

Book Review

on Reischmann, Jost (ed./2021) *Essential Readings in International and Comparative Adult Education*

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Abstract

This review will reflect upon a recent publication of Reischmann which is a unique edition of studies on comparative adult education with attention to some particularly important aspects of the evolution of comparative studies and research on teaching and learning of adults. Therefore, historical phases in the evolution of the field became marked in the collection, together with a focus on some key 'travellers' and their reports, essays of distinguished thinkers in adult education and its internationalisation, strategic roles and comparative dimensions. Therefore, it is essential that one can find some key essays on comparative studies, upon the roles of international organisations to highlight pitfalls and methods and necessary lessons. A review, on the one hand, must recognise this effort to collect basic reading into an updated collection and, on the other, to call attention to some limitations and perspectives referring to the usage of this valuable work.

Keywords: Adult education, policy, comparative studies, research, history

Review text

Prof. Dr. Jost Reischmann, a former chair of Department of Andragogy at the University of Bamberg, and first president of the International Society for Comparative Adult Education (ISCAE), has devoted his professional life to the research and development of adult education with a special approach of comparative work he had entered into by the 1980s. It is no wonder that Reischmann became engaged in comparative studies, since the work of Pöggeler, Leirmanm Chartes and Knox deeply influenced his own mindset and approach. Also, the collaboration with Henschke, Jarvis, Pöggeler and others helped him to build up his personal approach to adult education in a world of change with growing roles to international organisations, and associations trying to develop adult education. His participation in collaborative exchange in between AAACE and DVV also helped him to develop his understanding and focus to research and studies with comparative lenses. Another important aspect of his having gained a significant role in the field of comparative adult education is that he could combine the focus of ISCAE with some other platforms in comparative studies, like the Pöggeler-platform in the history of adult education, which became channelled into the European Society for the Research in the Education of Adults (ESREA). This background entitled Reischmann to turn his experience into supporting the International Hall of Fame of Adult and Continuing Education (IHOFE) and, amongst many other quality works in comparative studies and professionalisation in adult education, into editing a thorough collection of studies, most of considered as milestone inputs into comparative analysis of adult education both in methodological and in analytical dimensions.

It is no wonder that the foreword of Tom Sork, current president of ISCAE, drew a rather clear line of explanation why such a collection of studies would be necessary to provide a good source of studies and analytical works of adult education in a world of accelerated international collaboration and partnerships.¹

At the same time the preface of the collections made by Reischmann made it clear that historical models of knowledge transfer from university extension in the UK to encounter groups in the US have demonstrated the impact of good examples why the learning and education of adults could be beneficial at both local and global levels, however, we should understand not only similarities and differences in the usage of community platforms as models in adult learning and education, but also to recognise some basic reasons for them to occur from the original to the ones as “borrowed”. Reischmann clearly pointed upon the roles of cross-cultural communication, international partnerships and discoveries as part of travels and exchange in the quality improvement of the field of adult education with better understanding.²

The promotion and development of international comparative adult education have been enhanced through special events of conferences and seminars in comparative education, comparative adult education, ISCAE and that of CONFINTEA V. in between the 1980s and late 1990s. ‘Essential readings’, as the title of this collection would signal, may help documenting the long, but serious path of comparative perspective with concrete examples. Another driver of making this collection to come true was that there was a real need to get older/classical texts of the field accessible in one set. However, a good influential reason was to help young scholars in adult learning and education to receive an accessible collection to provide reasonable documents as standards of comparative work representing methodology.³ Reischmann edited incorporated papers by providing introductory notes to each of them so as to draw a wider context to each paper and, thereby, to help understanding comparative aspects. It was a rather direct and clear intention to collect particular historical papers from distinguished authors in order to enlighten the evolution and progress of international and comparative studies in adult education.⁴

The collection of Reischmann formulated some specific readings to mark stages, ‘episodes’ and challenging dimensions of international and comparative adult education. Furthermore, another remarkable intention was to collect studies that would resonate some country-specific comparison trying to identify some trends and issues to be related to our own countries’ developments and challenging issues, like borrowing effective models and/or adapting them to some new environments.

A significant attention was made to the limitations having been generated by the professional languages used in international and comparative studies in which English became a dominant tool of knowledge transfer and analysis, however, some other languages also played their own roles in national, regional and local dimensions. (e.g. the role of Danish, Dutch and Swedish were rather limited to regional focuses) signalled particular contexts of limitation and choices for regional developments and innovations.⁵

¹ Foreword by Tom Sork, ISCAE president, p. 7.

² Preface made by Reischmann, p. 9.

³ *ibid*

⁴ Preface made by Reischmann, p. 10.

⁵ Preface made by Reischmann, p. 11.

Moreover, Reischmann was accurate to indicate other challenges related to traps and pitfalls as consequence of limitedness or misuse of data, personal blindness, political correctness, and misunderstanding of language, amongst some other issues to turn meaning into unwanted or unidentified fields.

The scale of selection was rather limited to some earlier planned length and total number of words in general, yet the collection intended to imply all those papers which marked the vision and action in international and comparative adult education be related to internationalisation and development as consequence of developments and cross-structural implications from content, to structure and from methods to resources. It was a great challenge to group those papers by generating categories for topics recognised as relevant to the collection with some intentional orientations to cover up content, structure and research categories.

As for the structure of this collection, Reischmann provided intentional groups/topics of papers to demonstrate issues and contexts, however, one may consider that those groups/topics not only helps understanding the roles and mission of adult education with comparative approaches, but may generate tension upon trying to identify and understand trends and issues within this particular field of adult learning and education and related research and analytical work. The following chapters were created by the author:

- Foreword and Preface
- History, Development
- Travellers and their reports
- International, Program Reports, Country Reports, Juxtaposition
- Comparative Studies
- International Organisations and Institutions
- Reflections on Pitfalls and Methods
- Lessons learned
- Epilogue
- Observation and Perspectives.

Let me be clear upon the structure and underline that the above framework helped Reischmann to make use of his experience in international and comparative work in adult learning ad education and turn this to a good set of problem areas to resonate the complexity and manyfold aspects of international and comparative studies in adult education. Accordingly, it also turned out the accelerated internationalisation in adult education also had its rises and falls, while international focused in our field became rather specific and broad in research works emphasized by a good wave of internationalisation to start by 1993 and move beyond expectations after the Millennium.

This collection of Reischmann, entitled as 'Essential Readings' allows us to estimate and recognise the impact of adult education and its internationalisation to promote participation, performance and partnerships as part of welfare and well-being in a number of advanced societies, but also to resonate ongoing struggles in adult learning and education to prioritise inclusion, equity and ethical concerns embedded into the citizenship discourse. Reischmann was rather accurate in forming his chapters, but also to get them balanced throughout his collection. One may consider this collection as unfinished or incomplete, however, it was a remarkable attempt to connect past, present and future in adult learning and education so as to underline changing roles and mission of international and comparative adult education whereby difference and similarities in delivery modes, structures, methods, means and strategic focuses may keep this field as complex to depend on country/region/locality and cultures of people having engaged in the process of collecting and sharing good knowledge as adult learners.

Finally, let us remark that since internationalisation became a significant element of further modernisation in education and training in Europe and beyond the 1990s, adult learning and education could make use of international and comparative studies having been broadened up to reflect to structural changes, methodological improvements in an era of lifelong learning to rise to political mainstream focuses.⁶ Reischmann is a significant representative of very few scholars who, in this specific climate, organised an international platform of ISCAE to promote comparative studies in adult education so as to understand the nature of the learning and teaching adults regarding regional, national and continental scales to result in similarities and differences.

This collection is worth to be read since it helps not only junior researchers to understand the nature and characteristics of international and comparative studies in adult education, but also to turn senior scholars to recognise the impact of such studies upon quality teaching and learning of adults in an age of uncertainties with at least one particular stability point that knowledge is power.⁷

⁶ European Commission (1995) *Teaching and Learning. Towards the Learning Society* 1995 White Paper on Education Luxembourg: EurOP

⁷ 'Knowledge is power' is taken from the title of the book of Tom Steele, entitled *Knowledge is power. The Rise and Fall of European Popular Educational Movements, 1848-1939* (2007) Frankfurt am Main: Peter LANG, ISBN 978-3039105632