

Jütte, Wolfgang; Nicoll, Katherine; Salling Olesen, Henning

## Professionalisation – the struggle within

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DIPF | Leibniz-Institut für Bildungsforschung und Bildungsinformation  
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E-Mail: [pedocs@dipf.de](mailto:pedocs@dipf.de)  
Internet: [www.pedocs.de](http://www.pedocs.de)

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## Editorial: Professionalisation – the struggle within

*Wolfgang Jütte*

Bielefeld University, Germany (wolfgang.juette@uni-bielefeld.de)

*Katherine Nicoll*

University of Stirling, UK (katherine.nicoll@stir.ac.uk)

*Henning Salling Olesen*

Roskilde University, Denmark (hso@ruc.dk)

The professionalisation of the field of adult and continuing education has been a source of intense debate and controversy in the last few years, although this debate has been patchy over the European nations and perhaps more intense in some areas (cf. Nuissl & Lattke 2008; *European Journal of Education* 2009; Research voor Beleid 2010). Germany, for example, is one of the countries where the ‘professionalisierung’ has been on the political and academic agenda more than elsewhere (Gieseke, 2005). National and European Union policies argue strongly for an increase in the quality of adult and continuing education through professionalisation (cf. European Commission 2006; Research voor Beleid & PLATO 2008; Research voor Beleid 2010), and the European Commission identifies ‘challenges’ to be addressed by those who have a stake in adult learning (2006). The Commission plans action to address these challenges and proposes to manage the adult and continuing education terrain by encouraging nations across Europe to accept their arguments for quality improvement through adoption of their performance indicators and benchmarks.

In this debate there has been a tendency to follow the lead of the European Commission and understand professionalisation in terms of functional markers of professionalism – increasing competence, quality and qualification. Other markers, such as those of academic qualification, professional organisation and autonomy have been disregarded. Of course, professionalisation does not have a single definition. It is sometimes conceived as a normative ideal state, corresponding to that of the traditional professions (medical doctors, architects and lawyers). Others argue that the terms ‘semi-profession’ or ‘incomplete professionalisation’ express a distinction between the traditional professions and those that do not fully qualify as professional. Incomplete professions lack some of the requisite markers, for example, professional organisation and entry through academic qualification.

This debate is important in that there are very real social and material implications in accepting the arguments for change implicit in dominant descriptions and discussion. There are questions over adopting specific abstract and generalised notions of professionalisation as the basis for that change. There are, for us, various points for

struggle for debate and critique. The abstract notion of the 'quality' of adult and continuing education tends to overshadow the questions over the possibilities afforded through the diverse histories and cultures that have given rise to the wealth of distinctive practices which constitute its 'qualities'. From these have emerged different social and cultural functions and statuses for the work of adult and continuing educators in different locations. These are riches that have afforded educators and graduates very specific and contextualised social roles when compared with those emerging from the traditional notion of profession.

Change is happening. The adult education staff active in across the formal and non-formal sectors in Europe were found by the Research voor Beleid and PLATO study to be coping with change in contexts of teaching, contents and teaching methods and in dealing with the emergence of ICTs (Buiskool, Lakerfeld & Broek, 2009). Where some follow the earlier positions of the OECD (2003), the EAEA (2006) and Eurydice (2007) to argue that changes 'imply a demand for new skills and competencies' (Buiskool et al., 2009, p. 148), we take a different tack in searching for qualities. Here we are concerned to identify points of struggle over qualities in specific contexts of practice. We are interested to construct a forum for debate over these, contributing to their identification and discussion over what might be lost and found if policy arguments for change are accepted. We think this can provide a more fruitful point of departure for the discussion over whether and in which sense a professionalisation of adult and continuing education will improve quality.

This editorial for the *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults* (RELA) is written by three authors from differing national adult and continuing education contexts and traditions. Our discussion has been over how to problematise the professionalisation of adult and continuing education in Europe through this issue. There are three foci that we think important for this problematisation. The first is in that through description of the heterogeneous and changing terrain of adult and continuing education we can begin to describe some of its qualities. The second is in that we begin to identify points of struggle significant to researchers from the articles that contribute to this issue. The third is that we analyse the discursive work of the descriptions of professionalism that are put forward strongly through current European policy. All descriptions act persuasively, and it is this persuasive quality that we explore. Taking a discursive and rhetorical approach we highlight the way in which the descriptions from Research voor Beleid (2010) work politically in their positioning of professionals and professional work. We identify some of the likely consequences in the shaping the professional terrain if we become persuaded.

Our editorial is thus written in three main parts and a concluding section. First we consider the diverse contexts and heterogeneity of the professional terrain. This is the construction of a picture of a pluralistic landscape through which to remind ourselves of the histories and diverse emergences of adult and continuing education in different parts of Europe. These inform contemporary meanings and their distinctions and debates in different locations to the extent that it is indeed quite difficult to argue that a general historical overview might even be possible or appropriate. Second, we introduce the articles of this issue and consider the points of struggle which they articulate as issues of concern over the qualities that are found, lost and emerging from specific contexts of practice. Third, we take a discursive turn to consider the European policy notion of professionalisation for adult and continuing education from a discourse analytic perspective and consider the possible effects of its persuasive qualities. We conclude briefly in terms of the points of struggle that emerge from the articles in this issue on professionalisation and introduce the two 'open' articles that are included and which

although not related to this theme are significant in their illustration of the increasing breadth of the research arena.

### **A diverse, heterogeneous and changing terrain**

Taking a close look at the situation of adult educators in Europe, we are faced with a fundamental problem for any attempt at the description of a profession or group of professionals. We can identify only a diverse terrain comprising the disparate practices of a widely heterogeneous group, vastly different educational biographies and roles and states of employment. The work of the adult educator varies significantly depending on the sector in which they work (vocational or general adult education) and their institutional affiliation. Thus adult educators are found working in folkhighschools, commercial institutes, associations and business companies as well as the church, higher education institutions, parties, (political) foundations and labour unions.

In painting this picture, however partial, it is easy to see that adult education is not a profession in any clear way when compared with the usual criteria based on the classical professions. In the introduction we identified the functional markers of competence, quality and qualification as those central to policy and wider debate on professionalisation. The adult educator falls short on certain aspects not only of these but of other markers. For example, there is no clear monopoly on the occupation or type of work that would allow competence in carrying out specific functions to be clearly recognised. There is also no specific professional organisation to initiate and maintain any collective code of conduct for quality and professional correctness. Although there is a scientific knowledge related the discipline or field of adult education on which to base a university-based professional education, certainty in its recognition has been undermined along with that of the foundations of knowledge more generally. It is also difficult to identify a sole and specific responsibility in relation to customers and the wider community that typically marks a profession.

To gain an impression of this difficulty we can look first to the diversity of institutions and agencies, taking as the point of departure the exemplary 'cases' of Scandinavia and Germany. In both, several sectors have autodidact teachers/animators/trainers with a background in the skills or the experience of that sector, most often qualified as educators through courses in teaching skills.

- *Folk High Schools/Heimvolkshochschulen*: The teachers are usually also school teachers, qualified for primary or secondary formal education; they may have academic qualification but no specific teacher education. There are various 'cultural workers' with an experience from social movements, cultural institutions, artists and so forth, with most being in full-time employment.
- *Evening classes and liberal adult education*: Teachers are often school teachers or particular specialists who teach specific skills (technical, language, sport, arts and culture, health and body) to adults. Some have full-time employment, others are part-time employees, and the training background for the job mostly a variety of optional courses. Further organising institutions and organisations have clerical and organisational staff that may be full or part-time, formally qualified or not.
- *Trade unions and civic organisations education*: Teachers are often holders of honorary posts or experienced organisers in these unions and organisations.

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Trade unions in some countries have their own comprehensive training of trainers and some organisations (political parties) likewise.

- *Vocational education and training*: These teachers may be craftsmen/technicians, primary school teachers or academic teachers. Most are full-time employees. In Germany and Scandinavia vocational teaching is a profession with a full education and basic curriculum – in most countries teacher education is an optional addition to the subject knowledge specialty of teachers, through a variety of optional courses.
- *Basic adult education for adults/Volkshochschulen*: Teachers often hold a teacher education and are full-time employees. They normally define themselves as teachers.
- *Professional continuing education and training*: This is continuing education for the updating and/or retraining of professionals in the widest sense, most often in form of optional training courses or in-service training. Teachers and trainers are most often members of the same professional groups who occasionally teach, or specialists with relevant expertise for the profession. Teachers in more systematic education like certificate and diploma courses at colleges are normally full-time employees.
- *Human resource development and business consultancy*: Those involved here are involved in in-service training, guidance and HRD and have differing backgrounds – mostly with managerial education, some with psychological or pedagogical training.

There is no surprise then that no clear occupational image, monopoly of competence or functions exists. The differences between institutions, orientations, educational aims and didactic models are too huge. As a result there are distinct job titles (adult educator, trainer, teacher, lecturer, educational manager, coach etc.) and accepted ways of approaching the work entailed. Diverse histories, purposes and traditions leave a legacy of tension between the aspirations of the adult and continuing educators and the relative status of the knowledges, approaches and models that circulate in these locations.

Even though there are no easy generalisations to be made, much adult education in Europe originated in social and cultural movements and grassroots developments as the voluntary action of laypersons (Gieseke, 1989; Olesen, 1989). However, there are clear distinctions between the traditions of adult education in the northern and southern nations of Europe, those of the Baltic states and Central-Eastern Europe (Jögi & Gross, 2009) and the western European nations, and then of course there are also wide distinctions between countries in these national groupings. The Nordic countries are suggested to have the most distinct tradition (European Commission, 2006), with the western European countries differing more in approach than in ends. In Germany, as in many other nations, adult education emerged in three movements or strands (Dausien & Schwendowius, 2009): a bourgeois liberal education movement from a little earlier in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; a workers' education strand of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century with emancipatory aims, and a further or vocational education strand emerging through industrialisation. The trends, impetuses and meanings of professionalisation are as varied as are these traditions.

In those types of adult education that have emerged as institutionally based (for example, general adult education in Germany and the Nordic countries, and some types of training and professional continuing education) the teaching of adults has become a regular full-time employment. However, in contrast to this and in other educational sectors most adult educators do not have permanent positions. Employment conditions

in adult education are therefore heterogeneous and employment may be permanent, temporary, full-time, part-time or voluntary. Where the conditions of employment and initial qualification of its members are taken as markers of a professional group, there is a lack of professionalism in adult education. In some cases adult educators have qualifications as teachers, but in others expertise is based in the profession being taught (e.g. a technical or commercial vocational education, one of the traditional professions, etc.) and perhaps equally in some locations on prior experience of teaching. Yet the last decades show clearly that an academisation through qualification is taking place.

Continuing education, by contrast to adult education, can be described as emerging from the apprenticeships of the trades. Organised formally in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as institutionally-based education for vocational workers, it involves the return of workers to institutional education for mid-career qualification enhancement, or ongoing education offered in the workplace. Often then continuing education has been defined as education subsequent to that needed for the entry of adults into a vocation or profession.

Professionalisation could then be argued to be the elevation of the voluntary activity of the unqualified community-based adult educator to that of the paid work of semi-professionals or professionals, now formally qualified as educators and working in communities, educational institutions or workplaces. That professionalisation exists is perhaps evident in that other professionals – engineers or accountants or psychologists – who take up a full-time employment as teachers within their field of expertise would now most often have to re-qualify to become professional educators. However, and complicating the picture further, in many cases the agents of adult and continuing education specifically reject the label of professional, identifying themselves as ‘amateurs’ in the literal sense, as they are committed to the task because of their social and cultural belonging to a community, or social or emancipatory cause.

Into this mixed picture new developments in adult education seem a challenge for professionalism. This includes the support of new learning cultures, the creation of learning environments and arrangements to allow for formal, informal, self-directed and media supported learning processes, the strengthening of educational counselling and new forms of monitoring, stronger support for motivation in learning, in ‘learning how to learn’, cooperation and networking between educational institutions and different areas of education, and increasing division of labour calling for organisational competences, educational management, quality management, and so on. A question emerging from change is that over the content of programmes for the professionalisation of adult educators when there is such diversity and where change is ongoing. For a long time a normative ideal has prevailed: the aim has been for teachers to gain new and better understandings. But this has proved to be inapplicable in many ways, in part because of diversity and change, but also as raising learning standards through courses does not necessarily lead to improvements in professional practice. Studies show that continuing education has to be personally relevant, and focus where teachers feel uncomfortable with their professional actions. In the light of the diversity of the terrain and this sort of empirical evidence, it has become apparent that there is no clear knowledge content upon which to base a profession.

It is a paradox that as adult education becomes central to debate about lifelong learning, it loses institutional contour and visibility. Sporadically this is described as a process of differentiation or ‘de-differentiation’ in the blurring of previous boundaries and definition of new ones. As education and learning become integral to society they leave their traditional institutional contexts and are bound up elsewhere. The danger for professionalisation is that the job profile of and knowledge for the adult educator becomes more and more nonspecific.

## Points of struggle

The title of this issue, 'Professionalisation – the struggle within', indicates tensions and contradictions in debate and as policies and wider changes influence the terrain. We have called these 'points of struggle'. Although some have wanted to develop common understandings of the professional and professionalisation we argue that these points of struggle make unity difficult to achieve, and may be not fruitful either. There is for us a tension between proposals for unity and quality and those struggles over the qualities that may be lost and found in the processes of change. Tensions and contradictions emerge with differing concerns and purposes within and between contexts that have very different traditions and policy and practitioner emphases.

Moves towards professionalisation across this differentiated terrain appear in some locations to have reached only those involved in the planning and organisation of adult education. Questions of professionalisation have therefore focused on organisational processes derived from the innovation models of quality management. Adult teaching is still therefore mostly considered the task of part-time and freelance teachers or lecturers. The prototype adult educator therefore has in some locations been the full-time educational manager, responsible for planning, organising and evaluating educational offers.

*Egetenmeyer* and *Käpplinger* in their article *Professionalisation and quality management: struggles, boundaries and bridges between two approaches* for this issue identify this struggle between the distinct understandings of professionalisation – as pedagogy and as quality management – as key in contemporary debate. They argue that there are distinct differences between approaches of quality management and professionalisation which are blurred within contemporary discourses. Through a comparison of these approaches, they examine the merging of this in contemporary discussion and by *Research voor Beleid* (2010) in its identification of 'Key competences for adult learning professionals'. Differences are lost in this. Arguing that these two discourses have quite distinctive historical and disciplinary locations and logics, they see them as essential to maintain – maintaining boundaries here in order that the differing interests can be visible as conflicts of interest, and thus available for mediation.

There is a question over what gives rise to the strong political and bureaucratic concern about professionalism which has resulted in a number of national and supranational (EU) initiatives. They appear to emerge from concern for functionality and quality. The idea put forward is that the qualification of teachers and trainers and other agents in the sector is key to the successful development of lifelong learning and building of the knowledge society.

In the context of European Union strategy, adult educators are positioned to play a key role in implementing lifelong learning. However, in some domains (labour-market training or education for unemployed people) there are tendencies towards deprofessionalisation. There appears to be a point of tension here and for *Lorenz Lassnigg* in this issue and unease concerning the relation between the development of competencies and processes of professionalisation. Debate over the professionalisation of a group appears stifled by this policy focus on the continuing education of individual adult teachers.

*Lassnigg* in his article *Contradictions in adult education structures and policies in Austria: their interrelation with the professional development of educators* argues that competence development and quality assurance approaches to professionalisation in Austria are not guaranteeing the professionalisation of the field. He identifies a set of

contradictions embedded in educational policies and the practices that emerge through the development of a lifelong learning strategy. The consequences of which is to inhibit the achievement of the lifelong learning strategy as well as the professional development of adult educators.

The concern for professionalism is aligned with an interest in mobilising human resources at the heart of the lifelong learning agenda. Whereas it is possible to see increasing overlap and synergy between different sectors of adult education and training, the unified domain implied through policy arguments for a competence framework is still so far from reality that to define institutionally-based joint development seems a little far-fetched. Professionalising in the sense of quality improvement appears to presuppose an unquestioned idea of quality and assume the possibility of implementing change in education and training from above.

A point of struggle appears to emerge in moves towards professionalisation through university qualification and the adoption of competency frameworks. *Aileen Ackland* in her article in this issue, *The eye of the storm: discursive power and resistance in the development of a professional qualification for adult literacies practitioners in Scotland*, takes up a discursive approach to critically explore the play of power at one site in this point of struggle between practitioner associations, university authorities and regulatory bodies. This is at a moment where adult literacy tutors in Scotland for the first time became required by national policy to engage in a process of professionalisation through formal university-based teaching qualification, as response to policy concern over the problem of poor population literacy figures in comparison to neighbours. This constructed a site of struggle at this location whereby both language and power relations became reconfigured. Adult education associations, or as they are called here 'practitioner services' became redefined in this process. Ackland thus explores how previously diverse and unregulated work of various adult education services in Scotland (offered as local authority adult basic education services, community learning and development services, adult education voluntary organisations, Further Education Colleges and the prison education services) became reconfigured and renamed 'adult literacy' work. Previous distinctions between the values and purposes of these heterogeneous services have become lost as they were redefined through the competency descriptions that were devised. Ackland tells us of the forms of alliance and resistance entailed.

There may then be much at stake in attempts to bring together a heterogeneous field through the development of professional qualifications and accreditation programmes which adhere to common descriptions of competence. We saw this also in Fragoso and Guimãraes (2010) discussion of this situation in Portugal where they argue the loss of capacities for innovation through emancipatory discourses of professionalism. In this issue, Ackland illustrates that valued distinctions symbolising value and theoretical differences between the work of professionals in the field can be elided through processes for the derivation of benchmark statements. She argues that adult educators may risk promoting the projects of management that they seek to avoid through conceptualisations of professionalism that emphasise heteronomy. She points to a process of change in this location, where a social practice literacy perspective, one that saw literacy as socially constructed and political, became taken up through policy and a site of discursive contestation in the exercise of power in this process of professionalisation. Through the development of a field of knowledge, university-based and other teaching programmes appear as vehicles for the reconfiguration of the discursive field in specific locations, and even though the outcome may not be certain.

There is perhaps a related issue over whether the building of knowledge and standards of quality are related to universities or to the lay practitioner organisations like associations for adult and continuing education, church or political organisations. Universities' engagement with the field of adult and continuing education in some senses 'requires' the development of a field of knowledge through research. Practitioner associations on the other hand have understood themselves as fostering quality and professionalisation through advocacy in the field and recognition of competence.

It is difficult to be against the arguments for professionalisation that are put forward through policy. Although there are those who would prefer to be against it – either in that their work requires them to belong to the community or to take up emancipatory cause – this appears a hard position to successfully hold. Common understandings of competence in professionalism perhaps make it difficult to suggest that one would prefer to be without it. And, in even posing a question over what that professionalisation might entail, as we do here, there is an encouragement of discussion of professionalisation which acts to put professionalisation more securely on the agenda as some 'thing' that *might be* accepted.

What may help is the development of empirical understandings of processes of professionalisation in situations where these are not formally governed. It is clear is that people do act with values and purposes and develop knowledge of what they do when teaching adults. However, we know little about these motivations and processes. Professionalism may not depend on the achievement of formal qualifications. Different forms, whether or not incomplete or semi-, may emerge very differently in different contexts; individuals are influenced by the institutional and social contexts in which they are located for the development of their senses of professionalism. There are thus questions over what these might be. What are the ways in which a professional identity may emerge and be expressed?

Cornelia Maier-Gutheil and Christiane Hof in their paper *The development of the professionalism of adult educators: a biographical and learning perspective* in this issue investigate the development of the pedagogical professionalism of adult educators' by comparing the narratives of individual teachers at different times in their lives. Professionalisation here is taken to be the acquisition of systematic pedagogical knowledge in adult education. The investigation offers insights into differences in forms of professionalisation and professionalism that emerge through the life-course and the influence of context in this. Professionalisation may thus be found in an intentional process of professional learning by an individual, which, for example, results from a perceived discrepancy between knowledge, ability and the requirements of a changing world. Alternatively, professionalism for some individuals might not ever be explicitly developed.

In the following section we analyse different possible versions of arguments for a professionalisation agenda for adult educators, focussing initially on the argument in the report commissioned by the European Commission (Research voor Beleid, 2010). It is our assumption as we have already discussed that this discourse reveals certain strategies and agendas, but also that it acts in persuading us that we should accept its version of the agenda. Through the focus we have adopted for this analysis, we therefore seek to examine the rhetorical work that this and alternative arguments or descriptions might be said to attempt in positioning professional work in particular ways and in representing certain views of practice and practices as professional. We draw on resources that allow us to consider the work of rhetoric and discourse that have informed previous writing (cf. Nicoll & Edwards, 2004; Nicoll & Harrison, 2003;

Nicoll, 2007). This analysis points to the power of persuasion in the shaping of the socio-rhetorical networks in which adult educators participate.

### **Analysis of discourses of professionalisation: competence, reflection and expertise**

The report commissioned by the European Commission (Research voor Beleid, 2010) proposes the professionalisation of adult education for Europe through a competent and reflective professional. We argue that this helps shape the possibilities that may then emerge in particular ways, and exclude the possibilities of alternative forms of professionalisation. It is difficult to be against the notion of professional development itself, but audiences are mobilised in descriptions such as this. What audience is mobilised and how it is dependent upon the extent to which different individuals and groups are persuaded that a particular discourse is about and for them; that they are being invited to participate in the practices of a certain socio-rhetorical network. The discourse analysis that we use to examine this particular proposal, poses the questions of To whom the text or discourse is addressed? and How are they positioned? This is important, as 'one of the means of persuasion is making arguments with which the audience may already agree, in order to create a sense of identity between the implied author and the implied audience' (Leach, 2000, p. 210). A polyvalent discourse of professional development can enable a range of interests to be mobilised as a supportive audience, as different interests are translated into a common cause.

Different notions of professional practice and professional development attempt different things and have material effects. Different audiences are mobilised in different discourses, including potentially groups beyond those of the profession through which the profession may then be held to be accountable and subject to scrutiny. In the process, different notions of the professional are inscribed, positioning the professional in particular ways, and contributing to the changing relationships between social groups, adult and continuing education professionals.

The report by the European Commission (Research voor Beleid, 2010) identifies and describes key competencies that are intended to be used for what they call 'adult learning professionals' right across the European nations. Here the diversity of the practices and multiple histories, cultures and traditions involved are identified as obstacles to be overcome. From this positioning of diversity as the problem, an argument is constructed that it is to be through a professionalisation of the sector, achieved through unification and founded in the identification of 'common elements' of work, that a solution is to be found. This is a solution that can be reached in the construction of an 'adult learning professional' who can now be 'dedicated' to the task (Research voor Beleid, 2010, p. 3). By implication then, this argument positions the adult educator as a unified group and as not yet professional or even perhaps dedicated:

Recent European wide studies show that the adult learning sector is very diverse. This diversity can be seen in the various target groups of adult learning, subjects covered by adult learning courses, but also in the professional pathways to becoming an adult learning professional, the employment situation of adult learning professionals and furthermore, in the competences required for working in this sector. This diversity makes it difficult to develop the sector as a whole and in particular a dedicated profession - adult learning professional (APL).

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To partially overcome the ‘hampering diversity’ it is important to identify common elements in the work adult learning professionals do and the key competences that come with carrying out their key activities. The Member States recognised this need and the European Commission therefore commissioned a study on key competences of adult learning professionals that can be used as a reference for developing a professional profile for staff working in the sector and thus improving the quality of adult learning. This report presents the outcomes of this study. (Research voor Beleid, 2010, p. 9)

It is through this kind of representation of urgency for change within policy description – of a common problem to be overcome – that a strong positioning and pressure can be attempted by policy makers in the unification and management of a diverse terrain. It is constructed rhetorically as an ‘exigency’, an urgency, for change. It acts to construct a population to be managed and a direction for change through the identification of the ‘obstacle’ as a problem, and the key competencies as its solution. By identifying ‘common elements in the work adult learning professionals do’ quality can be measured and improved. Overcoming the hampering diversity is represented as simply necessary.

This positioning of diversity as the problem to be overcome is not the only formulation. In South-Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and Turkey) it is the changing political perspectives and prescriptions that are identified as the problem (Zarifis, 2009). Dausien and Schwendowius (2009) suggest that in Germany, because of diversity, the providers at the local level are those best able to respond. Guimãraes (2009) considering Portuguese provision argues that diversity provides for the necessary quality, and that professional autonomy in situated contexts of adult and continuing education is important. By identifying a problem and by naturalizing change in relation to this, policy descriptions (as all descriptions including our own) assume not only a certain force, but hide their own work as a form of action in the world. They hide the social practices that help persuade that certain changes are necessary and should happen. This is then a struggle over specific and competing descriptions of problems and solutions, where the tension might be characterised as one between those for unification and those for maintenance of heterogeneity and autonomy.

This points to the rhetorical work of descriptions in positioning professionals and professional work in particular ways and representing certain views of practice and practices as professional. By adopting particular narratives for the professionalisation of the sector across Europe political work is being done. By constructing diversity as the obstruction in policy descriptions, adult educators are positioned in two key ways in this particular text (Research voor Beleid, 2010). First, as not already professional, and, second, as needing to be professionalised by reference to a standard set of generic competence descriptions. This positioning is highly significant in that the adult and continuing educator then becomes available for lifelong and professional education and learning and the generic shaping of the identities, knowledge and practices that this entails. With this shaping, and standardisation through competency descriptions (cf. Nicoll, 2007), adults and societies *themselves* become available for unification and shaping – indeed we see this from Fragoso and Guimãraes (2010) and Ackland (2011) in this issue.

There is a strong logic to policy arguments for competent professionals. Competent professionals are required to demonstrate that they can do what they claim they can do, and maybe sometimes, what is claimed by others that they can do (as in Research voor Beleid 2010 perhaps, for example). Through the work of Research voor Beleid (2010), standards of competence have been developed for the adult educator from evidence of what already competent practitioners do in their arenas of work. The invitation is that assessments and curricula are to be aligned with these standards, the logic for which is

strong and standing in sharp contrast to a perhaps more reified discourse of the professional as technical expert. Professionalism as the demonstration of competence appears more empirically and experientially secure than technical expertise, as appropriate levels of behaviour can be determined through functional analysis.

People are aware that much that is important is not available for description and analysis in this way. What is identified as competence is only what can be easily identified through job analysis, described and measured, and that what lies outside of this may become forgotten. Thus, while there are calls for greater transparency for the European sector through systematic description of outcomes and competences, and compatibility with national and European frameworks (Buiscool et al., 2009, p. 159), there is also a question over 'what visibility conceals?' (Strathern, 2000, p. 315). At the same time, for Strathern (2000), a logic for visibility sits in tension with and fabricates its opposite – a feeling of lack of trust. However, this trust is necessary for professional performance. Without trust that the professional will act professionally, logic requires that they must demonstrate that they are trustworthy. A discourse of competence as professionalisation fabricates the very distrust necessary for its maintenance. In a sense then there is a discursive struggle over whom to trust, embedded through a discourse of competence as that of professionalisation.

Within discourses of competence, those of reflection have had a tendency to emerge. There is perhaps an important conceptual compromise possible between the positioning as competent professional and the defensive identification with the amateur position that we identified earlier. The polyvalence afforded in the positioning of reflection with competence in policy arguments and descriptions of standards can enable a range of interests to be mobilised and different interests to be translated into a common cause. In the identification of key competencies for the adult and continuing educator across Europe, Research voor Beleid (2010, p. 12) propose a generic competence of reflection applying across all domains of activity in the sector and as intrinsic to the autonomy and comportment of the lifelong learner: 'Personal competence in systematic reflection on one's own practice, learning and personal development: being a fully autonomous lifelong learner'. For adult and continuing educators, as others, this discourse of reflection may seem an attractive positioning, as it appears both indicative of serious thinking and the capacity for autonomous judgements in the uncertain and diverse situations of practice.

The notion of professional work as reflective practice has had a trajectory of its own (Schön, 1983). Although it may arouse a positive emotional response and appear logical, it also does specific rhetorical and positioning work. Here a diversity of practice is acknowledged, as the professional is positioned in the complex and messy world of practice. It is the decisions and judgements of the professional that are brought to the fore for consideration in reflective practices, even although these may require more intuitive than deliberative action (Eraut, 2000). As Parker (1997) argues, this positions the professional as adopting an open-minded and questioning approach to practice, but also potentially encourages the emergence of a culture of loss of certainty and doubt. Neither is reflection the free, autonomous, practice that it is often represented as, as we are always already shaped through our social and discursive contexts. Systematic forms of reflection carry with them assumptions and values through which our own are made available for questioning; they are technologies through which assumptions and values are made available for reconfiguration in ways that are also constrained. Indeed, reflection can be positioned as a technique to be applied to situations, a competence to be practised, or as an embedded and embodied practice – each shaping autonomy in particular ways. What may emerge in the suggestions for the competence for adult

educators in Europe by Research voor Beleid (2010) is not certain, but reflection may tend to invite individuals to make themselves available for categorization and improvement in terms of the competence frameworks and prescriptions that are represented as quality indicators. This inscribes their vocabulary and categorizations into the discourses and reflections of practitioners.

We find a point of struggle between the newer call for lifelong learning in the European space, and a previous discourse of expertise. Expertise as a form of professionalism and professionalisation is linked to a model of technical rationality (Eraut, 1994). It has relied on understandings of an initial education and training for life. Here we find the struggle – for, how can an expert continue to be expert if he or she is not at the same time a lifelong learner? To put this in another way, how can a lifelong learner be considered an expert? The description of the urgency of change that we considered above as necessary in discourses of professionalisation, embedded as it is through a policy discourse of lifelong learning in Europe, undermines the logos, the seriousness, of discourses of professionalisation through expertise. This may suggest in part why discourses of expertise have appeared less convincing over the last decades. Although as much a reason might be a cultural resistance among adult educators and discourses against the generalizing of experiences, and a ‘prejudice’ of discourse towards practice as situated and thus unique. However, the description of the urgency of lifelong learning undermines discourses of expertise only in certain ways. This does not necessarily displace the notion of the technical expert for two reasons. Although a discourse of expertise has traditionally been premised on entrance into the profession through initial education and as the learning of necessary theoretical knowledge and then application within the place of work, opportunities for continuing professional development can still emphasize the learning of theoretical knowledge as the basis of practice. This basis of learning can still be provided away from the workplace and then applied within it. This can be done simply on a continuing basis, rather than it being based on initial education alone. Hence a discourse of expertise, premised on a naturalised discourse of change and embedded in a wider discourse of the need for lifelong learning helps construct a requirement for more and continuous learning.

## Conclusion

This issue of RELA also contains two individual articles not related to the theme of professionalisation. They illustrate the increasing breadth of the adult learning research area, and also, each of them, demonstrate a well defined method applied on an empirical case study. In the first article, *In the framework of videoconference classrooms at local learning centres in Sweden*, Ulrik Lögdlund from Linköping University explores the practice of videoconferencing based on ethnographic observation in classrooms at local learning centres. The study is focusing on communication and the role of the teacher in a videoconferencing class, and reveals the particular consequences of the absence of proper back-channel cues and low feedback. The teacher becomes an actor in class trying to break through the barriers of the mediating technology and the practice is described as a learning space imbued with the rationale of communication technology. The second article in the open pool, *Competing discourses and the positioning of students in an adult basic education programme*, written by Anne Winther Jensen, Roskilde University, received the ‘best PhD paper award’ at the ESREA triennial conference in Linköping in September 2010. It presents a case study of the learning processes of students’ enrolled in an adult basic education programme in the social and

health care sector in Denmark. The issues being researched are how the students are positioned and position themselves in relation to the discourses which are available within the school based part of the education programme. The study draws on concepts of positioning theory, i.e. a poststructuralist approach. The empirical analysis of observations, interviews and document studies reveals a competition between opposing discourses mobilised in the programme, and uses this observation to understand processes of inclusion and exclusion of students in the programme.

We have been concerned to identify points of struggle over qualities that may be lost or emerge if policy arguments for change are accepted. Will a professionalisation of adult and continuing education improve quality? In what sense might this be so? To begin to answer these questions we have argued that we need descriptions of the terrain of adult and continuing education and research indicating these struggles and qualities in various locations. In this issue, as articulated by Egetenmeyer and K apflinger, there is a loss of qualities in a tendency for discourses of professionalisation to have become oriented to those of quality management. For Lassnigg, there is a struggle in the contradictions between adult education structures and policies and their lack of success in supporting the professional development of educators' in the Austrian case. For Ackland, there are qualities lost in the discursive struggles entailed in the implementation of teaching qualifications and as practitioner services became reconfigured in Scotland. For Maier-Gutheil and Hof, there are quite different qualities emerging in the different forms and identities of professionalisation that they identify. These critical thoughts over the struggles and qualities entailed, widen the possibilities for debate and for consideration of our own responses to calls for professionalisation. The focus on professionalisation and increasing quality through generic competence descriptions is important and has real social and material consequences. Thus our responses need to be considered.

Further discussion over how changes influence the many adult educators, trainers and organisers is also important. Which competences are developed in specific contexts and which collective reflections are being developed apart from those emphasising the local and specific and the need to remain amateur? The classical notion of the professional entails a collective responsibility and an organisational safeguarding of autonomy. We do not yet know if the developments in diverse sectors and contexts make some notions of the professional more relevant than others for understanding work and in building work identities. These could take the professionalisation debate in quite other directions than have the policy ideas that have tended to set the scene so far.

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