

## Book review: Adult education policy and the European Union—theoretical and methodological perspectives

By Marcella Milana and John Holford. (Eds.). (Rotterdam: Sense Publisher, 2014). 194 pp., ISBN (open access e-book): 9789462095489

This book is a timely response to the increasing influence of the European Union (EU) in shaping adult education policy in the member countries. This collection is premised on the assumption that nation states still make policy, but they do so within a system where the EU plays an important part. It is therefore no longer sufficient to rely on “methodological nationalism” when researching policy of adult education at the national level but these policies will have to be examined within a system of transnational governance.

The aim of this book, which is organized in four parts, is not to describe adult education policy in Europe, but to explore key issues in how research can be carried out. However, in order to provide the reader with a solid background of what has happened at the EU level Part I, *The evolution of European union policies*, looks at the progression of EU policies which have had a direct effect on adult education practice. It raises questions such as: How have these policies evolved? Who were, and who are, the political and other actors involved? Who has been included, and who has been excluded, from this process? And most importantly, what effect are these policies likely to have in shaping the future of adult education in Europe? The two chapters in this section are very informative and provide a rich and most useful insight into the adult education policy evolution within the EU. Palle Rasmussen traces how adult learning policy has developed as an element in EU education and training policy. The work highlights the European Commission’s contribution to constructing a transnational dimension in European adult education policy. As a follow up Vida Mohorčič Špolar & John Holford explore the wider intellectual and policy background to EU’s work in the area of adult education and examine how it has moved from a relative marginal position to being a central issue in the language of the EU.

The rest of the book focuses primarily on discussing theoretical and methodological frameworks that could inform research on the relationship between the EU and member states which come to govern the policy and practice of adult education. In *Part II, Political theories and their potential*, the two contributors Malgorzata Klatt and Marcella Milana develop their arguments by drawing on a body of political science literature emerging mostly – but not only – from the field of European studies. They examine such questions as how different institutions within the EU work, what the power relations among them are, and how these relations have changed over time. Which ‘hard-’ and ‘soft-law’ mechanisms are utilised? In doing so they identify and comment, from a perspective that assumes transnationalism and close interdependence amongst administrative and governance systems at national and European levels. The two chapters are informative and provide the reader with a good general understanding on how the EU operates and provide a fruitful framework for future research on lifelong learning and transnational governance.

The contributors to Part III: *Governmentality perspectives and their potential*, use sociological perspectives to explore, theoretically and analytically, the emergence of a

new kind of governance and its impact on European lifelong learning politics and practice. They discuss such questions as: What kind of arrangements and actions define the common good at a European level? What principles of justice feed into the construction of a new moral self? And no less important, what identity do these create for the adult learner in Europe? Both chapters take a point of departure in Michel Foucault's conceptions of power, governmentality and the technologies of the self. Romuald Normand & Ramón Pacheco look at the new challenges the new political configurations of the common good where individuals are expected to focus their actions towards a complex lifelong universe. In the second chapter Andreas Fejes argues for the usefulness of Michael Foucault in research on lifelong learning. Both chapters provide a rich theoretical frame for approaching research on lifelong learning. However, at times one can detect a tendency to focus more on theory as such than on its application to the exploration of lifelong learning.

In the final section Part I: *Developing methodological perspectives*, the focus shifts from theory to methodology and addresses how adult education scholarship can productively borrow methodologies from other disciplines, and how this can contribute to methodological advancement in the field. The two chapters draw on the sociology of law, policy sociology and critical policy analysis to challenge disciplinary boundaries in an attempt to provide new methodological approaches calling for the triangulation of methods of data gathering and the combination of analytical strategies. These include, but are not limited to, discourse analysis, quantitative content analysis and qualitative content analysis of policy documents, interviews and other narrative data. Pia Cort presents a proposal on how to research the unpredictable pathways of EU lifelong learning policies. Borrowing the concept of 'policy trails' she argues that the methodology of policy trailing and the use of the mixed methods of discourse analysis and narrative inquiry are a means of overcoming 'methodological nationalism' and of linking structure and agency in research on the 'European educational space'. The second chapter in this section is by Evengelia Koutidou who presents a methodological framework from the sociology of law, and explores its relevance for adult education research on the implementation of statutory frameworks regarding certain ethnically and culturally diverse social groups. She does this comparatively at both the EU and national levels. The two texts help the reader to learn about less well known but most useful frameworks that can assist in the analysis of transnational policy making in the field of adult education. What is particularly helpful is the way the authors have managed to illustrate how the theoretical perspectives can be applied by looking at actual policies.

Overall the book successfully delivers on what it has promised and after having worked through the different sections the reader will have developed a good understanding of the shift towards transnational governance and the rule of the EU in this process. The book also provides the reader with a useful set of theories and methods that will assist those who intend to examine national and supranational policies on adult education. I therefore strongly recommend that this book be used in adult education graduate courses, not only in the area of policy studies but as well in foundation courses.

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