

Comparing Professionalisation in Adult and Continuing Education

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Regulations and working conditions for trainers in adult education: A comparative glance*

Abstract

Adult education is a fundamental and strategic part of the new strategies for Europe. Education, learning, lifelong and lifewide learning are the central pivots for a sustainable, smart, and creative growth of people for the future, a very close future, as a mid-term horizon. Thus, the training of the trainers appears to be one of the most important points of research and practice fields in adult education, and it is possible to say that the beginning and continuous training of adult educators, adult teachers, trainers, guides, and coaches/mentors is a sensitive and central point for professionalisation. This chapter focuses on the qualitative pathways for the training of adult trainers from a comparative perspective. The authors describe the differences at the legislative level and the variations in the training situation in three European countries: Italy, Germany, and Portugal. The aim of the article is to confirm the initial hypothesis: Although trainers are highly regarded in the development of societies, economies, and people, their working conditions and job situations seem to be underestimated (reflected namely in unstable labour contracts, long working hours, and a precarious payment system).

Introduction

Adult learning and education are vast fields of research, important for both the current and future conditions of people in Europe and the world. In this context, the European Commission is looking to better the conditions for citizens by implementing policies to improve the conditions of adults. We know that more adult education can help Europe overcome the economic crisis, because learning is essential for increasing social inclusion and for growing competences and capabilities at the workplace and in the labour market (cf. Federighi, 2013). The different levels of participation in education and training by adults aged 25 to 64 reflect the different levels of participation in the labour market (cf. Federighi,

* The article represents the work of all authors, although Introduction, Conclusion and Part 1 are by Vanna Boffo, Part 2 is by Kathrin Kaleja, Part 3 is by Joana Fernandes

2013). There is a correlation between the development of economic growth in some countries over the years 2000, 2005, and 2010 and the better performances of these countries. This is because the new, young generation have invested a lot more in up-skilling than their predecessors. Where this has been the case, there have been significant results in terms of economic growth and improved social conditions (cf. Federighi, 2013, pp. 26–27).

Learning and education are important for the training of adults (cf. Knowles, 1984; Morin, 1999). In this context, problems regarding the training of the trainers are at the centre of our knowledge about adult learning and education.

Who are the trainers in the field of adult education? We have different answers depending on the countries of Europe where we ask this question to scholars or policy makers. We can see the answer depends on national legislation and on the qualitative pathway regarding the training of the trainers.

We will observe the situation in three European countries: Italy, Germany, and Portugal. Comparing these three states will lead to the conclusion that the political level is very important for improving the working situation of trainers in adult education. You could say where the legal provisions regarding the profile of trainers are clear, there are better job conditions and better circumstances for the diffusion of the 'system' of adult education.

The Condition of Italian Trainers

In Italy, the condition of trainers in the field of adult education varies depending on whether you look at the public or the private sector. From a historical point of view, in Italy, it is possible to talk about an adult education path, and directly about the figure of the adult educator, beginning in 1997. In March that year, there was a public law reforming public administration and consequently the possibilities of learning paths for adults into higher education institutions. In this sense, the legislation defined the difference between a specific professional profile in the private sector and the profile of a teacher at school.

The profile of an adult educator emerged in Italy after World War II, when the literacy of the Italian people was of high relevance. In a very important period for the re-building of Italy, education and learning were at the centre of this process of reconstruction. The adult educator in 1947, (Law n. 1559, 17/12/1947: the date when the school for adults was established) was an important person in the informal context of education: in associations, in religious situations, and in schools for adults. An important point for the qualification of the adult educator profile occurred when the Italian Ministry of Education (Ministerial Order n° 455 on

29 July 1997) decided to establish the Permanent Territorial Centres for Adult Learning and Training (CTP).

The CTP were replaced in 2012, and now we have the CPIA (Provincial Centres for Adult Learning – DPR 29/10/2012 n. 263) where it is possible for an adult to obtain the certification for primary and secondary school, as well as the certification for proficiency in Italian. This type of path is public, and it is the better way to reach a certification valid in the Italian labour market. In this case, the profile of an adult educator is the same as that of a teacher (7 EQF). Furthermore, the role can be compared to a teacher in a public Italian primary or secondary school. This is the sector of formal education.

Then there is the private sector of adult education and learning. Here, there is law n. 92/2012, in which the Italian government defines the general rules for the recognition and validation of an adult's prior learning. Ever since, that legislation has been applied via legislative decree 13/2013, making it possible to recognize the competences of each adult, thereby giving all adults the possibility to study or to learn.

Who is the adult trainer in Italy, currently? You can distinguish between those professionals active in the training of employed workers—mainly within the framework of business policy—and those training unemployed workers.

Regarding the training of employed workers, it is important to distinguish between adult learning professionals working in professionalisation pathways and those working for various kinds of organisations represented in the training market (global training companies, various kinds of public, private, and combined training agencies with different missions and structures—religious organisations, trade unions, etc.). In the case of unemployed workers, you find professionals working for organisations represented in the training market driven by social policy. The field of training for employed workers includes roles such as in-company training managers, human resource managers, experts, consultants, and trainers.

In non-formal adult education, specialised sector-oriented experts work in the various areas of the field. In some cases, certificates or specific qualifications are required to exercise a profession, for instance, tourist guides and health educators. Managerial roles are also examined in the various fields under consideration: school heads in adult education, company directors in private organisations, or heads of in-company training. Support services include professionals with the following roles: guidance practitioners and counsellors employed at public employment centres but also at companies (in this case they are often combined with other complementary profiles such as selection consultants) (cf. Boffo, 2010).

The Diversity of Qualification Pathways for Adult and Continuing Education Trainers in Germany

The Continuing Education Acts (*Weiterbildungsgesetze*) are the only main legal basis for regulating the field of adult and continuing education in Germany. Each of Germany's 16 states has its own act on continuing education. The different acts lead to different situations in each of the states. Some of the acts define the qualification that trainers need for their work; some don't refer to staff in adult and continuing education. Those that do mention requirements for the qualification of trainers—like the Bavarian Continuing Education Act—state that trainers should have a suitable qualification (Bayerische Staatsregierung, 1974). Most employees in adult and continuing education obtained an academic degree (73 per cent). Another 26 per cent acquired a degree in vocational education and training. A lot of people who work in adult and continuing education are career changers (cf. Kraft, Seitter, & Kollewe, 2009, p. 18). 38 per cent of the people working in adult and continuing education have an academic degree in educational fields. 49 per cent obtained teaching skills through continuing education. 34 per cent of the people working in adult and continuing education do not have any teaching qualification (cf. WSF Wirtschafts- und Sozialforschung, 2005, p. 49). In adult and continuing education, there is wide-ranging diversity in initial and continuing qualification programmes. A mandatory qualification path does not exist in the field. The qualification paths of adult educators are diverse, and specific regulations and minimum standards do not exist (cf. Kraft, Seitter & Kollewe, 2009, p. 19).

The statistics make it obvious that trainers obtain their qualifications as trainers through various paths: through a university degree (e.g. in education or secondary/vocational teacher education), through continuing education programmes with an educational emphasis, or through a programme without any pedagogical qualification. The different qualification paths are strongly diversified, and standards are not defined. In addition to the formal paths, there are projects on the validation of adult educators' competences, such as the GRETA Project, which aims to identify the basic elements for developing a validation process for the competences of trainers in adult and continuing education.

An academic qualification in an educational field can be obtained by earning a teaching degree for secondary or vocational school or a bachelor's or master's degree in education. Undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in education feature various concentrations, including adult and continuing education, lifelong learning, and many others. The structure of bachelor's and master's degrees with an emphasis on adult and continuing education varies from one German university

to the next (cf. Heyl, 2012, p. 49). For the qualification programmes in continuing education, a similar situation can be assumed, because programmes are provided by different providers.

In Germany, adult and continuing education is defined as education for people who completed formal education. It is not part of Germany's formal education system. Adult and continuing education is divided into vocational education and training and general adult and continuing education. The field of adult and continuing education is diversified, featuring providers of different sizes and with different offers. A study financed by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) shows that in 2004 in adult and continuing education, 16,841 providers of adult and continuing education were identified by the *Weiterbildungskataster* (Dietrich, Schade, & Behrendorf, 2008). 1.6 million people were employed in the adult education sector (including self-employed people and volunteers) (cf. WSF Wirtschafts- und Sozialforschung, 2005, p. 3). 1.3 million of them work as trainers in adult and continuing education. The field of adult and continuing education is a broad field with a lot of employees. In adult and continuing education, 83 per cent of the people work as trainers in teaching situations.

Of those working in adult and continuing education, 14 per cent are employed, 74 per cent are self-employed, 10 per cent are volunteers, and 3 per cent work under other working conditions. Self-employed trainers in adult and continuing education face particularly difficult working conditions, because their salary per hour is much lower than that of employed trainers. In addition, they may face irregular working hours, and being paid per hour may mean financial insecurity. This is relevant for most of the trainers in adult and continuing education. Due to this situation, trainers in adult and continuing education need to work in more than one institution, or they need a second job. 62 per cent of the people working in adult and continuing education work part time in the sector, with a main job outside the adult and continuing education sector. They are students, retirees, or homemakers (cf. WSF Wirtschafts- und Sozialforschung, 2005, p. 5). Trainers tend to work for more than one institution as well. If they work in more than one institution, they work in an average of 2.9 other institutions (cf. WSF Wirtschafts- und Sozialforschung, 2005, p. 61). This underlines the situation that more than half of the trainers working in adult and continuing education do have a main job next to their work as a trainer. There are very few trainers for whom adult and continuing education is the only source of income. The high rate of self-employment shows that adult and continuing education as a main job does not provide a secure financial basis. The number of work contracts can have an impact on the number of working hours per week and on work pressure. If trainers work in more than

one institution, they have to travel back and forth between the different providers of adult and continuing education.

Although the results show that the working conditions of trainers in adult and continuing education in Germany are precarious, some 80 per cent of the trainers state that they are satisfied with their working conditions (cf. WSF Wirtschafts- und Sozialforschung, 2005, p. 9). The high satisfaction rate is hard to reconcile with the working conditions. Probably their satisfaction results from the fact that they have chosen to do their training work as a side job.

Legislation in Portugal and the Continuous Changes in Trainers' Working Conditions

Trainers' professional activities were first regulated in Portugal in 1994 (Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 1994). On this date, the trainer was defined as a 'professional who while training, establishes a pedagogical relationship with trainees, favouring the acquisition of knowledge and skills, as well as the development of attitudes and forms of behaviour suitable to a professional performance' (Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 1994, p. 6885).

Although this regulation occurred in 1994, it was a set of actions of the previous decade that paved the way for the need to regulate the trainer's activity. In 1991, there was a distinction between professional training in the education system and professional training in the labour market; there also was a distinction between initial vocational training and continuing vocational training (Decree-Law n.º 401/91, 16 October 1991); and it was expected that the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP) would create a pool of trainers (Decree-Law n.º 405/91, 16 October 1991). In 1992, the legal framework of professional certification was established (cf. Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 1992, p. 2468).

The proficiency certificate as trainer, named 'Proficiency Certificate as Trainer' (CAP), was valid for five years and could be renewed by professional development (at least 120 hours of training per year) and taking continuing vocational training courses (minimum 30 hours) (Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 1994). In 1997, the type-approval conditions and the contents of the trainers' initial vocational training were defined, and the renewable conditions of the trainer's certificates of professional competence were identified (Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 1997).

The IEFP is the Portuguese public organisation responsible for issuing trainer certificates. As a certifying body, it designed and implemented the initial vocational training key reference to be used in the trainers' initial vocational training

(cf. IEFP, 1999). The creation of this key reference made it possible for trainers to access a certificate of professional competence, ensuring the 'normalisation during the process of acquiring the necessary skills that are inherent to the trainer's profile, by stabilising the key contents, the intervention methodologies and the minimum length required (for face-to-face training), as well as a suitable evaluation system' (IEFP, 1999, p. 4).

Since 2010, the renewal of the proficiency certificate as trainer has no longer been mandatory (Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2010). The reasons for this change include the 'constraints regarding vocational training' (Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2010, p. 4330) and the absence of a legal framework of vocational training (resulting from the Ministers Council Resolution n.º 173/2007, 7 November 2007). This change was adopted in a non-consensual way by the different players of training, because some are concerned that if trainers don't have to validate their certificate, they may not invest in training and updating.

In the following year, as part of the reform of vocational training and the establishment of a legal framework of the National Qualifications System (Decree-Law n.º 396/2007, 31 December 2007), a new system of trainer's training and certification of educational competencies was established in Portugal (Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2011, p. 2059). The changes made by this new system are multiple. First, the designation of the trainer's certification changed from 'Proficiency Certificate as Trainer' to 'Teaching Skills Certificate'. Furthermore, new ways to access the trainer's certification were introduced. As of 2011, earning a 'Teaching Skills Certificate' is possible by: attending initial vocational training; the recognition, validation, and certification of trainers' competencies acquired by work experience; and the recognition of educational qualifications.

Since 2011, certification processing has been done by an electronic site¹, the 'Information System of Trainers' Training and Certification', replacing the previous delivery of paper documents to the IEFP. Besides issuing the 'Teaching Skills Certificate', this platform contains vocational training courses and the list of recognised educational qualifications, amongst others. This platform is also a trainers' pool. According to data from the platform, over 300,000 trainers with a Teaching Skills Certificate are registered here.

Although the trainer in adult education is frequently referred to in a broad way, as someone capable of integrating multiple actions and training formats, it

1 <http://netforce.iefp.pt>.

is undeniable that the trainer's activity depends on the type and form of training. The trainer may develop vocational training within a company (for active employees); vocational training within a training centre (for active employees and/or unemployed persons); double certification training (educational and professional) for young people and adults; parental education/training; trainers' training; processes of recognition, validation, and certification of competencies, amongst many other possibilities. In essence, each training has distinctive purposes, objectives, durations, and methodologies, which also require specific skills and specific ways of behaviour from the trainer, and he/she must have a strong and fast capacity to adapt (cf. Fernandes & Santos, 2014, p. 47; cf. Santos & Fernandes, 2014, p. 51). Therefore, considering, on one hand, the importance of the trainer's activity, but also the demands related to it, it is relevant to pay attention to their activity, because, if the trainer's activity has been analysed according to its educational capacity and respective efficiency, it has not been as well analysed regarding the conditions in which this activity is developed (cf. Delgoulet, Cau-Bareille, Chatigny, Gaudart, Santos, & Vidal-Gomel, 2012, p. 111). Despite the important acknowledgment of the trainers' activity, their activity is demanding also because they usually develop it under precarious work conditions, with unstable contracts of unpredictable duration, and with a very variable salary level (cf. Conselho Nacional de Educação, 2011, p. 248; Fernandes & Santos, 2014, p. 47; Santos & Ferreira, 2012, p. 51), reflecting a lack of appreciation for training as a professional activity. In fact, as Abrantes (2011, p. 248) pointed out, the cohesion and stability of the trainers' team are crucial for the training development. However, these aspects don't seem to be considered in the Portuguese scenario, especially as far as stability is concerned (cf. Santos & Ferreira, 2012).

In Portugal, over the last three decades, there has been an effort to regulate training, including the trainer's activity. In Portugal, the trainer's qualification is, in most situations, guaranteed by the attendance of an initial vocational training programme. The analysis of training and adult trainers reveals a strong dependence (as far as training is concerned) on external funding sources and a strong sensitivity towards the priority given in the political agenda. So training in Portugal follows a relative ambivalence: on the one hand, training is associated with great responsibility and expectations regarding the development of society; on the other hand, it has to deal with significant instability and unpredictability and also a relative lack of appreciation. The trainer is expected to know how to deal with these two dimensions throughout his/her career.

Conclusion

The three dimensions of the profile of the adult educator or adult trainer show us some differences and some similarities, focused on a political problem in Italy and on cultural problems in Germany and in Portugal.

At the base of the diffusion of the importance of adult training is the power of education and the possibility to improve democracy, employability, and the economic and social development in countries and regions where the level of participation in education and training is high (European Commission, 2010; European Commission, 2011). In this sense, more education and, in particular, more adult education will be the pathway towards the future from a political point of view (cf. Federighi, 2013). In Germany and in Portugal, these types of sentences are in line with national strategy. The challenge of the countries' growth is strictly linked to adult education and depends on the profile of the professionals working in this sector. In Italy, the situation is different in terms of government policy choices.

From the legislative point of view, the role of the adult educator is important all three countries; likewise, the training of adult educators takes place at the higher education level, above all in Italy and in Germany. In spite of the recognition of trainers' competences in Portugal, and regardless of the university pathways in Germany and in Italy, there is still a lack of appreciation for the adult education professional: employers ask for a high degree of flexibility, salary expectations are not that good, and sometimes trainers have to work in two or more workplaces at the same time.

More work is necessary to raise public appreciation of the adult educator, because their role is essential in helping societies meet the challenges of tomorrow.

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