

Adult education in an interconnected world

Cooperation in lifelong learning for sustainable development
Festschrift in honour of Heribert Hinzen
Uwe Gartenschlaeger and Esther Hirsch (Editors)

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The reports, studies and materials published in this series aim to further the development of theory and practice in adult education. We hope that by providing access to information and a channel for communication and exchange, the series will serve to increase knowledge, deepen insights and improve cooperation in adult education at an international level.

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Jost Reischmann

Andragogy: Because “adult education” is not beneficial to the academic identity!

In many countries of the world a new educational (sub-)discipline dealing with the learning and education of adults has come into existence in the past few decades. This contribution focuses on this academic discipline and its struggle to find a professional identity in universities and for their graduates. It suggests that “Andragogy” helps to clarify the specifics of the scholarly approach, thus contributing to a professional identity of this group of academics and graduates. International readers are invited to compare the following arguments coming mainly from the German and European background with the developments in their countries, the similarities and differences.

The growth of a new academic (sub-)discipline

In Europe, universities from Finland and Estonia to Serbia, Hungary and Italy, from the Netherlands to the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania offer programmes dealing with the learning and education of adults. The same is true for Thailand, Korea, Australia, Nigeria and Venezuela and many other countries. In Germany more than forty, in the United States and Canada more than eighty universities offer programmes for students and do research and theory development. A wealth of publications, national and international societies, conferences and cooperation demonstrate that today a new reality exists in adult education, an academic discipline with professionals and specific tasks.

But this new academic field is still in question in many places. It appears that sound academic work and successful graduates are not sufficient to build a professional identity in universities and for graduates. What also seems necessary is to work explicitly on image and identity. As an attempt to contribute to a distinct identity, it will be argued that the term “adult education/educator” is “destructive” for the identity, role and perception of this new discipline and its graduates.

“Adult educator” – an everyman label!

When using the term “adult education”, most people associate this with the institutions of practical adult education. In common perception “everybody” can be labelled as an “adult educator”:

- the grandma sharing her knowledge of baking cookies,
- the engineer instructing his staff about a new technology,
- the political or religious missionary preaching in the marketplace or on TV about the true and only life or society,
- the hundred thousand teachers in adult education institutions.

So: “everybody” can be an “adult educator”. This can also be confirmed by analysing historical cases of “key persons”, published in two international conferences (Standing Conference on the History of Adult Education 1996, 2006). These cases also confirm the variety of understandings of “adult educator” – from “everybody” to “academic specialist”, from “the wise” to “scholar and researcher”.

When “everybody” is an “adult educator”, it is difficult to build a specific professional identity of university programmes, students and graduates with this label. If people who graduate after more than five years from a university

are labelled “adult educator” similarly to “everybody”, this is destructive for the role and perception of the academic discipline and its graduates. In order to differentiate between the field of practice and the academic subject, it is suggested here that for academic programmes and their graduates the term “andragogy” and “andragogue” should be used to identify and differentiate this special group and their professional competency.

Andragogik – andragogy

The first time the term *Andragogik* was used was by the German high school teacher Alexander Kapp in 1833 (more detailed in Reischmann 2004). In the 1920s in Germany academics started new reflections related to the why, what for and how of the education of adults. There *Andragogik* found a second birth. A new reality was emerging: a scholarly reflection level “above” practical adult education. Faber, systemising the academic development of this field, names this “the generation of adult educators out of passion (*Erwachsenenbildner aus Leidenschaft*): They came from different fields of society, they were active in a new sector of life without an academic mandate or an institutional structure” (Faber 2006: 64). The idea of “adult education” as a discipline was not yet born.

In the 1950s, andragogy can be found in scholarly publications in Switzerland (Hanselmann), Yugoslavia (Ogrizovic), the Netherlands (ten Have), and Germany (Poeggeler 1974, p. 17ff). Still, only insiders knew the term. But the increasing use of “andragogy” signalled that a new differentiation between “doing” and “reflecting” was developing with “professors in double disciplines”. At universities they were engaged in adult education *within* their main subject. They were, so to say, doubly interested, as professors of pedagogy or sociology and – as the first academics – reflecting as individual persons on professors’ positions at universities on questions of adult education” (Faber 2006: 66). And – something that was new – now students in university programmes could study adult education, at least as a minor subject.

The American understanding: Andragogy – a banner for identity

A breakthrough for the term “andragogy” for the English-speaking adult education world came with Malcolm Knowles. He describes:

“... in 1967 I had an experience that made it all come together. A Yugoslavian adult educator, Dusan Savicevic, participated in a summer session I was conducting at Boston University. At the end of it he came up to me

with his eyes sparkling and said, ‘Malcolm, you are preaching and practicing andragogy.’ I replied, ‘Whatagogy?’ because I had never heard the term before” (Knowles 1989: 79).

In a short time, the term andragogy, now labelled as Knowles’ concept, received general recognition; “within North America, no view of teaching adults is more widely known, or more enthusiastically embraced, than Knowles’ description of andragogy” (Pratt 1998: 13). Providing a unifying idea to the amorphous group of adult educators connected with the term andragogy – “the art and science of helping adult learners” – as well as the scholarly access, were certainly the main benefits Knowles brought to the field of adult education. The problem: attaching “andragogy” exclusively to Knowles’ specific approach means that the term is lost for general use.

The European development: Andragogy – an academic discipline

The European understanding is broader (Reischmann 2004). Where “andragogy” is used, it functions as a header for (places of) systematic reflections, parallel to other academic headers like “biology”, “medicine”, “physics”. It covers the academic discipline “the subject of which is the study of education and learning of adults in all its forms of expression” (Savicevic 1999: 97).

From 1970 onwards, Andragogy became connected with new academic and professional institutions, publications, and programmes. Ex-

Fig. 1: Publications from Yugoslavia, Canada, and Korea, using the term “Andragogy”



amples are: The Yugoslavian (scholarly) journal *Andragogija* 1969 and the Yugoslavian Society for Andragogy; Slovenia's Andragoski Center Republike Slovenije (1993) with the journal *Andragoska Spoznanja*; Prague University (Czech Republic) has a *Katedra Andragogiky*. A similar professional and academic expansion developed worldwide: Venezuela has had the *Instituto Internacional de Andragogia*, since 1998 the Adult & Continuing Education Society of Korea has published the journal *Andragogy Today*.

So now again we find a new reality with new types of professional institutions, functions, and roles, with fulltime employed and academically-trained professionals, with "explicit andragogy professors: with this specification I will express that now for the first time we have the academic reality in our science that adult education or andragogy is not an additional subject but – *expressis verbis* – only the main one" (Faber 2006: 73).

But still: The lack of identity

As described: university programmes, research, publications and institutions give proof that such an academic field exists worldwide. But there are problems threatening the further development and identity of the discipline.

To name four:

1) An old-fashioned approach can still be found – in public and among university colleagues, administrators and other andragogical amateurs: "the knowledge that is utilised in the education of adults is, fundamentally, knowledge from other disciplines which is applied to the education of adults ... Adult education is an integration of branches of disciplines, rather than a discipline in its own right" (Jarvis 1987: 311). For sure, all disciplines (i.e. physics, biology, history...) utilise knowledge from other disciplines, but that does not mean they are a blunt mixture. This outdated position has critical consequences: Academic posts are given to persons that have not studied this field, thus leading to a loss of identity and knowledge. A voice from Africa expresses it unmistakably clearly: "it is too late in the day to toy with the idea of recruiting persons not trained in adult education into Departments of Adult Education ... about a century after the establishment of the first Department of Adult Education in the world and after 40 years of the establishment of the first Department of Adult Education in Nigeria" (Biao 2005: 13f). It seems that the professors, using the "everybody" term "Adult Education", now reap what they have sown: "everybody" can take over that university position.

2) Another problem is that adult education sometimes becomes primarily focussed on one “fashionable” field of praxis. Carroll Londoner, past chair of the International Adult Education Hall of Fame¹, outlines this problem (private mail 31 January, 2014): “The Adult Education programmes in the States have shrunk dramatically as the Universities do not seem inclined to support adult education because they do not understand it. They have too quickly identified the broad field of adult education with the notion of “adult literacy”. That is a sad misunderstanding but nevertheless it exists because in the past there has been such a huge amount of federal dollars available to support the US literacy efforts. This is no more and that is for certain. We in the Universities have not done a very good job of explaining to our administrators what the broad field is about and why it should be studied academically”. Supporting practical fields certainly is praiseworthy, but for surviving in the academic arena it might have been better to “explain to our administrators what the broad field is about and why it should be studied academically”! The discussion about andragogy as a discipline could support that, also to keep the necessary distance “above practice” and above specific approaches.

3) A third threat for identity came – at least in Germany – with the Bologna system and its Bachelor-Master system: Reputable professors report (in Egetenmeyer/Schüssler 2012), that in the changing University programmes adult education becomes marginalised and disintegrated (p. 37), loses profile (p. 37), operates under dozens of names (p. 36), has a low reputation (p. 197), has difficulties to identify the core of the discipline (p. 278), and becomes invisible (p. 256) in the mixture of contents.

4) And a fourth thread is the confusing plurality of workplaces reported by the graduates. In the last three decades in many countries the working fields of the graduates far exceeds the traditional understanding of “adult educators” or “teachers of adults”. Only a small portion work in the traditional fields of adult education, only a small portion teach as “adult educators”. The disadvantage of this multi-functionality is: The graduates are not perceived (from the outside and even worse: from the inside) as a distinct group of professionals.

A shared identity of the academic field of adult education and its graduates seems further away than before.

1/ <http://www.halloffame.outreach.ou.edu>

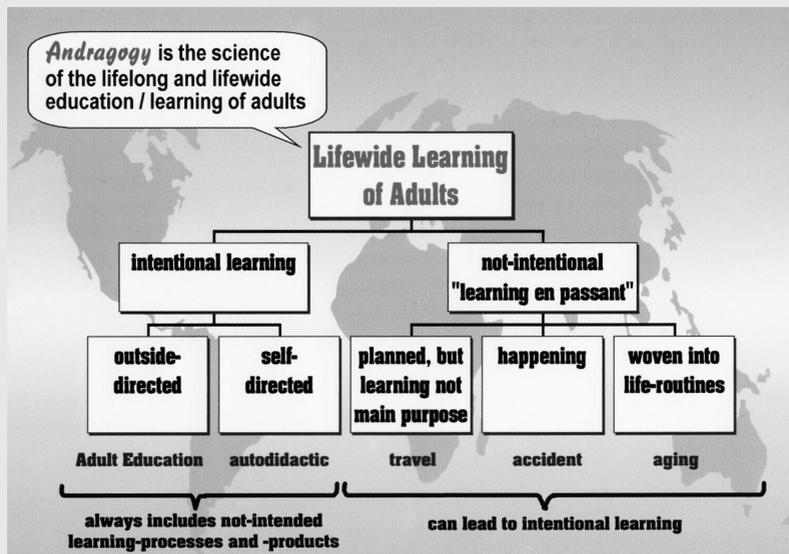
Andragogy: A chance for identity?

How can the identity (and hopefully reputation) of this new academic field be supported?

1. Elaborating on the specific tasks of “andragogy” (academic) and “adult education” (practical) prevents confusion about the different responsibilities and strengths of each field.
2. When using andragogy in the academic arena, it is necessary to carve out the specifics of this subject, its identity and image. To support this, professors have to
 - explicitly work on and for the policy, legitimation and identity of their subject, and make this obvious to the outside world,
 - differentiate the subject from other subjects,
 - take care that in study programmes the visibility and identity of the discipline is respected – which also means to exclude persons who have not studied adult education/andragogy from appointments in this subject,
 - supply the students/graduates not only with knowledge and skills, but also with the awareness of their uniqueness and what only they have to offer, and
 - stay away from the confusing bunch of different names for the discipline.
3. Andragogy, by opening the perspective to “more” – to “Lifewide Education” (Reischmann 1986, Jackson 2012) in all forms and expressions (Fig. 2) – creates a new identity, not defined by “adult teacher”, but by “change agent”. This new understanding makes it clear that it is not by chance or mistake that the graduates can be found in companies, churches and culture, in armed forces and adult education centres, in management and media, in tourism, hospitals and many other fields. This plurality of workplaces is confusing only when thinking in the limiting category of “adult educator”. Andragogy makes us aware that there already exists a unifying, identity-giving function: to support change for individuals, institutions, and society – in various institutions, in various functions.
4. To support a shared identity under the perspective of andragogy, the curricula must prepare for this plurality of workplaces. The competencies of andragogues in this complex field are highly valued: to professionally teach, to plan and organise learning occasions, to consult and moderate, to evaluate and research – and produce the most successful mix of these ingredients (Fig. 3).

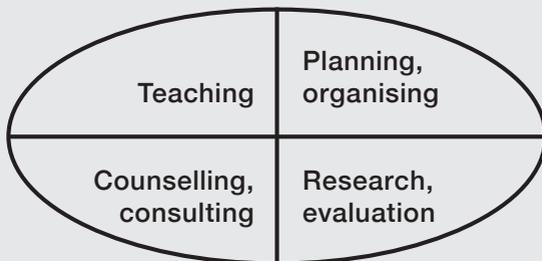
5. For building a distinct identity of the graduates (“andragogues”), the ingredients are available: first of all, graduation from a University programme. Second of all, the insights that learning and change processes happen in many contexts far beyond school-learning. Thirdly, the awareness that the graduates have shared competencies for all these contexts, unifying them to a distinct group: professionals supporting change.

Fig. 2: Structure of “Lifewise Learning” of Adults (Reischmann 1986, 2004)



Source: Prof. Jost Reischmann, University of Bamberg, Germany. www.andragogy.net

Fig. 3: Core competencies of andragogy curriculum at Bamberg University (and elsewhere) (Reischmann 2010)



The label “andragogue” is – as our graduates reported – also helpful on the labour market: It made employers curious to invite them for interviews. In many cases this led to employment. This seems true even in Brazil, as I learned in a mail from there: “I prefer being called an “andragogue” because it ... is better for my professional marketing”.

This too may serve as confirmation: To be perceived as a distinct group, they have to avoid the all-embracing term “adult educator”.

Identity does not come about by itself. Professors and graduates have to explicitly work on this identity. It seems this was forgotten in the past. The discussion about andragogy as a unifying label has the potential to direct our attention to this missing identity development.

Summary

Claiming a separate name for the academic discipline is not meant to devalue the field and institutions of practice. DVV International is persuasive evidence of the valuable work done in practical adult education, and has been a premier and respected disseminator of this idea for more than 45 years. It also is a convincing example of much cooperation between the practical and academic access to adult learning and education – including academic honorary degrees to representatives of DVV International – congratulations, Heribert! A self-confident academic identity will in many ways strengthen adult education as a powerful concept and key to the twenty-first century.

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