

Pathways towards professional development of adult educators

Habilitation Thesis

Summary

Professionalization in adult education refers to the people working in this field. They are actually the staff, which is supporting learners in their learning process. For me it is very important that, in a time and a perspective in which the learning of adults becomes more and more important, there is a scientifically based evidence about the situation, the needs and the future development of these people. That's why my work is focused since more than one decade on questions concerning the professionals in adult education.

My **scientific and professional achievements** in this topic can be grouped as follows:

1. Professional status of adult educators

Professional status includes the aspects of access, employment, income, career, institutions, social image and self-understanding. In many countries, Romania included, the professional status of adult educators is quite low, partly precarious. Open access combined with unsecure employments, low income, little career options, little institutions and opportunities for professional development, low social image and a diffuse self-understanding characterizing adult educators.

The issue is becoming increasingly important at national and European level, as it can be seen in the policy messages, documents, efforts spent in this regards (see EC 2006, 2011, 2012b).

My activities here were focused on analyzing the situation nationally and internationally, proposing the concept of national system for professionalization, teaching adult education at university and giving data and recommendations for improvement in national and European policy making.

2. Competence profiles of Adult Educators

In adult education there are a lot of different works to do, acquiring different competences of the professionals. Teaching, Counseling, Managing, Curriculum planner and many other tasks are requiring a complex and complete competence of the staff, mainly since there is little opportunity for work-sharing in the small educational centers. In general the professionals focus on different combinations of

work and accordingly competences, such as Management/Policy making or Teaching/Counseling. Many of the competences are acquired non-formally, in learning by doing or kinds of further education. A big effort and research work is done in Europe on this topic, in projects (f.e. Research voor Beleid 2008, 2010).

My contribution consisted out of mapping competence profiles for trainers, career counselors, evaluators of competencies, participating in European R&D projects (like the Delphi – Study, Bernhardson/Lattke 2011) and putting it on the agenda in the Romanian discussion (such as the national conferences in adult education 2001, 2006 and 2010). I have been researching also on the training needs of different categories of professionals. In projects like DPPC, Vinepac, Capival I was coordinating, the concern was for harmonizing and clustering competences of adult learning professionals (ALPs) in an international and national perspective.

3. Pathways towards professionalization

The possibilities of ALPs to gain competences by further education and or formal acknowledgement (certification) of their practical experiences are rather limited, European-wide. Therefore, my research focus, a pioneering one (since 2004), goes on enhancing alternative pathways towards formal certification, as well as on integrating the different professional pathways. I developed proposals for certifying competences in adult education by evaluation and validation.

My contribution: I was coordinating an international team to develop the concept of such validation, together with tools and instruments (see VINEPAC project, No.16¹). Further research focus was on identifying the credibility of this alternative pathway towards professionalisation (No.21), as well as the impact of the validation process on the continuous professional development of the adult educators (No. 29). In other publications (No. 32 and 33) I elaborated my approach within the international debate.

4. Educational policies for professionalization

National systems for continuing professional development (CPD) are set just in few European countries, and, generally, the policy measures for supporting the CPD of ALPs are not set often systematically built up. Obstacles are mainly the heterogeneity of the field, the complexity of the adult educators work and the different interests of the associations and stakeholders. Beside this there are more fundamental questions, concerning the responsibility for adult education (State? Individual? Society? Enterprises?) and problems of financing. In some countries such as Austria, Estonia and Switzerland exist models of professionalization in a coherent way, whereas in other countries the topic is led to the dynamics of the labor market.

My involvement in this topic was mainly to analyze the situation, the reasons and to propose and initiate the development of the Romanian national system, coordinating elaboration of its concept, based on

¹ My 42 publications related to the topic are numbered and can be found in the Reference list R.1, with Own publications.

the national survey undertook (No.35). The analytical work can be seen in the content analysis of the main European policy documents in the last decade (No. 38), and in the related policy brief (No. 42).

My future research interests and career plans concern providing scientific input for debate and for evidence based policy making. Mainly I will realize research activities and projects on the needed competences of ALPs (i.e. the facilitator), on the role of the universities, from a lifelong learning perspective. My short/ medium term research plan for instance is to approach, on large scale, within a Horizon2020 project, the issue of the role of educational professionals in building up learning cities.

I will be involved in the conceptualizing of a national program of educational research, as it was started at the conference “Quality in educational research” (under my coordination, Oct. 2014). I will continue to do these research activities in close connection with the European and international scientific community I managed to be part of, benefitting from their findings and allowing a comparative approach in educational research.

In my further activities, I continue to follow my approach to research, carried out always linked with activities in practice, to develop the field, to foster innovations, to bring problems and solutions in discussion.

I will support the implementation of an elaborated concept of professionalization by counseling stakeholders in practice, giving recommendations to the governmental bodies, teaching and building up a group of younger professionals being scientifically prepared and collaborating with international experts, within the European doctoral school, now in construction. I also will continue to work abroad as Guest-professor and researcher, as I did already in Germany (Essen), Italy (Firenze), Copenhagen (DK) etc.

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