

Call for Papers

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**General and Vocational Education for Adults - Similarities and Differences**

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Among a series of varying attempts at classification, it has become established conceptually to categorise general, cultural and political education on the one hand and vocational education and training for adults on the other both under the term 'continuing education'. This logic of a sector-specific categorization overlaps in parts with other sectors that are significant in terms of content, such as basic language or political education, in-company vocational training or scientific continuing education. Furthermore, the analytical category of 'lifelong learning', whose programmatic effectiveness seems to have worn away or dissolved as self-evidence, still requires a foundation, both theoretically and empirically-based, in order to capture the entire range of adult education systematization.

The linguistic use of 'adult education', 'vocational education and training', 'continuing education' and 'lifelong learning' cannot be determined unambiguously since they are subject to contingent circumstances as well as contemporary influences. The way particular connotations of meaning become dominant over time also reflects the constitution of the disciplinary subject matter by researchers in this wide-ranging field. At the same time, empirical research cannot be done without systematic and theoretical clarification. It is against this background that the *Zeitschrift für Weiterbildungsforschung* would like to use this call for papers to invite analyses and attempts at interpretation of the relationships between the various educational sectors with emphasis on the supposed or factual opposition of 'general adult education' and 'continuing vocational education' while including 'continuing scientific education'.

General and vocational education have often been juxtaposed even though the origins of (ped)agogical thinking can be described as principles of an anthropagogy (Dräger 2017). In modern times, these principles were used to dissociate human learning from life experiences and its pedagogisation and legitimised the institutionalisation of an (initially school-based) system of general education alongside the corresponding efforts at

professionalisation. Traces of past practices around adult education indicate that social movements – such as e.g. those addressing the workers' situation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – have always also been an impulse for the implementation of educational movements, which in turn set in motion processes of institutionalisation. In this regard general and vocational education are not only nourished by their respective differences but indeed also by shared roots in the history of ideas and social history.

The study and scholarship of adult education, too, has historically been the history of both the demarcation of a pure, non-directed general adult education from a purposeful vocational training as much as the history of convergence of those two types. Already around the turn to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the theoretical debates on 'popular education' and 'adult education' that were increasing during this period held fast to the principle that adult education was to be free of purpose on the one hand, but on the other hand, they could no longer ignore the professional reality. Robert von Erdberg (1919), for example, accepted Kerschensteiner's axiom of education and took the view that education which relates to the individual required a vocational relevance: "The profession must be the centre from which education is shaped because the profession provides the momentum and most effective starting point for an engagement with the outside world" (p.31). Although the 1920s could be described as the "realistic turning point" (Laack 1984, p. 125) of adult education, it was only in the 1970s that professionalism ("Beruflichkeit") became academically accepted as a theoretical reference for adult and continuing education (cf. Gonon 2019; for vocational and business pedagogy, also Harney 2009). This, however, did not occur without divisive impacts within and between the then still young sub-disciplines of general adult education and vocational education. While the former continued, in their adult education debates, to dissociate from or even bypass work and occupation as a frame of reference, the latter focussed more on structural and developmental questions related to continuing vocational and professional education. While expanding the so-called fourth pillar, adult education was predominantly concerned with formal and non-formal learning on the one hand and with the out of school sphere on the other hand. This is a tendency that even more recent attempts to define a unifying nature of the pedagogical largely hold on to (Nittel & Meyer 2019).

A theory debate on Bildung around 'vocational and professional education', which aimed at integrating general and vocational orientation, took place in a rudimentary fashion at best. Likewise, the critical and constructive formula of „Bildung as the means of the profession“, introduced by Herwig Blankertz in the 1960s, has barely been acknowledged in adult education. It is only much later that this direction was taken up, e.g. in the contributions by Peter Faulstich (1981) on "work-oriented adult education" or by Dirk Axmacher (1984) on "integration of political and vocational education". However, even they were not able to provide a sustainable solution to the schism between general and vocational education of adults. In particular, they could not have anticipated the developments of the past 20 years

which have newly infused, stirred up and challenged the question about the relationship of general and vocational education (cf. Büchter 2021).

Thus, with the increasing academisation of professions and educational biographies, the academic sector of continuing education is becoming more relevant. It has become the task and function of universities, which are becoming places for relating experiential knowledge and scientific knowledge committed to substantiating its validity (Molzberger 2021). Furthermore, the pace and structural elements with which all aspects of the world of life and work are currently being digitalised also no longer stop at the subject potentials of experiential knowledge (Schaupp 2020). As a result of the algorithmisation, however, experiential knowledge which has gained professional recognition over generations is being privatised and thus withdrawn from the general public.

The above has had considerable impact on the prerequisites for general, professional, vocational and academic continuing education and is leading to shifts amongst disciplines internationally (an assessment of the situation in Austria is provided by Gruber 2007). What is equally far-reaching but as yet partly barely acknowledged by adult education research are the developments arising from globalised education markets, described under the catchwords of a Global Educational Industry (Parreira do Amaral et al. 2019). Comparative perspectives illustrate that the relationships between the educational sectors, shaped by the respective national education system, are in fact being reshaped. For example, privatisation and new digitalised education formats allow for different opportunities for participation in general, vocational, professional, and academic education at adult age. Educational pathways are becoming more differentiated and biographical configurations more complex.

The dissolution of traditional boundaries manifests itself in the overextension of established responsibilities, the limitations of institutionalised forms of adult education, new overlaps amongst educational spaces, as well as hybridisation and digitalisation of educational offers. Consequences and effects of this development have become apparent across all sectors:

They are most evident in the multiplication of places of learning and their inclusion into scientific observation (1). They appear institutionally in new transitions, which are promoted in education policy under the terms of permeability and equivalence of vocational and general/university education, in particular with reference to qualifications frameworks for lifelong learning, as well as in new education formats (2). They can also be seen in the analytical correlate of educational biographical transitions that adults undergo in their post-school educational phases (3). And they show up systematically in the educational-theoretical question about the generality of vocational education on the one hand, and the specificity of general adult education on the other (4); this, in turn, raises the question of the political in adult and vocational education (5).

Against the background outlined above, and combined with the aforementioned phenomena of dissolution of boundaries, three thematic questions can be identified:

1. How can the question of the relationship between general and vocational adult education, of their sameness and their difference, be dealt with theoretically and

systematically? What new demands arise from this with regard to empirical continuing education research? 2. What institutional path dependencies and alternative development paths do comparative perspectives open up? 3. How can we reflect in a new or different manner on education as a central category of adult and continuing education that is worth preserving?

The editors of *ZfW* invite contributions which analyse, as described above, the relationship between general and vocational education of adults, including academic continuing education, in its present state and its development to date, examine its empirical manifestations and discuss it with regard to the constitution of the subject matter and the formation of discipline.

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