

Author: Dr Kristinka Ovesni
University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy
Department for Pedagogy and Andragogy

TEACHING ADULTS - A PROFESSION IN ITS INFANCY

Abstract

This paper explores research findings on recognition of teaching in adult education as a profession, and is based on a complex research methodology. This work discusses empirical data looking through the glass of one of the most important, constitutive element of developed profession -- a professional knowledge. Emphasizing teaching in adult education is in the early stages of process of structural changes in their occupation, this paper examines possible paths towards professionalization of the field.

Key words: teaching in adult education, profession, professionalization, professional knowledge, professional preparation of teachers in adult education

Introduction

The main research topic covered in this paper is recognition of teaching in adult education as a profession. Searching for an answer to a question whether and in what scope teaching adults is a profession, we learned that:

- The teaching of adults in a broad sense represents reflection of andragogical knowledge, gained during the university professional preparation. This knowledge is continuously displayed to reconstitutions and to reflection through professional experience, personal characteristics and attitudes, accepted theories and methods.
- The practice of teaching adults is consisting of “myriads of possibilities” of andragogical performances; there are no uniform situations, normative, standardized, unison behavior as one could find in the other fields. Professional decisions are always reflection of combination of context and a theoretical (andragogical) and empirical (practice of adult education) knowledge and competencies.
- At the other hand, professionalization of the whole field of adult education is a political act: this field is a mean “*to transforming society, not merely imparting knowledge and information*” (Heaney, 2000). Especially for societies in transition, adult education is a field with key importance for developing democracy, for (re)building of a civil society with all included instruments for deciding on everyday life problems.

Even though in the literature one could find a plenty of publications related to the conferences, seminars, symposia, comparative studies on the professionalization of the whole field of adult education or on the professionalization of the some aspects of the field (Houle, Cyphert and Boggs, 1987, Jarvis and Chadwick, 1991, Ovesni, 2001, Savicevic, 2007, etc) there are no empirically founded studies dedicated to relevant characteristics of the profession of adult educators (professional knowledge, professional associations, professional autonomy, social control of a profession, social status of a profession, professional standards, professional ethics, professional culture). The exemptions were made by few relevant studies (Leirman, 1994, Merriam & Brockett, 1997, Ovesni, 2007, Schön, 1983, Wilson, 2001). In other studies, in a methodological sense dominates case study design with a very limited number of respondents and with a brief research agenda (detailed in: Ovesni, 2007).

In the attempts to answer a question on scope of professionalization of the teaching of adults researches agree only on a few overall conclusions:

- That it is very complex problem, and
- That some determinants of professions such as professional (andragogic) knowledge, existence of professional association, commitment to profession, professional autonomy, social control of a profession, social status of a profession, professional standards, professional ethics, and professional culture also have a great impact in the process of professionalization of the teaching of adults.

Research Problem and Objectives

The basic research problem considered in this paper is the process of professionalization of the teaching of adults. Understanding that professionalization is “*the process of structural change that occurs in an occupation as it develops its objectives of obtaining public recognition of its status as a profession*” (Jarvis, 2002), and based on the assumption that teaching adults is an occupation undergoing professionalization, we developed a few research objectives concentrated on the examination of:

- Professional preparation of teachers in adult education,
- Expression of some determinants of professions studied through the perception of: professional autonomy, social control of a profession, social status of a profession, professional standards, professional ethics, and professional culture of teachers in adult education,
- Interrelationship between the professional preparation of teachers in adult education and the perception of some determinants of their profession, and

- Interrelationship between the perception of some determinants of profession of teachers in adult education and some bio-social, work and organizational determinants.

The new theoretical understanding

Theoretically, the most important suggestion of the research findings is about scope of influence of professional knowledge on professionalization of teachers in adult education. The main research hypothesis - that appropriate professional preparation of teachers in adult education accomplished with continuing professional development is a main pillar in the professionalization of the teaching of adults is completely confirmed. We learned that expression of some determinants of professions studied through the perception of: professional autonomy, social control of a profession, social status of a profession, professional standards, professional ethics, and professional culture between the teachers in adult education differ than the perception of these determinants between the members of developed professions (law, medicine, etc.). That perception is directly linked with professional knowledge of the teachers in adult education. Also, we gathered interesting information about connections between the perception of some aspects of profession and bio-social, work and organizational determinants of teachers in adult education.

The new empirical information

A research findings suggests that teachers in adult education are indifferent to influence of their professional associations, mainly because of absence of formal professional associations of teachers in adult education. They perceived complexity and intellectual engagement influences professional autonomy, but they do not demonstrate the need for continuing making decisions, for the critical reflection and for continuing reconstruction of professional knowledge such as members of developed professions do. Although teachers in adult education perceived that curriculum at their own study group was controlled and designed by the members of their profession, and that professional services offered by teachers in adult education are well known, they are in disagreement about locus of the professional control. The teachers in adult education strongly perceived that that they demonstrated commitment to profession and absence of lucrative practice. Also, they perceive the domination of: loyalty for own profession, service orientation, relaxed communication between members of profession, intensive nurturing interpersonal relationship, readiness for self-sacrifice for the sake of professional community, and in relation to other members of professional community they show security motives, instrumental and solidaristic orientation. The teachers in adult education perceived that their

actions are ethically driven, i.e. that they show emotionally neutral relationship towards adult learners without corruption, but they don't recognize a category of privilege and obligation for confidential communication as a professionally relevant. Also, they clearly perceived need for mandatory continuing education in the field of adult education.

The new research methodology

For gathering data, we used a complex battery of instruments consisted of questionnaires, five-point Likert-type scales and dichotomous Mokken-type scales. Consensual content validity was established by a cohort of 7 experts in the field of adult education and methodology of pedagogical and andragogical research (Delphi method), where their comments and corrections were incorporated in a final version of the battery of instruments. Reliability of this study was ascertained by the calculated statistical coefficients of reliability, Item-Item analyses, Guttman or Cronbach α coefficient. The Cronbach α coefficient for one instrument consisted of 103 Likert-type scales was 0.944, for another instrument consisted of 49 Mokken-type scales Guttman coefficient showed the values between 0.602 and 0.803, what suggest high reliability of instruments and acceptability in social sciences researches (Fajgelj, 2003).

The Microsoft Excel, SPSS 8.0 for Windows, and Statistica 5.0 for Windows were used for data analysis. These items were subjected to a few common procedures: ANOVA or MANOVA, T-tests, exploratory principal component analysis, carried as a data reduction method based on the inter-correlations with the Varimax rotation; they were also subjected to the canonical correlation analysis.

The new practical contribution

Practically, the most important suggestion of research findings is about importance and urgency of continuing professional education and about the constitution of the formal professional association as a prerequisite for creating the code of professional ethics.

Research Setting, Design And Methods

The empirical data were collected from a nationwide random sample of 137 respondents. The studied population was all adult educators in Serbia, employed in the institutions included in An Adult Education Society's Directory of Adult Education Institutions in May 2005. A sample of total 137 teachers in adult education was selected from 730 adult educators who participated in a study on the base of dominant teaching professional roles. The distribution of a battery of instruments was conducted with the help of colleagues and final year students of andragogy in May 2005. Instruments were distributed in all cities in Serbia involved in An Adult Education

Society's Directory of Adult Education Institutions. Response rate for the research was high (91.0%).

As a dependent variable we considered determinants of professions, as an independent variable - educational characteristics while some bio-social, work and organizational determinants we considered as control variables. In an empirical aspect of research we applied quantitative, non-experimental, descriptive research method. Accordingly, basic technics for gathering data were questioning and scaling by questionnaires, five-point Likert-type scales and dichotomous Mokken-type scales.

Results

The teachers in adult education, in most cases (70.6%) perceived that professional associations are lined on expert knowledge of members, but only 57.0% of them perceived that most clear control of entrance into teaching adults profession combined with the barriers to enter for inadequate professionally prepared individuals could lead to stronger and powerful association.

Canonical correlation analysis permitted extraction of the four structures significant on $p < 0.01$ level:

- The first of them indicates that some bio-social and work determinants (parenting status, educational level of mother and number of organizations in which respondents were employed) did not influence the perception of knowledge as a necessary barrier to enter in a professional association.
- The second canonical structures indicate that the sex of respondents and educational level of father influenced perception of a power of their professional association.
- The third canonical structures indicate that the way of education, marriage and the length of service did not influence on perception of a power of professional association.
- The fourth canonical structures indicate that the sex, educational level of father and the way of employment influenced perception of networking in professional association.

Based on this data, one could assumed that one of the key features of the process of professionalization of the filed of teaching of adult is constitution of professional association of teachers in adult education or professional association of adult educators with section for teachers with precise standards for controlling the entrance. Foundation of such formal association could be regarded as a specific incentive for gaining adequate professional knowledge.

Regarding professional autonomy, the majority of respondents consider that complexity of performed job encompasses full autonomy (87.8%), but that perceived professional autonomy is influenced by marginalization of the field of adult education (82.6%).

Exploratory principal component analysis allowed extraction of two principal components. First extracted component (Inner determinants of decisions in professional activities) explains 37.34% of common variance; this component is shaped by coordination with students needs and with perceived independence from experienced colleagues and other employees. The second extracted component (External determinants of decisions in professional activities) explains 19.08% of common variance; this principal component is shaped by perceived independence from management or any other external factor. Such findings imply perception of huge autonomy in decisions between teachers in adult education.

Besides, canonical correlation analysis of data gathered by PPA Scales (for self-esteeming existence of autonomy in own professional activities) permitted extraction of the only one structure significant on $p < 0.01$ level, which indicate synergy of the earnings and the job titles influences perception of autonomy in own professional activities.

What makes our research findings considering the question of social control in the profession interesting is a result of exploratory principal component analysis. From the data gathered with instrument for self-esteeming of expression of responsibility and perception of confidence of relevant persons, three principal independent components were extracted. First extracted component (Full professional responsibility in professional activities) explains even 45.10% of common variance; the second one (Intensifying individual responsibility through formal system of sanctions) explains 12.15% of common variance, while third extracted component (Maintenance the confidence of students, public, management and colleagues) explains 8.40% of common variance.

Detailed statistical analyses revealed that data on social control of profession reflect interesting interconnections with bio-social, work and organizational determinants, statistically significant on $p < 0.01$ level.

Teachers hired in the field of adult education as youngsters, without adequate professional preparation perceived their professional responsibility as lower than other respondents. Older and experienced teachers perceived professional knowledge as a key for responsible, confident professional practice and as a mean for reduction social sanctions for incompetency. Especially, there is an emphasized importance of previous professional preparation and setting of the professional standards, while self-education is

regarded as dominant base of knowledge in gaining the professional jurisdiction. Perception of frequency of different types of evaluation as incentives for responsible, confident professional practice is dependent on job satisfaction and on other bio-social, work and organizational determinants.

Research findings of problem of professional standards in teaching adults were based on the presumption that they have great impact on professional practice: as a dynamic, social mechanism of control of "entrance into profession", as a social mechanism of control of performance, competence and professional ethic, as a standard of accreditation, as a base of professional practice, and as a base for creating differentiated curricula for professional preparation and for continuing professional development.

Exploratory principal component analysis on 32 items from the gathered data, allowed extraction of eleven principal components, with the considerable Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (0.695):

- the first extracted component (*Efforts that in accordance with professional standards improve social interests*) explains even 15.38% of common variance,
- the second one (*Congruence with contemporary professional tendencies*) explains 10.45% of common variance,
- the third one (*Knowledge of existence of professional standards in practice*) explains 7.23% of common variance,
- the fourth component (*Reflection of professional standards in practice*) explains 5.90% of common variance,
- the fifth component (*Striving for professional chimera*) explains 5.20% of common variance,
- the sixth component (*Importance of material rewards*) explains 5.03% of common variance,
- the seventh component (*Continuing process of standardization in professional practice by competencies and by professional ethic*) explains 4.31% of common variance,
- the eighth extracted component (*Interests for researching professional practice*) explains 3.93% of common variance,
- the ninth component (*Importance of inner rewards*) explains 3.71% of common variance,
- the tenth component (*Professional competence based on knowledge*) explains 3.38% of common variance, while
- the eleventh extracted component (*External standardization of profession*) explains 3.27% of common variance.

Due to the theoretical differences, the scope of derived principal components is not surprising. On the contrary, by relative equalization, importance of all eleven extracted components is emphasized.

The problem of professional ethic is considered from perspectives of perception of the code of professional ethics through: acceptance, regulatory, accordance, relations with students and with colleagues. The research findings indicates that more of 75% of respondents perceive that they show emotionally neutral relationship towards adult learners, that there is no corruption in their practice, but they do not recognize a category of privilege and obligation for confidential communication as a professionally relevant as members of developed profession do (Houle, Cyphert and Boggs, 1987).

Canonical correlation analysis applied on gathered data permitted extraction of the four structures significant on $p < 0.01$ level:

- The first of them indicates that some bio-social and work determinants (low earnings, educational level of fathers) influenced on perception of acceptance of codex of professional ethic.
- The second canonical structure indicates that some bio-social, work and organizational determinants (educational level of mothers, career development agenda, number of organizations of previous employment) contaminate perception of a privilege and obligation for confidential communication as a professionally relevant.
- The third canonical structure indicates that the marriage, sex and some organizational determinants contaminate perception of an acceptance of the code of professional ethics.
- The fourth canonical structures indicate that the high educational level of fathers and the length of service contaminate perception of their accordance in practice with the codex of professional ethic.

Research data on professional culture of teachers in adult education suggests more intensive influence from organizational than from professional culture. However, exploratory principal component analysis on 30 selective items allowed extraction of eight principal components, with the notable Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (0.792):

- first extracted component (*Collegiality*) explains even 26.22% of common variance;
- the second one (*Performance*) explains 12.30% of common variance,
- the third extracted component (*Professional norms*) explains 6.70% of common variance,

- the fourth component (*Similarity of outfit*) explains 6.05% of common variance,
- the fifth component (*Nurturing the interrelationship between the members of a profession*) explains 5.53% of common variance,
- the sixth component (*Professional signs*) explains 4.34% of common variance,
- the seventh component (*Mutual professional preparation*) explains 3.98% of common variance,
- the eighth extracted component (*Understanding of professional language*) explains 3.55% of common variance.

Even the other professional characteristics are not fully progressed, the professional culture of teachers in adult education pointed out progress in the process of professionalization. Reasons for creation a professional career in some field are dependent on professional culture and whether they are personally, naturally or socially driven.

Discussion

The analysed data suggest that some bio-social determinants and location of organization of employment influence perception of barriers to entry for inadequate professional prepared individuals in professional association. To clarify: as it is found in other researches professional knowledge is of great value to the respondents and overflows other characteristics, especially when in situation that 67.7% of respondents have bachelor or lower educational degree (Ovesni, 2007, Savicevic, 2007). On the other hand, it seems that female teachers in adult education (over 70.1%) are disappointed with the inactivity or with the inability of their professional association, what is characteristic of the other "feminine" professions (Skelton, 2002). However, analysed data imply some social marginality of teachers in adult education. In such circumstances one could consider findings encouraging in the andragogical perspective: strongly interconnected, by solid formal structures powered professional association have potentiality to disseminate, to recreate, to reflect, and to make adequate professional and continuing education of their members mandatory.

Perceived autonomy in making decisions, and accordingly, objectivity regarding Schön's criteria of professionalization indicates that teaching adults makes huge progress in process of professionalization, but that this dimension is more openly expressed between adequate professionally prepared ones (Schön, 1983).

Besides, as relevant one could emphasize political dimension of perceiving autonomy: teaching adults is not a privileged profession due the marginalized status of clients (students).

From andragogical perspective, analyzed empirical data on social control of profession indicates that novices in the teaching adults must have adequate professional preparation or at least they must be included in comprehensive mandatory program for professional education concentrated on the different andragogical topics. Also, the findings indicate the importance of the problem of evaluation and nurturing the positive attitude toward all aspects of evaluation in the programs for professional preparation and for the continuing professional development of teachers in adult education.

Amazing scope of extracted principal components from data on professional standards in teaching adults indicates the diversity of aspects for potential explanation of problem: professional standards are tightly interconnected with the processes of certification and licensing and accreditation. The professional standards are formalized method of control of market, a social mechanism of control of performance, competence and professional ethic. But, at the same time, professional standards are andragogical phenomena: they are a base for introduction of the programs for continuing professional education. Professional standards are in accordance with dynamism of professional knowledge; as results of critical thinking, professional standards are regulative for performance and standards of excellence. Process of standardization of practice is important process in human resource development, a base for organizational design, and a platform for networking knowledge in organization (Ovesni, 2007).

Research findings on professional ethics indicate influence of social status in the acceptance and in the application of code of professional ethics. These findings, in the andragogical perspective, imply that above understanding, acceptance, and application of codex of professional ethic dominate adequate professional preparation focused on critical consideration of the career, and not only the actuality and indiscriminating application of code of professional ethics (Savicevic, 2007; Merriam & Brockett, 1997; Despotovic, 1997).

The main reasons for creation a professional career in some field represents reflection of culture and represents the complex combination of values and interests, needs for social contacts, social stimuli, professional development, cognitive interests, anticipations, motivation, etc. "*Despite the differences in some educational and demographic aspects (a) teachers in secondary and adult education and (b) teachers in primary education and members of*

traditional professions are relatively homogeneous groups with respect to the reasons for engaging in their professions" (Alibabic and Ovesni, 2005). But, the research findings also imply that strong needs for social contacts with other colleagues (*Collegiality*) may be the reflection of inadequate professional preparation and of lack of self-confidence, based on professional knowledge. Also, the findings imply that as more adequate professionally prepare teachers in context - a stronger is perception of some by professional culture driven signs.

Conclusion

The research findings strongly suggest need for interconnected, by solid formal structures powered professional association between the teachers of adults, adequate professional preparation and mandatory continuing professional development of the teachers of adults, introduction of the professional standards and the formal codex of professional ethic as prerequisite for progress in the process of professionalization. At the other hand, the perceived autonomy in making decisions and evolution of professional culture indicate that teaching adults makes huge progress in process of professionalization

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kristinka Ovesni is an assistant professor of Human Resources Development and Educational Planning at the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy, Department for Pedagogy and Andragogy. She is born in Serbia, where she gains graduate degree at Faculty of Philosophy, Belgrade, with the theme: "Free Time Activities of Parents and Children". At the same faculty, the author obtains her master degree with thesis "Concepts and Models of Professional Preparation of Andragogues" as well as her PhD degree with dissertation "Professionalization in the field of Adult Education".

Her research interests include problems of professional preparation of adult educators, professionalization of the field of adult education, human resources development and educational planning.

Kristinka Ovesni can be reached by e-mail at kovesni@gmail.com or through her home page at <http://www.geocities.com/kovesni.geo/index.html>