

Adult learning and education in international contexts: Future challenges for its professionalization

Comparative Perspectives from the 2016 Würzburg Winter School. Edited by Regina Egetenmeyer, Sabine Schmidt-Lauff and Vanna Boffo. Peter Lang, Frankfurt a. M., 2017, 216 pp. Studies in Pedagogy, Andragogy and Gerontology series, vol. 69. ISBN 978-3-631-67875-6 (hbk), ISBN 978-3-631-71880-3 (ePUB), ISBN 978-3-653-07046-0 (ePDF)

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Published online: 13 January 2018

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This comprehensive edited volume contains 14 small-scale comparative studies initiated by the 2016 “International Winter School”, a 10-day programme hosted annually by the University of Würzburg in Germany.¹ The philosophy of this event is to bring together budding scholars in Adult Education (Masters and PhD students) from various countries, mostly European, but also from Nigeria, India, China, Malaysia and Korea, Turkey and Brazil.

The Winter School is based on an ERASMUS+ Strategic Partnership called “Comparative Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning” (COMPALL). Training starts with preparatory online seminars, then brings participants together face-to-face for two weeks and ends with reviewed, comparative studies. These are organised around three major sections: (1) Adult Learning in the Context of International Policies; (2) Frames of Professionalisation in Adult Education; and (3) Dimensions of Adult Education Professionalism. Participating scholars are invited to join the professional online network LinkedIn and to make use of country reports and several other useful resources (links are provided on p. 12).

The comparative papers presented in this edited volume cover policy documents, networks and interventions, policies, curricula and guidance practices, didactics and (subjective) theories, to name just a few. Most papers are written by international

¹ For more information on the 2016 event, see http://www.lifelonglearning.uni-wuerzburg.de/archive/winter_school_2016/. For information on the upcoming 2018 event, see http://www.erwachsenenbildung.uni-wuerzburg.de/fileadmin/06030230/Winter_School/Winter_School_2018_Booklet.pdf [both links accessed 4 January 2018].

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teams; all of them contain comparisons. All papers begin with a definition of their *tertium comparationis*² and then start comparing two to three countries. This allows for comparison of adult education in countries as different as Brazil and Serbia or Austria and India, but also in countries that have commonalities, such as colonialist legacies in Nigeria and South Africa. Findings show, for example, that Indian and Australian professional profiles differ in terms of governance and policy focus. The governance approach in Austria is evaluated as being co-operative, while the Indian approach is sectorally divided. Professionalisation in Austria is in line with the European Union's requirements, while Indian professionalisation currently shifts from mission-oriented towards market-initiated adult education. The advantage of this kind of comparison is its preciseness, even if the authors admit that the results lack a broader discussion of social and historical context (p. 61). This holds true for many of the articles and seems a pity, since occasions are rare where authors with first-hand experience come together, let alone write together.

During the 2016 Winter School, Italian and German doctoral students thus developed a structure that may enable consideration of more layers of comparison – at least for the wide area of research on transitions.³ Relying on the work by Kathryn Ecclestone and Andreas Walther, they scratched out a well-defined framework. For further investigation, the critical aspect (which is visible, but somewhat implicit) could be sharpened: Should guidance help those who seek advice to adapt to changes in the labour market, or is it also good to resist, fight back and integrate people in *collective* agency? This debate is laid out (pp. 136–137), but not emphasised. Researchers who use this framework should be aware of not losing the emancipative element of Adult Education.

The aspects of emancipation, resistance and anti-colonialism are addressed (p. 186) in a comparative study on Nigerian and South African teaching methods for the special approach of indigenous teaching methods. The author of this paper clearly distinguishes “Western teaching methods” from “indigenous teaching methods”. While her examples of songs and dances containing historical and religious heritage are convincing, several of them do not necessarily show how resistance is taught, but more how people are educated against laxity and procrastination (p. 189) or to sustain morality and law (*ibid.*). Moreover, they show how people are subjected to existing norms rather than how they are empowered to speak out and claim their rights. This more detailed comparison thus may inspire further research, since it offers a great and systematic basis and the author's evident knowledge of research on indigenous practices as well as on the practices themselves is rich and inspiring.

The Würzburg Winter School offers a unique opportunity for budding scholars to gather and exchange knowledge on different adult education practices in many different countries. But rather than merely collecting aspects, this particular format leads to precise studies with an impressive range of thematic coverage – all under the aspect of professionalisation. The aim is for this to lead to lifetime professional

² Latin for “the third [part of the] comparison”. It refers to the common aspect of the two things which are being compared.

³ This refers to transitions from one stage in life to another (such as from education to work, from work to part-time work and family work, from work to unemployment, from unemployment to further training or to retirement etc.)

co-operations all over the world and to inspire many more – and larger – studies of this kind.

For reading these papers with students it may be useful to prepare the students with some background information about the countries under consideration and to make use of the country reports mentioned (on p. 12).