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Professionalisation of Adult Educators

International and Comparative Perspectives

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International and comparative perspectives in the field of professionalisation

Introduction

In many regions of the world, professionalisation in adult and continuing education is brought into the focus of educational policy. Teachers of adults ("teachers" in a very broad sense) are widely recognised to be a critical factor for the quality of adult learning processes. This is not to deny the importance of informal or self-organised learning processes which are also receiving growing (policy) attention, especially in the context of debates on validation. However, these informal learning processes will never completely replace more organised forms of adult learning that take place under the guidance and/or with the support of a "teacher" (or "trainer", "instructor", "facilitator", "guide", "docent", "tutor", "coach", "animator", etc.). Moreover, even the growing importance of informal learning and its social recognition goes hand in hand with the emergence of new professional roles in the field of adult education, for example: Counselling and guidance staff will be increasingly needed to provide some support to adult learners in largely self-guided learning; and, secondly: professional staff will be increasingly needed for the validation of informally acquired competencies of adults. Whereas these tasks are not part of the traditional teaching role they increasingly belong to the range of professional roles and profiles that can be associated with the field of adult education and learning.

The range of professional profiles within the field of adult education is very wide and diverse – as is the whole field of adult education (for the situation in Europe, see for example Research voor Beleid 2008, p. 2010). Adult education as a field is very closely linked to the societal structures of a country or region, to its traditions and its socio-cultural, economic and political fabric (Nuissl 2005, p. 47). At the same time, adult education is much less regulated than other parts of the education system. It may therefore react more flexibly to upcoming demands and develop itself in various forms and directions. As a result, the field of adult education is extremely diversified as regards target groups, teaching content, providers, institutional arrangements, funding structures and legislation. Even the term "adult education" is not an unambiguous one – often very different names are used to refer to the more or less structured and organised learning provision for adults.

The diversity of the field complicates ambitions to professionalise adult education. However, there seems to be broad consensus that teachers and other professionals in adult education are performing highly demanding tasks, which involve a high degree of responsibility, as well as appropriate skills and competence for their work. Policy papers on national as well as on international level quite regularly emphasise the value and the importance of a well-qualified workforce in adult education (see, for example, European Commission 2006; Council 2011; or UNESCO 2009 to mention only a few examples from supranational institutions).

As the contributions to this volume show, strategies to develop such skills and competences of adult education professionals in a systematic way have been set up in many countries throughout the world – including countries with a rather longstanding tradition of training adult educators, also at an academic level, as well as others were corresponding developments were initiated only more recently. Professional competence requirements for adult learning staff are analysed in various research and development projects. Curricula and training offers are developed and implemented by a variety of providers and stakeholders. Though quite often on an ad-hoc basis and unsystematically in some countries, others – either through top-down or through bottom-up approaches – also established national multi-level systems of qualifications for adult education staff. In many countries, adult education – or andragogy, as some prefer to call it – is taught as an academic discipline in universities.

Besides those practical attempts at designing and providing different types and levels of qualifications to adult educators, either as a pre-service or in-service offer, a more *theoretical debate* is also ongoing in many countries on what "*professionalisation*" of adult education actually means – or should mean (see in particular the contributions in the first section of this volume). This includes also a critical analysis of the discourse and of the interests of different stakeholders, which are linked to these discourses. A few years ago, an issue of the European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults (RELA) analysed professionalisation as a process of "struggle": "Different notions of professional practice and professional development attempt different things and have material effects. Different audiences are mobilised in different discourses, including potentially groups beyond those of the profession through which the profession may then be held to be accountable and subject to scrutiny." (Jütte et al 2011, p. 9)

All these activities are increasingly pursued also at an international level: International curricula and trainings are developed (see for example Lattke in this book); cross-country study visits and exchange of information become increasingly prominent (promoted and supported by supra-national agencies such as the European Union); international networking is growing and gaining in stability

due to formally organised networks such as the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) and the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA) in Europe, the Asian and South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE) in Asia, the Consejo de Educación de Adultos de América Latina (CEAAL) in Latin America, the Lifelong Learning Research Hub of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM LLL) as a cooperation between the two continents or the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) as a global body. These networks contribute to fostering an international community of adult education professionals. More precisely, according to their different aims and priorities, these networks contribute to fostering sub-communities of adult education professionals – focusing either more on practitioners, researchers or policy makers – however, always with considerable overlap and links between these sub-groups.

This volume is an example of cross-country networking. It represents a follow-up publication to a conference, which was held in November 2013 by the German Institute for Adult Education – Leibniz Institute for Adult Education (DIE) and Bielefeld University within the ESREA research network "Adult Educators, Trainers and their Professional Development" (ReNAdET) in cooperation with the ASEM LLL Research network on "Professionalisation of Adult Teachers and Educators in ASEM countries". The conference's objective was to broaden the perspective and focus on the historical development, as well as current trends in professionalisation in the various regions from an international (and possibly comparative) perspective. This book, which is not a publication of the complete conference proceedings, comprises a selection of articles that relate to key conference themes. It is intended as a further contribution to the international debate and exchange on the topic of professionalisation and related research. Such international work may not always result in immediately tangible "benefits" or "products" and, moreover, it has always a number of particular challenges connected to it (see below). However, it is our conviction that an ongoing international exchange is not only a necessity in today's increasingly globalised societies, but also that despite all challenges there is actually much to be gained from such exchange and that these gains may take multiple forms.

International work and comparison in adult education

The value and use of international and comparative work in adult education were described by various authors. They range from intellectual, personal and networking benefits to practical tools and models ready for application in the field (cf. for example Reischmann 2008). Commonly cited benefits include:

- enlarging the individual knowledge basis by learning about developments in other countries;

- gaining a deeper understanding of the functioning of adult education and its parts in a given (national) context, thus developing an understanding of contextual impact factors;
- acquiring a broader reference base for assessing certain phenomena of adult education, as well as for ranking and benchmarking exercises;
- developing individual intellectual capacity, cultural awareness and self-awareness by analysing and confrontation with other cultural realities;
- gaining ideas and inspiration for solving practical problems by learning about successes (and failures) in other countries.

For all these benefits to materialise, some form of comparison between at least two countries is needed. However, in many cases this comparison will not even be explicit. It often takes the form of an implicit comparison (cf. Froese 1980), which, according to Reischmann (2008, p. 20), "inevitably happens" when analysing phenomena from another country. This statement even applies to a certain extent to research explicitly labelled as "comparative": "It is generally accepted that most of what is included under the rubric of comparative studies in adult education… does not include comparison in the strict sense" (Titmus 1999, p. 36).

Looking at international research from the last decades relating to professionalisation in adult education, this statement can only be confirmed. There are relatively few attempts at explicit comparisons, which do not only involve a simple juxtaposition of data and information but also an analysis of the reasons of the identified similarities and differences (Reischmann 2008, p. 10). A reason for this may perhaps be that even with an implicit comparison many of the benefits cited above are already within grasp to a certain extent, and in comparison, the expected added value of an explicit comparison seems too small, considering the high required effort to perform such comparison with the necessary methodological rigor.

As early as 1991, Jarvis and Chadwick set about the compilation of an impressive range of country studies on the training of adult educators in Western Europe. The concluding chapter provides an overview on the findings from 16 countries. The focus here is less on explaining similarities and differences but rather on identifying common trends and issues, as well as on outlining the range of different phenomena within Western Europe.

After that study, little can be found until the second half of the 2000s on international developments in adult education professionalisation. A mapping exercise of higher education training for adult educators in Eastern Europe was published by Hinzen in 2004. Nuissl (2005) and Schüßler, Mai (2008) provide

first analytical pieces on European trends on the basis of literature from a smaller number of European countries. More comprehensive data collection was then promoted in the context of EU projects and studies. The project "Qualifying the Actors" (Q-Act) was a first attempt to bring together stakeholders from a broad range of European countries for an intensive exchange of information, collecting practice examples and identifying current issues and trends (Nuissl, Lattke 2008). A similar aim of mapping the situation in Europe was pursued by the study "Adult Learning Professions in Europe" (ALPINE) which had been commissioned by the EU (Research voor Beleid, Plato 2008). A follow-up study in 2010 went on to develop a European competence framework for adult educators based on the results of the previous studies and on the analyses of additional sources relating specifically to the issue of professional competences (Research voor Beleid 2010). The Leonardo da Vinci project "Qualified to Teach" (Qf2TEACH, 2010-12) involved a Delphi survey on core competencies of adult learning facilitators in eight European countries (Bernhardsson, Lattke 2012).

In 2008 two dedicated international research networks on the topic of professionalisation were launched. Within the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA), a new network on "Adult Educators, Trainers and their Professional Development" (ReNAdET) was founded, which held its first conference in the following year in Thessaloniki (Papastamatis et al. 2009). In the same period, the Lifelong Learning Research Hub of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) launched its Research Network 3 on "Professionalisation of Adult Teachers and Educators in ASEM countries" (ASEM RN 3) which also held its inaugural conference in 2009 in Bergisch-Gladbach, Germany (Egetenmeyer, Nuissl 2010).

Both networks are dedicated to international cooperation and exchange among adult education researchers without placing particular emphasis on a comparative agenda. The aims of ReNAdET stated on the homepage do not mention comparison at all:

> "On these grounds the aim of the network is threefold:
>
> - To bring forward the experience from all around Europe, on issues pertaining to the multiple roles, practices and settings in which adult educators and related staff act and grow.
> - To report on current European projects and stimulate research in this area.
> - To explore the ways in which policies develop and analyse their possible impact."[1]

1 http://www.esrea-renadet.net/ (accessed 10 Nov. 2014)

By contrast, the ASEM RN3 homepage does mention comparison, however only as one aim amongst others:

> "The quality of adult teachers and trainers is seen as a key factor for the implementation of lifelong learning. The network is dedicated to exchanging, comparing and researching professionalisation and professionalism of this group."[2]

In the first publication of the ASEM RN3, which – similar to the present volume – is a collection of self-contained papers going back to a conference experience – the editors attempt an outline of comparative perspectives for the future joint work of the network. While identifying some issues of common interest and possible starting points for future comparative work, the authors nevertheless counsel caution, being aware of the enormous challenges that such comparison involves: "Thus, any comparison between the continents can only be expressed *cum grano salis* and on a rather general level" (Nuissl, Egetenmeyer 2010, p. 212).

Challenges related to international work

Difficulties and challenges involved in international work are not limited to efforts towards methodologically rigorous comparison but may be found in any kind of international involvement. Language and terminology barriers, to begin with, affect to a smaller or greater extent almost any type of international activity, and very specific problems are connected to attempts of transferring or "borrowing" good practice and ideas between different countries.

The language issue

Every examination of adult education in another language and culture area is confronted with the problems of translation and terminology (Jütte 1999) to a particular extent. So far, attempts by international organisations to draw up multilingual thesauri and terminologies for adult education reveal the immanent difficulties in finding the respective equivalent in a foreign language. The issue of translation and terminology must be understood not only as a pragmatic but also as a methodological problem. As such, it requires greater attention and awareness on the side of both authors and readers – including readers of this volume. Even though this volume is published in English, its contributions were written by authors from seven countries whose native language is, in most cases, not English. The use of a particular term by several different authors might suggest

2 http://asemlllhub.org/researchnetworks/professionalisation/ (accessed 10 Nov. 2014)

that in all cases more or less identical concepts lie behind this term, but this would be a very risky assumption. The highest risk of misunderstanding regards perhaps not even so much the key terms used in a particular paper, since these are usually subject to explicit reflections and definitions by the author, and both author and reader are likely to spend a considerable amount of intellectual effort on them. It is however not possible or reasonable to give explanations and definitions for every single term used in a text, therefore the risk of misunderstanding increases with seemingly "innocent", self-evident terms, which play only supporting roles in a text.

In the translation theory, the concept of "equivalence" occupies a key role (Jütte 1999). It expresses substantive correspondence between the source and target languages. The translation process involves the production of functional equivalence between two concepts. Translation cannot therefore be limited to providing literal equivalents of single words. Rather it needs to reveal the conceptual content of a word. This may require additional explanations, which need to be added to the mere translation of the words. For deciding on the appropriate translation, the translator needs a high degree of linguistic sensitivity as well as the ability to anticipate what readers from other countries are likely to understand by reading a given term, what additional information they may need in order not to be misled in their understanding etc. Therefore, besides linguistic sensitivity also contextual knowledge concerning the situation in the language of the target country is in principle required from the translator. It is needless to say that in the case of a multi-national audience, this demand is difficult or impossible to completely fulfil in practice. Context knowledge of at least some other country will however help to increase the translator's sensitivity to possible pitfalls in the translation work. It has to be stressed, here, that the term of "translator" in this context does not only refer to persons who transfer a given text from one language to another one, but covers any author who addresses an audience from a country (or countries) others than his or her own one. Also in this case, the author has to convey (to "translate") concepts from his own linguistic and cultural background to audiences from possibly quite different backgrounds. Because the meaning of a concept can be understood in its entirety only from the context, this ultimately becomes an interpreting translation, underlying interpretations and evaluations. Translation represents a problem-solving process, in which many and various interpretations are possible.

In addition to a technical translation problem, the use of languages involves the question of power. In the field of research, a new "economy of publications and citations" (EPC) (Larsson 2009) emerged that has manifold influence on the publication patterns: Referring to the "Anglophone International(e)", Fejes and

Nylander (2014, p. 226) write: "This distribution of indexed journals forces researchers in countries where the EPC is prevalent to publish their research in English, a language that is often not their native tongue. On one hand, such a trend may be considered positive if it allows researchers in linguistic and geographic peripheries to be plugged into the strong academic communities of the Anglophone world and render their research available to a much broader audience. On the other, it is also problematic in that it creates research that is neither fully understandable nor easily accessible in some of the countries that contribute."

The transfer problem

The current widespread (policy) focus on tangible and possibly measurable outcomes and benefits has an equivalent in the explicit or implicit assumption that international commitment only makes sense if it involves some practical use. This means in particular the adoption and adaptation of foreign experience, tools or models, which are considered to be "advanced" and might be useful for the further development of the individual national system. Although naïve concepts of transfer as mere copies of models from one country/culture to another will hardly be found anymore in international contexts, the idea that somehow "lessons" can be drawn from other countries' experience and be "borrowed" for one's own context, is quite common. Numerous national, international and supranational institutions sign up with the objective of promoting exchange and international cooperation. Networks are created, which are intended to spread exemplary practice by multiplication. Mutual and peer learning are favourite concepts in EU policy and constitute essential element of the EU's Method of Open Coordination, which provides the framework for the EU's policy in the field of education.

Transfer may take place at different levels (macro, meso, micro), and quite different issues may become the object of transfer or mutual learning. Elements such as administrative structures, policy programmes, training concepts and curricula may, at best, be adapted and implemented within institutional structures; didactic approaches, concepts and ideas may spread across country borders and impact discourses and practices in various ways. There is a huge amount of literature and theorising about (policy) transfer and related concepts such as policy diffusion, policy innovation, lesson drawing and others (cf. Benson, Jordan 2011). Various theoretical models were developed and subsequently applied to the empirical field by researchers. These concepts stem originally from the field of political studies and are also increasingly applied in the field of education and lifelong learning. In particular, studies of globalisation and Europeanisation trends and

analyses of the impact of supranational institutions such as OECD or EU refer to concepts of transfer to explain convergence in educational policies (cf Knill, Dobbins 2013). Also in the field of vocational education and training, transfer phenomena are widely studied, mainly in the context of "exporting" successful models and concepts from one country to another (cf. Barabasch, Wolf 2009).

Despite such studies, there is still little reliable knowledge available about the potential and limits of cross-country transfer in adult education on different (macro, meso, micro) levels. Systematic transfer research dealing with transfer potentials and obstacles would therefore be desirable. Among the questions to be answered are the following: Do functionalist transfer mechanisms fail because of a disregard for specific national traditions (cf. Knoll 1996, p. 209)? To what extent are actual examples of transfer based on prior reflection of the enabling factors (as distinct from "ingenuously" transferring a model)? Does experience exchange among experts go beyond the circle of the actors immediately involved? To what extent is the transfer contextualised, i.e. related to the framework policy conditions and regulations?

There is a clear role for comparative research here. As Reischmann puts it: "Comparative research, by helping to understand the differences and similarities among countries and their significance for adult education, clarifies the possibilities and limits of understanding and borrowing". In this book, Egetenmeyer, Schüßler provide an example of comparative design – relating to the topic of academic professionalisation – which may help to shed light on some of the open questions surrounding the factors, which are responsible for a transfer's success or failure.

Prospects for further comparative research and introduction to this volume

At the European Q-Act conference, organised by the DIE in 2008, a range of open questions and needs for further action concerning the professionalisation of adult education in an international perspective were identified (Lattke 2008), many of which still apply. While these issues were mainly addressed to policy makers and were formulated in view of needed policy intervention, they also involve needs for further research. Several of these issues are addressed by one or more papers in this book. These include:

- The *development of consistent competence profiles* for – different roles of – adult education staff: Some fundamental work in an international perspective on competence frameworks is already available (Research voor Beleid 2010; see also Zarifis, Papadimitriou in this book proposing a key competence

model for adult educators based on a capacity-building perspective). Its further development and application to the field, also in a cross-country perspective, continues to be a task. Research will also be needed concerning the role which specific competencies and skills play for the adult education practice (see for example Goeze, Schneider in this book on recruiting practices and Käpplinger, Sork on programme planning);

- The *development of consistent training and qualifications pathways* which reflect the different professional roles in adult education and allow the persons performing in these roles to progress in a learner friendly way from non-expert to expert roles: This includes not only curriculum development activity (see for example Lattke in this book on a global cross-country curriculum for the training of adult educators) but also the development of suitable didactic formats and methods to be employed in such programmes for the teaching and assessing of the desired skills (see for example Marx et al. in this volume on the development of a test instrument for assessing pedagogical-psychological knowledge); in-depth research into these and other specific elements of an adult educator's competence is highly needed;
- *Agreeing on standards and regulations and the role of different players* in professionalising adult education: Adult education is a comparatively unregulated field. Calls for ensuring the quality of the adult education provision are frequently to be heard, yet at the same time there is often resistance to the idea of introducing regulations and standards through the state. The role of different players in deciding on standards and rules in implementing and in controlling them, is subject to much controversy, and is approached in different ways across Europe (cf. Sgier, Lattke 2012). More (comparative) analyses of these practices are needed to learn about relevant impact factors. In this volume see for example Murphy on experience from Ireland concerning the role and impact of different bodies and institutional actors on the professionalisation of the field, including the resulting conflicts between a learner-centred ethos of adult education and the reality of a system which builds on measuring individual performance in a rather rigid way.
- *Researching questions of professional identity and self-understanding of adult educators, including ethical values*: A professional identity is developed in a complex biographical process. While training programmes may influence this development, their detailed impact is difficult to detect and requires more in-depth research. Qualitative biographical approaches such as used in an Estonian project (see Karu, Jõgi in this book on research on the self-comprehensions of university students in adult education) may shed light on these issues; see also Egetenmeyer, Schüßler in this book on a proposed

comparative research on factors which influence the professional identity and the understanding of professionalism of adult education students.

- *Developing and refining theoretical concepts* as a basis for a shared understanding and building a community, if not a classical profession, in adult education: In some countries debates around theoretical concepts of professionalisation and related notions (professionalism, professional development, professional action …) are rather developed and continue to be conducted in a differentiated way. (See in this book the contributions by Ludwig, Günther from Germany proposing a theoretical model of professional in adult education; Steiner from Austria, suggesting "professional culture" as an alternative concept to the traditional one of "profession"; and Wittorski on the understanding of professionalisation in the French context.) It is desirable to further increase the international debate and joint work on such fundamental concepts.

This book is entitled "Professionalisation of Adult Educators. International and Comparative Perspective". While the international perspective is ensured by the very compilation of the individual contributions, the (international) comparison involved is mostly an implicit one, both on the side of the author(s) and the reader: On the side of the authors, their prior understanding and knowledge of the realities in other countries has an impact on the way in which information is selected and presented or arguments are arranged even without making explicit comparisons. On the side of reader, similarly, comparisons to individual situation are inevitably made when reading about a foreign country (cf. Reischmann 2008, p. 20).

Some of the papers in this volume adopt an explicitly comparative and/or international approach. A few contributions (Egetenmeyer, Schüßler; Käpplinger, Sork) are concerned with outlining research programmes of explicit comparison. Others (Lattke; Zarifis, Papadimitriou), although not following a comparative approach, address their respective topic from an explicitly cross-cultural or cross-country perspective. The international and comparative dimension is implicit in the other papers, which either develop theoretical considerations around key concepts relating to professionalisation (Wittorski; Ludwig, Günther; Steiner) or report on findings from recent or ongoing research projects (Murphy; Karu, Jõgi; Marx et al.; Goeze, Schneider).

The papers were selected in view of three thematic areas, which also constitute the sections of this volume. The first section, *Structures and Concepts*, covers the debate about the notion of professionalisation and cognate concepts. The papers in this section address the issue of professionalisation partly in view of theory-building and concept development, partly with the intention to analyse

discourse structures in a policy field with its interplay of different actors and power relations. The second section, *Professional Studies and Training*, addresses the issue of training and education of adult educators, both at non-university and university-level. It involves an example of curriculum development as well as research related to academic professionalisation and students' self-conceptualisations. The third section, *Competencies and Profiles*, deals with professional competencies of adult educators. This section involves a proposal for conceptualising an overall model of such competencies as well as research focusing on specific competencies or skills which are supposed to be an essential element of an adult educator's profile.

It is our hope that this volume will both contribute to sharing knowledge in the scientific community, to further "internationalising" adult education research and to providing stimuli for new (comparative) research and development projects to support the development of the field. The processes of globalisation and increasing inter-connectedness, which are highly ambivalent, raise by themselves many new research questions. As Bray (2003, p. 209) stated "comparative educationists can themselves promote and shape elements of globalisation". Comparative education "should adress new questions, and it should be invigorated as a vehicle to assist academics and practitioners to understand the changes around them" (ibid, p. 219).

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