

Editorial: Open issue

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In this open issue we present five papers covering different adult education and learning contexts across different geographical spaces, ranging from Spain, Germany, Eastern Europe to Canada. The topics of research range from young people to retired people, adult educators and men and women reading self-help literature.

In the article by *Francesca Salva-Mut*, *Elena Quintana-Murci*, and *Danielle Desmarais*, the focus is directed at young people and their participation in adult education and training. Using a biographical perspective the authors establish three different types of pathways regarding education, and they also study the main factors that exclude or include adults from participation in adult education. Despite the fact that these paths are marked by heterogeneity, a large number of the sample participate in adult education – mainly young adults with low qualifications, with the aim to improve their professional situation or to try to integrate into the labour market. It is, therefore, not surprising that these adults come from a situation of unemployment or economic inactivity. However, they experience a set of barriers to participation that can be institutional, situational or dispositional. The analysis of those barriers lead the authors to state that it is necessary to develop new equity policies and to introduce reforms to the adult education national system, which will allow a second educational chance for young adults.

Paula Thieme, *Michael Brusch* and *Victoria Büsch* direct their interest towards continuing employment in pensionable age, drawing on data from a German national survey. They illustrate how there are significant correlations between continuing training motivation and work ability and desire to work past retirement age. Their results show that training motivation is significantly high across all the studied groups of older adults. While some correlations proved not to be significant, there is no doubts that the stronger the culture of life-accompanying learning, the higher the ability and the desire to work after retirement. As positive experiences can increase training motivation, the authors suggest that new methods geared to the needs of older citizens should be developed. In the same line of reasoning, the training contents for older adults should be more application-oriented and eliciting positive effects – which will further increase motivation.

Adult educators are the focus in *Tetyana Kloubert's* article. She addresses the self-images of adult educators in exercising their professional agency in contexts of social transformation after the fall of the communist regimes. She has conducted 91 interviews with adult educators in Poland, Ukraine and Russia. The author tries to understand common trends that could illuminate changes occurring during the transitions—with these three countries being used mostly as examples. Adult educators see adult education as a way to attain a set of aims, including, for example, to preserve memory, resist state attempts to forge memories, foster therapy and healing, or to promote political and civic engagement. Thus, the adult educators functions goes beyond the traditional function to moderate and foster learning-building, including other dimensions such as the responsibility for the development of civil society. But Kloubert highlights the issues in Russia and the Ukraine, where adult educators dedicate themselves to dealing with the past much more in their personal engagement—and not as a part of a social demand. She concludes from her investigation that despite the fact that adult educators show an agentic capacity, there are a number of critical questions to be posed. For example, should the agency of adult educators focus on fostering and supporting individual growth, or renewal of society?

Scott McLean and *Brandi Kapell* have conducted in-depth interviews with 134 men and women who read self-help literature. Their conclusions are, first, that women's reading is more focused upon the enhancement of interpersonal relationships. Secondly, the gender differences regarding the reading relating to careers and health were modest. It appears that women have joined men in reading career-related self-help books, and men and women have comparable interests in reading about health and well-being. The authors claim that these differences are related to political-economic and cultural changes. They argue that women's increasing necessity to work for wages makes career related reading just as important for men and women. The disproportioned responsibility towards domestic and emotional work would therefore determine women's tendency of reading self-help books on personal relationships. A parallel could be outlined with women's participation in adult or continuing education: regardless the motives, women feel a stronger responsibility to learning than men, thus explaining gender differences in participation.

In the last article, *Reinhard Zürcher*, proposes a model for the continuum between informal and formal learning connected to a teaching continuum. Drawing on sociomaterial theories, he argues that 'performative, practice-based approaches are indispensable in order to investigate the low formalized section of the TLC [teaching-learning continuum]. The material aspect of sociomaterial theories enables us to argue for the (partial) symmetry of the teaching-learning relationship, for the equivalence of human/non-human action in TLP and to understand informal learning and in particular informal teaching in a new way'.