

Call for Papers Heft 3 | 2027

Science Studies in Adult Education

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In this issue of ZfW, we aim to focus on a topic that has only been sporadically addressed in adult and continuing education thus far, and to bring together existing research efforts that are often still unconnected.

Science studies examine the institutional structural conditions, the specific practices, and the desired and undesired results and effects of producing methodologically sound knowledge. It is of great importance to critically reflect on the forms, conditions and limits of knowledge production and reception, both within and beyond science. This is especially true regarding the self-observation of the discipline, the differentiation of forms of knowledge, the epistemological foundation and the impact of knowledge in the field of action. Adopting a science studies perspective in this reflection can help to sharpen the epistemological foundations of adult education, strengthen its capacity for scientific reflection, and promote a more conscious approach to the social, institutional, and practical conditions of knowledge and education.

In Germany, adult education has achieved a level of institutionalization as a subdiscipline of educational science. However, internationally, both its position within educational science and the status of its scientification are much more controversial. Against this backdrop, it is particularly important to us to attract international contributions with this call.

While research, particularly in the natural sciences, is often conducted on a transnational or global scale, discourse in the social sciences and humanities tends to be organized more regionally (e.g. along language boundaries). In recent years, there has been a growing interest in internationalization of German adult education which may be due to the importance of supranational governance structures in adult education practice in the last decades (e.g., Schemmann, 2007). This development is evident in the research focus on topics of internationalization (e.g., the thematic focus in the *Hessische Blätter für Erwachsenenbildung [HBV]* on “Adult education in an international perspective” (HBV, 2020), and the 2021 annual conference at HSU Hamburg on “Adult education in international perspectives: boundaries and opportunities”). It is also evident in the development and application of research approaches in international comparative adult education research (e.g., Egetenmeyer, 2014; Field & Boeren, 2024). This ties directly into the perspectives of science studies. As early as the 1970s, bibliographic analyses sought to determine the extent to which a genuine body of knowledge on adult education was developing (Boshier, 1979). More recent analyses have also addressed the unity and diversity of adult education research, particularly on a global scale (e.g., Fejes & Nylander, 2015; Käßlinger, 2015).

Adult education science is increasingly faced with the question of how developments such as digitalization, economization, or political polarization affect the forms, conditions, and limits of its knowledge production in the course of contingent social transformation processes. The existence of

a fragmented disciplinary interest in addressing these developments from a science studies perspective highlights the need for a more systematic and coherent space for discourse. In this space, science-reflective questions can be addressed and developed not only in isolation, but in a structured manner. Such a consolidation would contribute to the theoretical foundation and profile-building of adult education science, as well as increasing its connectivity to neighbouring disciplinary, interdisciplinary and international debates. At the same time, it opens up the possibility of critically reflecting on existing research traditions, revealing blind spots and developing new perspectives for analyzing and designing adult education knowledge production, particularly through international and historical comparative research. In times of profound social upheaval, such a self-reflective perspective seems even more important to redefining the role and responsibilities of adult education within the relationship between science, practice, and society.

Against this backdrop, this issue of ZfW seeks to systematically compile and develop perspectives from the field of science studies in the context of adult education science. We invite contributions that take a theoretical, historical, empirical, or international comparative perspective on the following topics:

A. Disciplinary self-observation and history of science

- What forms of self-reflection have historically developed in adult education science—and which ones are still missing?
- To what extent do current contributions to the reflection of science in adult education help us understand its disciplinary status?
- What epistemic, methodological or normative assumptions shape the discipline's self-description?
- How do central scientific discourses in adult education unfold – and where are they interrupted or fragmented?
- What developments can be reconstructed with regard to the discipline's self-positioning and demarcation?
- To what extent is the history of research in the science of adult education also a history of omissions?
- Which theoretical approaches are suitable for the reflective analysis of the science of adult education?
- Which epistemological and ontological foundations are (implicitly) assumed in the science of adult education science?
- How can meta-scientific perspectives be more systematically integrated into the formation of the discipline's theory?

B. Forms of knowledge, production logics, and claims to validity

- Which forms of knowledge and/or knowledge production processes (e.g., theoretical, empirical, praxeological, historical, or internationally comparative) dominate the discipline—and what effects does this have?
- How are the conditions and limits of scientific knowledge production changing as a result of digitalization, economization or politicization?
- What logics determine what counts as scientific knowledge in adult education?
- What specific practices characterize research in adult education, and how do these relate to (changing) legitimation constraints?
- What is the relationship between disciplinary knowledge production and how is it affected by the field of action in adult education?
- Where are the limits of scientific knowledge reception in adult education, and how are individual transfer practices justified?
- To what extent are the expectations of application-oriented science compatible with scientific standards?

C. Institutions, networks, and disciplinary infrastructure

- What role do institutions such as universities, non-university institutions and professional associations play in structuring the field of knowledge?
- What path dependencies or innovation potentials are evident in appointment procedures, the promotion of scientists during their qualification phases or in journals?
- How can careers, networks, or citation practices in adult education science be analyzed through scientific research?

D. International perspectives and comparative dimensions

- To what extent do comparable discourses on science studies in adult education exist? What similarities and differences can be identified?
- What insights can be gained from international approaches to science research for German-language adult education science?
- How do processes of reception, translation, and integration of international theoretical traditions and research logics into German adult education science proceed, and vice versa?
- What significance do transnational research networks, international professional associations, and publication spaces have for disciplinary self-observation?
- In what ways do international perspectives open up new theoretical, methodological or epistemological approaches to reflecting on knowledge production in adult education research?

In the interdisciplinary field of science studies, we explicitly welcome contributions from neighbouring disciplines that offer an external perspective on adult education, as well as comparative research on the subject.

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We invite authors to submit an **outline** of approximately 3,000 characters (including spaces). The outline should include the following: title, author(s), reference to one or more subject areas (A–E), a brief problem statement/question, the theoretical or conceptual approach, data/material and method (if applicable), and key references. Please send your outline no later than **1. Oktober 2026** to the editorial office at redaktion-zfw@die-bonn.de

Please submit your **manuscript** via the publisher's portal: www.springer.com/journal/40955

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