
Usefulness of daily revision	49	51
Other, specify:	—	—

For somewhat less than one-half of the participants (49%), the usefulness of reviewing the press each day, in order to remain up-to-date, represented a sizeable demand. This attitude is apparent because some of the students enrolled in basic adult education do not have the habit of daily reading. Such a habit requires the time and the willingness to assign priority to reading, based on an evaluation of its contribution to information/education.

The aspects that generate least complexity for using the press are: the black and white format (35%), font size (32.2%), distribution of the text in columns (32%), and the

language of the publication (28.9%). (In the case of the Galician Autonomous Community, two languages officially coexist: Galician and Spanish.)

The formal elements of the press cause the least problems for adults in using the press as a learning resource. The press' format does not represent a complex challenge since the material is accessible for a good part of the students. Therefore, its pertinence as a resource is reinforced prior to the didactic activity, not only because of the students' familiarity with the press but also because of its viability.

The adult students mentioned the tendency to use the press with the spatial and methodological organization of small groups: individuals (3.397), pairs (3.276), teams (3.145) and triads (3.123). Made manifest is the pertinence of using the press to carry out cooperative methodologies in basic adult education that permit reflexive analysis and discussion on content by individuals as well as among peers. The adult students included conditions for working with the press (as seen as Table 4), such as establishing a level of cooperation (2.738) and participation (2.521) among the members of the class (Table 6).

TABLE 6
Using the press improves group work

Dynamics Permitted	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation
Individuals	3.397	1.276
Pairs	3.276	1.211
Triads (3)	3.123	1.176
Small groups (4-6)	3.145	1.263
Medium-sized groups (7-10)	2.703	1.272
Large groups (more than 10)	2.437	1.358

In basic adult education, the students consider the press less for work in medium-sized groups (2.703) and large groups (2.437). This attitude is a result of the greater level of complexity required to organize tasks among large teams in the classrooms. In addition, it is necessary to take into account that participating with organization, listening to others, understanding their points of view and taking turns require continual training, which we must not renounce by falling gradually into group debates.

On the other hand, the sample that participated in the study believed that the use of the press as a learning resource encourages a climate of constant improvement (77.9%), as well as the creation of initiatives of a social and/or employment nature (66%). Although the first aspect has greater weight in their responses, it is an important, fundamental trigger for the second aspect: the creation and development of socio-employment projects. Both the creation of a climate of continual improvement and persistence in socio-employment initiatives are connected to permanent education oriented to self-directed learning, which implies the adult's self-responsibility and enables new forms of informal, self-directed learning.

TABLE 7
Other aspects that favor the educational use of the press

Working with the press favors	Yes (%)	No (%)

A climate of improvement	77.9	22.1
Continuity or creation of initiatives of a social and/or employment nature	66	34
Other, specify:	—	—

More than half (50.4%) of the students mentioned that the activities carried out with the press aid in solving various situations of daily life. The link between the content of the press and daily events guarantees the pertinence of using the press in basic adult education. This concordance extends to the contents of the official curriculum since, the most distinguished objective of institutionalized elementary education is definitely to prepare people for life.

Somewhat less than one-half (44.7%) of the adult students mentioned that using the press provides adequate, concrete learning of the subject by facilitating an interdisciplinary view of various subjects that favor learning the curriculum as a whole (40.8%). A smaller percentage (38.7%) stated that the learning provided by the press is incomplete. This aspect leads us to emphasize the idea that using the press as a learning resource must combine in a timely manner with other curricular and auxiliary materials that broaden and supplement adult education.

TABLE 8
Educational possibilities offered by the press

The use of the press facilitates learning	Yes	No
The subject in an adequate, concrete manner	44,7%	55,3%
The set of subjects in the curriculum	40,8%	59,2%
That aids in facing or solving everyday situations	50,4%	49,6%
That is limited or incomplete on its own	38,7%	61,3%

In another variable of the analysis, the adults agreed that the type of information and education favored by using the press are, to a lesser degree, the permanent updating of knowledge (3.846). Here it must be underlined that the result obtained in this point presents a high degree of correlation with the students' statements (see Table 3) regarding the positive aspects they find in using the press as a learning resource. Emphasized is the press' value in providing updated information (427 reasons).

Without doubt, compared with the outdated information we have found in the materials of the curriculum, the press is naturally characterized for having contents, opinions, events and facts that are completely current. They allow immediate, unceasing updating. In addition, the adults took into consideration the level of objectivity offered by the press (3.064) (Table 9).

An aspect less appreciated by adult students is the duration of the information acquired through the press (2.793), as well as the temporary education (2.459) it offers. These facts are derived from the rapidity the information is outdated, and the inherent function of the press as communication media; another factor is the press' responsibility to offer over a short period and in an ongoing manner, the most relevant and impressive recent news.

By using the press, adult students also experience the political or ideological component (2.648), alienating behaviors resulting from events based on different points of view (2.609) that lead to a partial, subjective vision (2.502). As communication media for the masses, the press carries out its assignment of impressing and persuading the population by manipulating information.

With regard to this topic, Morduchowicz (2003) states that we live in a society in which knowledge is mediatized; the media give us an image of the news on which we construct our own image. In fact, education in the media is based on the idea that the media do not transmit transparent information about reality. This idea represents another argument regarding the interest in using the press in basic adult education.

TABLE 9

Type of information and education resulting from the use of the press

Type of information and education generated by the press	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation
Updated	3.846	1.225
Objective	3.064	1.169
Partial and subjective	2.502	1.197
Ideological or political	2.648	1.289
Temporary	2.459	1.232
Lasting	2.793	1.234
Alienating	2.609	1.283

Conclusions and Discussion

The conclusions and discussion are linked to the scenario of basic adult education, and comprise a pillar for interpreting, understanding and discovering the integration of the press in the curriculum. They are also an unavoidable point of reference for introducing the press into education, incorporating improvements, and establishing new lines of study with regard to this topic. As a final discussion and conclusion, we state the following:

The use of the press as a learning resource, as well as the amount of time that is dedicated to it, are reduced and irregular, thus making work with the press circumstantial. Although communication systems and information flows are increasingly voluminous in the diverse facets of life, their use in education continues to be marginal (Masterman, 1993). Another aggravation is the fact that most schools do not teach subjects related to the media, and if they do so, they ignore basic elements in the experience of media consumption (Ferrés, 2003).

The most common form of working with the press in adult education is using a single newspaper; plural usage of the printed media does not exist. Notably less common is the use of two or three newspapers, or practices involving the use of a newspaper and magazines. This panorama, however, does not correspond to adult students' perception of the use of the press in their education, when it reveals in a significant manner that such a use implies educational advantages. The minimum requirement is to propose the usefulness of encouraging educational projects that consider covering the media. In recent years, however, the media have been faced with the potential and expectations attributed to new technology in education. Yet in practice, the new technologies like the mass media in Spain continue to occupy a secondary position, with little integration into the classroom.

The basic lines of action for teaching about the media in adult education must begin by developing strategies of integration into the curriculum. Such strategies must be included in the educational project and classroom program. Action will start by implementing procedures of sensitization, encouraging a critical mentality, developing practical and intellectual skills, acquiring technical abilities to disclose the media's components of persuasion, and learning the mechanisms of articulation used by the media. In addition to the above, the teacher must have specific training in the mass media, along with more generic and specific training in each discipline.

Handling the press as an educational resource is globally pertinent, with significant benefits for adult students. These benefits materialize fundamentally as knowledge of current events. The contribution of other benefits, such as allowing the comparison, supplementation and broadening of information; facilitating debate among peers; stimulating learning linked to daily life; and being economically attainable, are also appreciated by adults. Rotger and Roque (1987) sustain that communication with the use of the press favors interaction throughout the educational process by increasing knowledge of current events and analyzing the news through discourse.

The disadvantages of using the press in basic adult education are few and mostly irrelevant, except for those that refer to the lack of rigor or authenticity sometimes found in the news. It is obviously true that the media—including the press—support message codes and content produced for mass consumption, and offer plural, current, contradictory, and erroneous viewpoints (Sevillano, 1995).

According to Bartolomé (2003), the above factors are a relevant argument regarding the pertinence of using the press, given the prevailing requirement of teaching reading and expression in new languages, in order to study them critically through understanding and analysis. Piette (2000) adds that the messages in the media represent certain visions of the world from particular ideological positions, on which we must reflect by questioning information so that it can be transformed into knowledge.

In this manner, education regarding the media must face the challenge of channeling the damaging, undesired effects that the media produce in individuals.

It is necessary to add that working with the press in basic adult education requires more class time than normal, a reduced number of students per class, follow-up on tasks, and balanced intervention. It must also be mentioned that the educational use of the press has sizeable obstacles for adult students, including complex, unclear language, the requirement of reading the news daily to remain current, and the presentation of much text and few images.

From a methodological point of view, using the press for adult education favors work in small groups, improves the classroom environment and reinforces the commitment to ongoing self-improvement. The use of the press, however, must study holistic proposals that permit, to a lesser degree, interdisciplinary learning of the subjects on the official curriculum. It should be emphasized that the use of the press promotes practical learning that is associated with life, a fact that increases adults' interest in the events around them, from a holistic perspective (Sevillano y Bartolomé, 1997b).

The above reveals one reason more for the pertinence of using the press in adult education. As we have indicated, the press' preponderance in the heart of daily life has made many of our everyday activities routine (Bélanger and Ross, 2000). Thus the media play their role as mediators between adult students and reality, and provide proximate

knowledge from their own semantics (Zabalza, 1989; Cabero, 1999). As an educational resource, the media give adults the possibility of relating their lives and experience with those of others. Without doubt, the press complies with a function of training and understanding information to facilitate adult learning and its transfer to real life (Castañeda, 1989).

Jütte (2000) states that the scenarios of the “society of knowledge and information” will be produced thanks to independent learning, which to a great degree is the acquisition of active knowledge that stimulates responses in addition to finding relevant questions. A different role is projected on teachers through the suggested process of teaching/learning in a shared manner, which encourages students to be active participants in education. The press is an excellent educational instrument for reviewing the hierarchical relations between students and teachers. Yet such changes require, to a lesser degree, the development of a new cooperative culture in educational organizations to favor dialogic learning through adults’ direct experiences. Such learning, according to Flecha (1997), is global and is based on communication and language as a means of dialogue; the author also emphasizes that the process assumes fair, reflexive conversation to encourage changes in the community. Such changes improve and provide meaning to individual lives.

Lastly, educational practices involving the press contribute to generating dynamics that prepare adults for developing, in academic settings, basic skills and knowledge that can be extrapolated to nonacademic settings.

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